

B. The Purpose of the Local Assembly

1. The following chart by George Zeller might be of help in comparing two dominant concepts within the camp of those who claim to follow Scriptural teaching:

Why do I come to church? What should I expect the local church to do for me? Should the regular services of the church be primarily for reaching the lost or for reaching the saved? Compare the two concepts below:

The local church is primarily a
SOUL-WINNING STATION.

The local church is primarily a
SOUL-BUILDING STATION
(Acts 20:28,32).

We rejoice at every soul that is saved through the preaching ministry of a local church, and we certainly do not want to minimize the importance of making the most of every opportunity to win a soul for Christ, but the primary purpose of the local assembly is to build up the believers in the most holy faith and to equip them for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The local church is here primarily to
GET PEOPLE SAVED (Reaching them).

The local church is here primarily to
GET PEOPLE TAUGHT (Teaching them).
See Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:42.

If the main thrust of the local assembly is to reach the lost, then evangelism will be unduly stressed and given priority and the edification and equipping of believers will not be given its proper place. If God's Word is properly taught, the unsaved who are in attendance will certainly hear the gospel, and the believers who need to be taught will not be neglected.

The local church is to
PREACH THE GOSPEL
(by "gospel" we mean that truth which unsaved people need to know in order to be saved, the good news of salvation).

The local church is to
PREACH THE WORD (2 Tim. 4:2)
which would include the gospel but which would not neglect "ALL SCRIPTURE"
(2 Tim. 3:16).

If a faithful pastor is preaching through the Bible, verse by verse, book by book, he is going to be constantly pointing his listeners to Christ and to His so-great salvation. At the same time he will be feeding the saints the kind of spiritual food that will nurture them and strengthen them to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The local church is here primarily for
EVANGELISM (Win them!).

The local church is here primarily for
INDOCTRINATION (Feed them!).
See John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2.

The key word here is “primarily.” We are not opposed to the gospel message going forth in the regular services of the local church, and we certainly rejoice over every sinner who repents. The problem comes when evangelism becomes the main focus and the believers do not get the spiritual nourishment that they need to be effective servants (and soul-winners!) for Christ throughout the week.

**BRING THE UNSAVED
TO THE GOSPEL.**

**BRING THE GOSPEL
TO THE UNSAVED**
(Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 5:20).

God does not say, “Go into all the world and invite everyone to come to church.” We are not to bring them to the gospel but we are to bring the gospel to them. All believers are to be gospel preachers, not just the pastor on Sunday morning or Sunday evening. Our gospel emphasis should be every day of the week, as we go into the world seeking the lost to win. But the hours that we spend with God’s people should be rich times of being built up in the Word of God so that we can be more effective witnesses for Christ at work, at home or at school.

The regular services of the local church have a ministry primarily for **SINNERS**.

The regular services of the local church have a ministry primarily for **SAINTS**
(Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:28).

Again the key word is “primarily.” We are certainly glad if unsaved people can come into a local church and find it a place that ministers to their spiritual needs, especially their greatest need which is salvation from sin. But the primary purpose of the local assembly is to proclaim the whole counsel of God so that believers are well-equipped to go forth and do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

Primary goal of the local church:
THAT PEOPLE MIGHT BE SAVED!

(Salvation is the final goal)

Primary goal of the local church:
THAT SAVED PEOPLE MIGHT BE CHRIST-LIKE!

(Salvation is just the first step)
Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13-15

Again, we are certainly not opposed to people being saved in church, but we are grieved when God’s people are undernourished, spiritually sick, and ineffective witnesses for Christ. A church that is faithfully teaching the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, will not neglect the lost who come through the doors. What happens when an unbeliever comes into a soul-building station where believers are being edified and where God’s Word is being rightly taught?

See 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

<p>The Pastor should PREACH SALVATION MESSAGES. John 3:16, etc.</p>	<p>The Pastor should PREACH THE ENTIRE BIBLE from Genesis to Revelation (Acts 20:27; Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 3:16).</p>
<p>It is impossible to preach through the Bible systematically and not touch upon the gospel repeatedly. There is a scarlet cord that runs throughout the Scriptures. But there are also rich gems of truth that believers need to hear and understand. John 3:16 is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, but a steady diet of John 3:16 type messages is not what a hungry believer needs. If we aim the Sword only at the unsaved, then we are going to fail to meet the spiritual needs of God's flock (John 21:15-17).</p>	

