

LESSON 8:

FELLOWSHIPING WITH A LOCAL CHURCH

Living for the Lord involves many challenges and struggles. As Satan is like a lion that is prowling and looking to devour you (1 Peter 5:8-9), he desires to find you as a sheep who is isolated from the flock. This makes it easier for him to devour you than if you were within a community of other sheep. In fact, God teaches the value of companions as a general principle (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Therefore, you should seek to join yourself to the fellowship of other disciples of Christ in a local church so you can share and jointly participate in the life Christ wants you to live.

LUKE 8:19-21

Whenever you became a Christian, you were adopted into God's spiritual family! Above all, this includes having God as your Father and Jesus as your Brother (Romans 8:14-17; Hebrews 2:11-18). Then, others who do the will of God have become your brothers and sisters. In this, you should recognize that God has not designed for you to be alone in your spiritual walk. In fact, even if your faith separates you from some/all of your physical family (Matthew 10:34-39), God has given you a great spiritual family that shares your pursuit of faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:27-30)! Certainly, with such a great blessing of a spiritual family, you must not choose to live in isolation as you attempt to exercise your faith!

ACTS 2:42-47

After about 3,000 people from various places in the world (vv. 5-11) obeyed the gospel (vv. 37-41), they did not go back to their homes and live in isolation. Instead, they devoted themselves to the Lord and fellowship (sharing) with other disciples of Jesus! They spent time learning from the apostles and worshipping God together. Furthermore, they took care of each other and spent time with one another. Therefore, from the very beginning of Jesus's church, we see the importance of God's people being in fellowship with one another. Notice, however, that

this early fellowship of disciples was committed to the apostles' teaching. Therefore, while there are many different kinds of churches today you may choose to fellowship with that teach and practice different things, you should intentionally search out a fellowship of true disciples who are committed to teaching and practicing only what is revealed in Scripture (2 Timothy 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). This includes such things as what the church leaders teach, how the church is organized, how the church worships, the work the church does, etc. For, you do not want to put yourself in fellowship with error (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 1:9-11; Ephesians 5:6-11).

ACTS 9:26-28

Whenever Saul traveled to Jerusalem (after he had become a disciple of Christ by obeying the gospel, Acts 9:1-25), Saul tried to bond/adhere himself in fellowship to the other disciples there. Then, after the church established that Saul was a disciple of Christ, they welcomed him. After this, he was interwoven with the disciples there and took part in the work that was done. This is the consistent pattern of disciples throughout the New Testament (as implied every time you read about a local church, 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Philippians 1:1). Similarly, you should intentionally seek out other disciples of Christ who are following the Scriptures near your community to join in fellowship. Talk with the church (e.g., the church leaders) about your desire to join them. Then, as part of the fellowship of that church, you must do your part in accomplishing the Lord's work!

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Being part of a local church is part of God's design for helping you grow spiritually. Beyond the assemblies of the church (which should strengthen you spiritually, 1 Corinthians 14:23, 26), God has designed the church to have spiritually mature leaders. Ideally, God's plan involves pastors (shepherds, elders, overseers) and teachers in the local church (Acts 14:23; Hebrews 5:11-14). Evangelists also serve to spread the gospel and assist in local churches being built up (Titus 1:5). By joining a local church, therefore, you are connecting yourself with spiritually mature leaders who can

help you grow in your faith, watch over your soul, and equip you for greater kingdom service (Hebrews 13:17)! But, if you do not join yourself to a local church, you are robbing yourself of such blessings who aid in your spiritual development!

GALATIANS 6:1-2

Being in fellowship with a local church involves more than just attending the assemblies of that church and learning from the church leaders (Hebrews 10:24-25)! The blessing and responsibility extend to disciples being involved in one another's lives. This includes helping each other through the challenges of life and restoring one another in matters of sin. Other "one another" responsibilities include loving one another (1 Peter 4:8), being hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9), serving one another (1 Peter 4:10), encouraging one another (Hebrews 3:12-13), confessing sin to and praying for one another (James 5:16), etc. Ultimately, the goal of this fellowship (especially in a local church) should be to help one another live for Jesus!

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6, 14-15

Followers of Jesus must not willfully engage in sin (Hebrews 10:26-39). When this happens and the sinner does not repent, the local church must withdraw/keep away from the rebellious brother or sister, so the sin does not spread and pulls the sinner back to Christ (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13). As fellowship between members of the church should be important to each one, the danger of losing those relationships and connections ought to serve as a major deterrent for every disciple against sin! As you fellowship with a local church, it becomes your responsibility to keep yourself pure and in fellowship with God and the church.

CONCLUSION

God does not want you to be alone as a disciple of Christ. In fact, He has created a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual. This is His spiritual family, the church. It is God's desire and design for each disciple of Christ to join themselves into the fellowship of a local church that is teaching Christ's doctrine and following the New Testament pattern. This local spiritual family will then help you grow and mature in Christ, as you also help them do the same, and accomplish Jesus's work that He has given the local church together!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Why would Satan like you to be isolated from other disciples of Jesus?

What is the blessing of a spiritual family?

What did the fellowship of the first church look like?

Why should you join the fellowship of a local church?

How do you join yourself in fellowship with a local church?

What things should you consider before choosing to fellowship with a church?

What responsibilities are involved with being in fellowship with a local church?

What should happen to your fellowship with the church if you willfully engage in sin and refuse to repent?