

Bedford Bulletin

Columbus Street church of Christ

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September 22, 2019



BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE
FAITH
1 Corinthians 3:9-11

Things That Divide (Part 4) The Church of Christ

Ending our last issue was the question, “What is the church in the universal sense?” In this issue we’ll answer in four ways. **The first answer: It is the universal, spiritual body of Christ** made up of people who have obeyed the gospel. It is not a physical building, not anything established by any man. Looking from the aspect of it spiritually, it is the universal church, without any earthly organization whatsoever, only the blood-bought souls, that is people who have obeyed and responded to the invitation of Christ. It is described by Paul in Acts chapter 17 where Paul is explaining to the people on Mars’ Hill there is one God, creator of all, Who by His own blood brought every nation together under one Head, that is the Lord. Paul said, God, “(v.24) *who made the world and everything in it...has made from one [j]blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (v.26)...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him (v.27)...for in Him we live and move and have our being (v.28)*” (Acts 17:24, 26, 27, 28). The point is, we’re all the same inside, one blood (Gen. 2:27), and God “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. 2:4) in Christ, thus becoming spiritually one body. This happens when one hears and obeys the gospel of Christ, God will add them spiritually to the universal church, the body of Christ. Every soul that obeys, is **added to the universal church, the body of Christ**: “*41 Then those who [a]gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them*” and “*47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added [a]to the church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:41, 47). The universal church, therefore, is spiritual and cannot act in any physical way.

Now then, to the second aspect of the question: “**What is a church of Christ in the local sense?**” The local church consists of saved individuals who joined together within their community to worship and work in the Lord’s body. This aspect of the church exists when saints physically assemble for work and worship. They assemble on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2) in one place, “a building”, take an offering, pray, sing, teach, and partake in the Lord’s Supper. Remember that we are commanded to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Some erringly teach that whenever you read the word, “*churches*” that scripture is referring to the plethora of man-made churches which today exist in the thousands. That is not how the term

Knowing & Doing God's Will

Proverbs 11:14

is used in the written New Testament. As far as I can tell, in my study, only Luke, Paul and John ever used the term church in the plural (Acts (3x), Rom. (2x), 1 Cor. (6x), 2 Cor. (8x), Gal. (2x), 1 Thess. (1x), 2 Thess. (1x), Rev. (13x)). All these letters were written approximately between 65 CE and 110 CE. Connect the dots, and reason for yourself. History clearly shows that only one church existed during that time period between 32 AD and the fifth century. The apostasy began when the church at Rome was founded in Rome by Boniface III 606 CE, then there was two. The church you can read about in the Bible continues even to this day wherever people obey the gospel, and would join together and work, worship and fellowship in the name of Christ. That is when the church became a local body of believers. Paul talked about local churches, for example in Galatians 1 Paul wrote, “*the churches of Galatia.*” In the book of Revelation John wrote about, “*the seven churches which are in Asia.*” A good example is in the book of Philippians chapter 1 verse 1 where Paul writing said, the “*church which is in Philippi*” as he did in his first letter to the Corinthians 1:2, “*to the church of God which is at Corinth.*” So then, when we ask what is a local church, we are talking about a group of men and women who physically meet in a local area and practice the things commanded by Christ for the church He built (Matt. 16:18). The local church of Christ's is composed of Christians who come together in a specific locality to do the will of God and Christ. The church at Corinth is so called because it was at Corinth. Our congregation meets in a building that is located on Columbus Street and is called the Columbus Street church of Christ. Made up of people who have joined together as the saints of God, meeting together in a specific locality and identified as such. That is what a local church of Christ really is. But of course, there is more to it than this.

The Bible tells us exactly what we are to be doing as a local church and how we are to be organized. For example, in Acts 14:23, “*they ordained elders in every city.*” This is an “approved example” as discussed in previous issues. Therefore, as they had to have elders in every congregation, we also strive to do the same thing. Everyone that is called an elder must meet the qualifications as described in 1 Timothy 3 verses 1-7 and Titus 1 verse 5 – 16. A basic summary: To qualify you must first be a man who desires the position. You must be blameless and married, with children. Cannot be a novice, that is to say you must have a deep understanding of the scriptures, able to teach. In 1 Peter 5:2, Paul said that elders have the oversight of “*the flock of God which is among you.*” So, the local church has members, and has “*elders, overseers*” who have been given the responsibility to see that the local church under their care does not fall into error because of the devil (see: Acts 20:28). Something else is to be considered whenever we ask, what is a local church of Christ? It is critical to note the elders only oversee the flock of God