<p>The Pastor should give the people INFORMATION ON HOW TO BE SAVED. (How to become a Christian)</p>	<p>The Pastor should give the people INFORMATION ON HOW TO LIVE. (How to be a Christian) See 2 Tim. 3:17</p>
<p>Believers need to be well-versed on how to be saved and how to have full assurance of salvation based on God's Word. But salvation is only the beginning. It is but the first step of a life-long process of growing to be more like Christ (2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:18). What would we think of a person who is admitted into medical school but receives no further medical training because all the medical school cares about is getting more and more people admitted into their school? I would not want to be a patient in the hospital staffed by such people! The prospective doctor needs to receive the best training possible so that he might be able to treat people properly and save lives. So also the pastor's job is to give the saints the best possible training from the Word so that they might be able to minister effectively and represent Christ rightly in the world, bringing others to the Saviour.</p>	

<p>THE PASTOR DOES THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY.</p>	<p>THE SAINTS DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY (Eph. 4:12).</p>
<p>In most churches today the pastor bears the great bulk of the ministry load along with perhaps a few others. The great majority are content to sit in the pews, hear a nice message and perhaps come back on the following Sunday. The genius of New Testament Christianity was that the saints (the believers) were to be fully equipped and well-trained to go forth every day of the week and do the work of the ministry. Instead of one man or a few people trying to bear the burden, God's intent was to have a whole army of believers going forth trained and well-equipped to serve the Lord at work, at school, at home, in town or in the local neighborhoods.</p>	

THE PASTOR IS THE MINISTER.**ALL ARE MINISTERS (Eph. 4:12).**

In so many churches the preacher is called “the minister,” and sadly this title itself reflects the wrong concept. The pastor is certainly a servant of Christ, but he is but one of many. His special assignment is to train and equip a whole group of believers to be faithful servants of Christ, and this would include being faithful heralds of the good news.

If someone were to ask, “Who is the minister of this church?” an appropriate answer would be, “There are about 200 (depending on the size of the congregation) ministers in this church. Which one would you like to speak to?” God’s people need to understand that the Saviour desires everyone of us to be His faithful servants.

On the other hand, the pastor has a very special ministry. He is able to devote himself continually to the ministry of prayer and the Word of God (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 4:15-16). The believers under his ministry ought to be good students of the Word also, but because they hold full time jobs and are full time homemakers, etc., the time they spend in the Word is limited by such constraints. The pastor has the time and needs to make the time for intensive study of the Word so that he might be able to equip the believers unto every good work. One of the great problems of our day is that Bible believing pastors do not study the Word as they should, and part of the reason for this is that all during the week they are running around doing many of the things that well-fed and well-taught saints ought to be doing.

THE PASTOR IS IN FULL TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE.**EVERY BELIEVER IS IN FULL TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

(1 Cor. 6:19-20; Col. 3:22-25).

Every believer needs to realize that he is in full time Christian service whether he gets monetary benefits or not. You may be a doctor or a lawyer or a plumber or an insurance agent or a homemaker or whatever, but your **chief vocation** is that you are a servant of the most high God and you are to walk worthy of your high, holy and heavenly calling (Eph. 4:1). Never forget what your main job really is. And if it really is your main job, do you not need to be fully equipped and fully trained for it? This is the purpose of the local assembly of believers according to God’s blueprint in Ephesians 4:11-16.

THE PASTOR IS THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL.**EVERY BELIEVER IS A PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL (2 Cor. 5:20; Mark 16:15).**

The pastor certainly has wonderful opportunities to proclaim the good news of Christ, not only in the regular services of the church, but also on other special occasions (funerals, weddings, etc.). As the pastor faithfully preaches and teaches through the Bible he is going to repeatedly exalt the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and point to the wonderful salvation that He alone died to provide. But there is also a gospel responsibility given to every blood-bought child of God. Remember, your pastor cannot readily get into the factory or the hospital or the insurance company or the school or the place of business where you work 40 hours a week or more. However God has placed you there to be His witness, by life and by lips (Acts 1:8). Also keep in mind that you don’t have to be a pastor to hand out tracts or to do hospital visitation or to lead a nursing home service or to conduct a neighborhood evangelistic Bible study or to teach a Bible club for children, or to go on door to door visitation, etc. May God guide each of us to know where and how we may most effectively serve Him.

