

The Local Church: A Spirit-Empowered Community, Part 1

Editor's Note: This is the first part a two-part article. Check back on soon to read the second part.

The church tradition I grew up in lacked teaching and a demonstration of the miraculous, present-day power of God. When I gave my life to Christ as a young adult, I gravitated toward the Gospels and the book of Acts.

I wanted to know more about new life in Christ and read about God's miracles. I longed to be part of a church culture where the life and community of the early church were realized and God's presence and power were normal. I soon came to believe, "God did miracles then, and He still does today for those who believe!" (See my book, *Receive Your Miracle Now! A Case for Healing Today* for more on the present-day working of healing and miracles.)

Today, I want to examine principles that will aid us in being Spirit-empowered members of a dynamic local church community.

Keep in mind that each of us was uniquely created by God with gifts, purpose and calling. You are the only you, and you are here for "such a time as this!" Pursue God and pursue your passions and dreams. But understand your giftings and calling are developed through connection to God's people in the local church.

When we embrace this truth and work together in the local church community we are placed in, we thrive and come alive—destiny is realized! Our passion and purpose grow; we mature; and dreams are fulfilled.

The New Testament assumes participation with other believers in a local congregation. Unfortunately, in today's world,

individualism has created many disconnected believers without accountability or commitment in the body of Christ.

The difference between being a church attender and a church member is commitment. Attenders are spectators from the sidelines; members get involved in the ministry. Attenders are consumers; members are contributors.

Attenders want the benefits of a church without sharing the responsibility. They want relationship without commitment. How can one be part of a family without participation? Healthy families work together, cleaning the house, doing the dishes and so forth. It takes effort to be connected to a family in a healthy way!

Let's examine a story in Acts that underscores the importance of belonging and commitment to a local church.

In Acts 6:1-10, we read of how the early church and apostles chose seven men who were full of faith, wisdom and the Holy Spirit to minister to the needs of the people.

In the early chapters of Acts, we read that since Pentecost, the growing church in Jerusalem needed more servant leaders to minister to the people. Or, as Jesus called them, "laborers for the harvest."

The Hebraic Jews, native Jewish Christians, primarily spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language. The Hellenistic Jews, Greek-speaking Christians, were probably Jews from other lands who were converted at Pentecost. The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being unfairly treated.

However, this favoritism was probably not intentional but was more likely caused by the language and cultural barriers. To correct the situation, the apostles put seven respected Greek-speaking men in charge of the food distribution program. Leadership was multiplied, and the apostles were able to keep their focus on prayer, study and preaching about Jesus.

In this story, did you notice there was an issue that caused division?

Principle No. 1: Being part of a local church family, even one moving in the power of the Spirit, is to recognize no church is perfect!

When we read descriptions about the early church—the miracles, sharing, generosity and fellowship—we may wish we could have been part of this “perfect” church. In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today.

No church has ever been or ever will be perfect until Jesus and His followers are united at His Second Coming. All churches have problems. A pastor, who helped mentor me as a new believer, once said, “Bob, the minute you came into this church, it was not perfect!” Ouch! But I got the point. None of us are perfect, so why do we expect perfection in everyone else and within the church?

If our church, or any church you are part of, distresses you, ask yourself: “Would a perfect church allow me to be a member?” Probably not! Therefore, we should strive to walk closely with Jesus and each other and do what we can to make our church better.

Keep in mind that a church (or an individual) does not have to be perfect to be counted as faithful in the Lord’s eyes.

Principle No. 2: Church growth creates a greater need for each member to use their gifts, talents and abilities to contribute and minister.

As the early church grew, so did its needs. In this account, the great need was to organize the distribution of food to the poor. The apostles needed to focus on prayer and God’s Word, so they chose others to administer the food program.

Realizing they needed more prayer rather than increased

activity, the apostles chose seven others to serve as servant leaders to care for the needs of the church.

Faithfulness to prayer recurs through Scripture. Paul would later tell the church at Rome, “Be kindly affectionate to one another ... continuing steadfastly in prayer” (Rom. 12:10a,12b NKJV).

As a result, the church grew, and supernatural ministry took place.

For more from Dr. Bob Sawvelle, listen to *Empowered for Purpose* on the Charisma Podcast Network. {eo2}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.