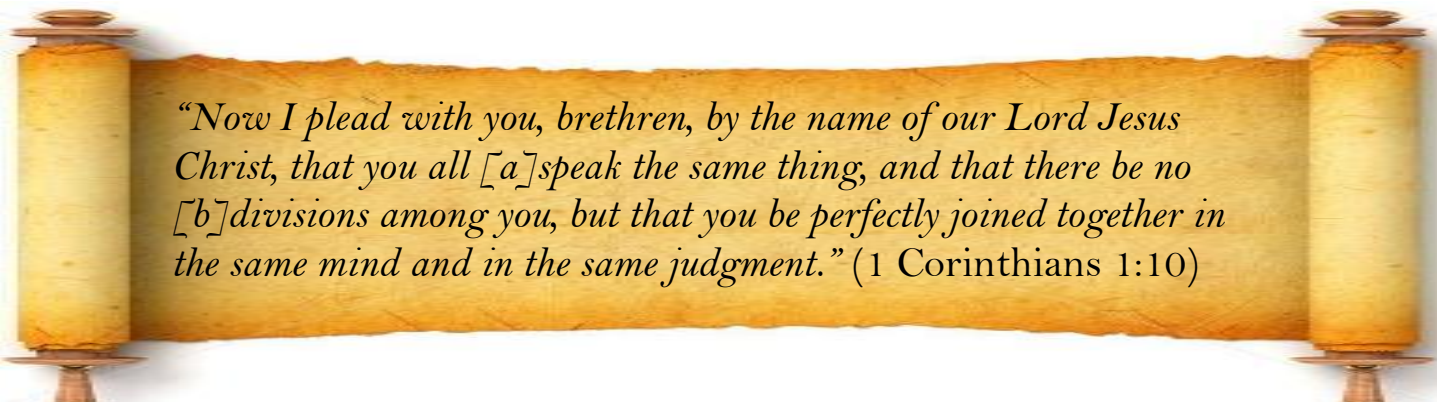
TODAY WE CHOOSE TO REJOICE

Ephesians 4:4-6

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in [c]you all.”

which is “*among*” them. What does this mean? It means that each eldership has been given the task of overseeing only their own congregation. Elders at one church have no authority, or oversight over any other church. There is great wisdom in this, namely that if a local church begins to teach error, they don’t “infect” the whole body. Denominations, on the other hand, today are plagued with this problem because they have central synods which oversee “their church”. A synod is a council of a church, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration or application. The word synod comes from two Greek words: SUNE “together” and HODOS “journey, path”, thus, together on the same path or purpose. The problem comes when the synod begins taking the whole membership down the wrong path, usually because they ignore Bible authority. This is crystal clear in the very definition which states they, “decide an issue of doctrine”. If that meant they turn to the scripture, great, but that is not what they’re doing. Rather it means they’re deciding what their doctrine will be, which differs from synod to synod. Many have misunderstood what “*overseers / elders*” duties are, abusing the bible principle, bringing about division within their own ranks. Let’s keep in mind so far, we see the definition that a local church is a congregation of believers in a specific locality who submit to the oversight of their local eldership.

Now one more point concerning the question, what is the local church? Paul writing to the church at Philippi refers to both, “...*bishops and deacons:*” (Phil. 1:1). The local church in your Bibles has instructions for deacons. Just as the elders must meet certain qualifications, so do deacons also. Read 1 Timothy 3 verses 8 – 13 which teaches what the qualifications of the deacons are. They are the special men who are servants, and they must be qualified to serve in a local church under the oversight of the eldership. Note: Search the scripture, there are no qualifications for “*deaconesses*”, that is women serving as deacons.

A scroll with text on it, set against a background of a scroll with wooden rollers.

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all [a]speak the same thing, and that there be no [b]divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

In every local church, you’ll have needs that must be met. There is a work to be performed: the preaching of the gospel of Christ (Ram. 10:14-15), the edifying of the saints of God (Eph. 4:12), the doing of the work of benevolence and taking care of their own poor (2 Cor. 8:1-6). Funds are raised to aid the church in accomplishing these three things. How is the local church to raise its money? Well, according to the teaching of God’s word in 1 Corinthians 16 verses 1-2 a local church raised its money by the saints of God giving upon the first day of the week. No bake sales, rummage sales, car washes, solicitations to the community. Just the saints of God giving each first day of the week, “*as he may prosper*” (2 Cor. 16:2), and each one gives “*as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*” “cheerfully” (2 Cor. 9:7). No tithes, or promise envelops.

So, what is the church? The church is the universal body of Christ with no earthly organization, and the local church of Christ is organized with elders, saints of God giving and doing what God told it to do, always standing for the truth. The question is, are you identified with a local church that is defined in this way?

As always, in Love

Dave Scarpino

Times of Our Services

Sunday Morning Bible Study	9:00 AM
Sunday Morning Worship	9:50 AM
Sunday Evening Worship	6:00 PM
Wednesday Evening Bible Study	7:30 PM

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Hear the gospel -----	John 6:45; Romans 10:17
Believe the gospel -----	John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6
Repent of sins -----	Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30
Confess Christ -----	Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10
Be baptized -----	Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38
Remain faithful unto and until death -----	Revelation 2:10; Matthew 10:22