2. Let us consider what God has to say concerning the purpose of His local church. You might find it helpful to read through the Book of Ephesians in one sitting. Then re-read chapter four which will be our focus.
 - a. God has a privileged position for the believer. He has called us saints (holy ones, set apart ones). He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm IN CHRIST JESUS. Believers are chosen, holy predestinated, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, made insiders, recipients of an inheritance, sealed, and so much more! We need to know it, so that we can show it! We need to understand, and Paul prays that it might be so. We need to know what God has called us to. We need to know what God stands to inherit in us. We need to know His grace that has lifted us so very high (who were so very low), that drew us near (who were so far away), that made us fellow-citizens (who were aliens), that put us on a tried and proven, permanent, precious foundation. We need to know the greatness of His attention to us and His power available to make us what He has saved us to be. We are part of a mystery, an eternal purpose, a brand new thing that God is doing in an age of grace.
 - b. Ephesians 4:1 I THEREFORE, THE PRISONER OF THE LORD, BESEECH YOU THAT YE _____ WORTHY OF THE _____ (calling) WHEREWITH YE ARE CALLED.
 - i. WALK _____ —let your life square with your calling. Live a balanced life. Live up to what you have professed. “Too many believers talk sweet cream, but live skim milk!”
 - ii. VOCATION means calling. The believer is called into fellowship with God’s Son, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). We have a new job, a new occupation. We are God’s personal representatives on earth (while the Son of God represents us at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high). No longer do we live for our jobs or our families, or our own pleasure. We now live for Him (Who died for us). Every believer is a minister. Every believer is in full time Christian service.
 - iii. We have an important new job. We must do our new job with soberness and seriousness. It is too important (too precious to God) to allow personalities, pet peeves, or personal differences to get in the way of the healthy functioning of the assembly. Hence verses 2-6. There is only one body—don’t distort the picture.

- iv. There is grace given to every believer to profit the entire assembly (verse 7, 1 Peter 4:10).
- v. There are gifted men given for the sake of the entire assembly (*verse 11. We shall deal more particularly with gifts in our next chapter*)
- c. EPHESIANS 4:12 For the _____ of the _____, for the _____ of the _____, for the _____ of the body of Christ.
- i. That the local church is here in view is evident for the completed Church will need no perfecting.
- ii. The word perfecting is elsewhere translated mending (Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19), fitted (Romans 9:22), restore (Galatians 6:1), prepared (Hebrews 10:5), framed (Hebrews 11:3), perfect (1 Thessalonians 3:10, Hebrew 13:21; 1 Peter 5:10). It means “equipping.”
- iii. The purpose of the local church therefore is to equip the saints, to mend them, to train or prepare them, to strengthen them so that they are able to do the work or service of the ministry. It is to make them fit or complete that they might do the work of the ministry so that the body might be edified or built up as a building, a habitation of God through the Spirit, upon the foundation, even Jesus Christ.
- iv. If there is no equipping, there is no work, no building up of the body of Christ.
- d. EPHESIANS 4:13 TILL WE _____ COME IN THE _____, AND _____, UNTO _____, UNTO _____

- i. How long are the believers to be equipped?—until they arrive at their destination, until they are one in the faith, until the faith (the body of truth, the Word of God) is fully known by all.
- ii. How long? (more information)—until all the believers arrive at the full knowledge of the Son of God, clearly understanding, fully grasping Him.

- iii. How long? (more)—until all the believers arrive at maturity (perfect man), the adult level. Do we ever arrive? (See Phil 3:12).
- iv. How long?—until all the believers arrive at the measure (capacity) of the stature of the fullness of Christ, until we are as complete and full as Christ Jesus Himself, until we are fully Christ-like.
- e. EPHESIANS 4:14 THAT WE HENCEFORTH BE NO MORE _____, TOSSED ____ and ____, AND _____ WITH EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE, BY THE SLEIGHT OF MEN, AND CUNNING CRAFTINESS, WHEREBY THEY LIE IN WAIT TO _____.
- i. Children should be children, but children must grow up. Childhood must give way to adulthood. We want children to mature. God wants His children to grow up. It is characteristic of children that they are very easily swayed, easily led astray, easily persuaded. God wants to ground us in the Truth so that every new idea, every cult and ism that comes along doesn't move us off course. The purpose then of the local church is to anchor the believer in the Truth so that he knows what he believes and why he believes it, so that he stays on course, rightly representing and picturing the Lord.
- ii. "Sleight" has to do with dice playing, and not so much the game as the deceit and craft that are associated with it. There is a concerted effort to move the believer from the Truth. The local church must fix and fasten the believer upon the word of God. False teachers with loaded dice are gambling for the souls of men.
- f. EPHESIANS 4:15 BUT SPEAKING THE _____ IN _____, MAY _____ INTO HIM IN ALL THINGS, WHICH IS THE HEAD, EVEN CHRIST.
- i. God would not have the believer off target, but on target, learning and living the Truth, growing up.
- ii. Note that the Truth is to be learned and lived in the sphere of love, that love which is God's love, that love which is self sacrificing, seeking the highest and best for the other. In the center of God's love, the believer is to grow up to maturity.