

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church
Part Two: The Local Church

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
 We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
 And I pray that our unity will one day be restored
 And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
 And they'll know that we are Christians by our love.¹*

This song has become a well-known appeal for unity among individual Christians, but has also been used to promote the end of denominational distinctives, to join hands and become one worldwide, unified Church. In spite of the popularity of this idea, there is good reason to believe that such a union would be a spiritual catastrophe. To prevent such a catastrophe in our time, the Spirit of God (the same One appealed to in the song) influences the consciences of men to believe and to worship as they do, rendering impossible any gathering into one world church organization. In the section of Revelation that foretells the coming of one world religious organization, it appears that this forced unity will arise during the Great Tribulation, and it will be the “church” of the Antichrist.

In the meantime, you have chosen to worship in a building at 410 East Social Row, while others in our community gather for worship around the corner and down the road. Why is it right – even important -- to have distinct, identifiable groups, sometimes meeting next door to one another, each of which calls itself a church of Jesus Christ? Why, instead of there being one church in Centerville, do we insist on owning our own property? Working from our own constitution? Having our own goals, plans, and programs? Keeping our own separate membership list?

It's because of what we believe the Bible says about the church:

We believe in the church: one true Church, the body and bride of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-32), composed of all true believers of the present age (I Cor. 12:12-13); and the organization of its members into local churches for worship, for edification of believers, and for worldwide gospel witness, each local church being autonomous but cooperating in fellowship and work (Eph. 4:11-13).²

This segment of our study examines the visible church, the part that gets together here on Social Row every Sunday: the local church.

¹ Scholtes, Peter, © 1966, F.E.L. Publications, assigned to The Lorenz Corp., 1991.

² Paragraph 7, *The Statement of Faith of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches*.

The Nature of the Local Church

1. What is the local church?

- Definition: “Any group of _____ Christians gathered in _____ to perform the church’s _____.”

- Examples

Acts 8:1 – the church at Jerusalem

Acts 13:1 – the church at Antioch

Romans 16:1 – the church at Cenchrea

1st Corinthians 1:2 – the church at Corinth

2. How does the local church relate to the universal Church?

- Main likeness: The local church is the _____ form of the universal Church.
- Main difference: Local church membership may unknowingly include _____ Christians.

In the local church, human beings decide who is a member and who is not. We all know that “men look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart” (1st Samuel 16:7). Consequently the ones who keep the membership list may be wrong about an individual who is merely pretending to be a genuine follower of Christ.

The Purposes of the Local Church (Acts 2:41-47)

1. _____ (verse 42)

Matthew 28:20 – “...teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.”

2nd Timothy 2:2 – “The things you have received from me, these things commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Acts 20:27 – “I did not hesitate to declare the whole counsel of God to you.”

If you're taking notes in this class, if you feel like you're in school, that's good! If a major purpose of your local church is to teach you things about God, then someone up front should say something worth remembering, and we should be writing it down.

2. _____ (verse 42)

1st John 3:4 – “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 – “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the Day drawing near.”

We enjoy a common life centered on the Lord Jesus. We enjoy each other's company. When the last prayer has been spoken in our gatherings, we don't leave immediately. As 1st John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

3. _____ (verse 42)

Literally “the breaking of the bread.” The implication is more than a potluck dinner (that would fall into the category of fellowship); it seems to be a reference to the Communion meal.

Luke 22:19 – Jesus passed the cup around the table twice. The first time it was a symbol of the fellowship they enjoyed together until Christ's departure. The second time it represented his shed blood.³

4. _____ (verse 42)

Matthew 18:19 – “If two or three of you agree on anything they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father in heaven.”

When the church gets a grip on this powerful truth, it experiences the awesome effect of hearts that are united in prayer.

5. _____ (verses 44-45)

³ This topic will be discussed more fully in the segment on “The FGBC Statement of Faith,” scheduled for November 2017.

1st John 3:16-18 – “We know love by this: that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s good, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

People can only *share* effectively when they *care* effectively.

6. _____ (46-47)

Notice three elements that contributed to the community’s favorable view of the believers:

- They went _____

Romans 10:14 – “How shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

- They displayed _____

John 13:35 – “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Their lives _____

James 2:15-17 – “...even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

7. _____ (47)

Ephesians 3:21 – “To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Membership in the Local Church

1. Is there a biblical basis for a formal list of local church members?

- In the early church, the members were _____.

Acts 1:15 – “...a gathering of about 120 persons....”

Acts 2:41 – “...and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.”

Acts 4:4 – “...and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.”

- Special _____ were kept.

1st Timothy 5:9 – “Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.”

- The selection of _____ required the identification of qualified voters.

Acts 6:2-5 – “And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said... ‘Select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation....’ And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and *they* chose...”

- _____, to be effective, required a point of leverage: the threat of exclusion from the congregation.

1st Corinthians 5:13 with 5:2; Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7, 12; 21:21; 22:21 – “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

2. How should an individual come to be counted among the members of the local church?

- Evidence of _____

Acts 2:38 – “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

- The testimony of _____

Acts 2:41 – “So those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

- Intentional _____

Acts 5:12-14 – “They were all with one accord in Solomon’s Portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them.”

Note: Each local church has the duty to determine if a prospective member has met all requirements. Some recommended questions:

Do his words and actions reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life? (Does he appear to be saved?)

Has he been obedient to what he knows about baptism? (Has the church instructed him?)

Is he in agreement with the church’s beliefs, practices, and mission? (Have these been explained to him?)

3. What are the responsibilities attached to membership in the local church?

- The member’s part:

-- To exercise his _____

1st Corinthians 12:7 – “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

-- To build and encourage _____

“Pray, give, go!”

“Prayers, pennies, presence!”

-- To be involved in _____

Representing Jesus

Representing the church

-- To expedite church family _____

To vote, you have to attend the meeting.

To vote as the Spirit guides you, you have to pray.

- The church’s part:

- To offer every member _____

Organization of the Local Church

1. Bible-based church governance is:

- _____

The church gets its authority and its rules from the Word of God, not from the American Constitution or from Robert’s Rules of Order. 1st Timothy 6 pleads with us to avoid arguments in our church meetings, but rather to remember what the Bible says.

- _____

Galatians 3:28 – “There’s no difference in the church between Jew and Gentile, between blue collar and white collar, between male and female; we’re all one in Christ.”

Sometimes people avoid church business meetings because they want to avoid unpleasantness. But in Numbers 15, Israel was instructed to gather the entire assembly to execute a murderer by stoning. Everyone was expected to be involved.

- _____

The church is different from any other group on the face of the earth. We’re more than just a loose gathering of individuals with a common purpose. Each of us is indwelt by the same Holy Spirit, giving us a truly united mind, heart, and direction. That demands that we exist only to accomplish things that pertain to the Spirit of God. Only what’s important to him ought to be important to us.

- _____

Each local church has supreme authority over its own affairs. There is no pope or archbishop or central committee or regional board that tells us what to believe, say, or do. We discipline our own members, elect our own officers, and obey the Lord's commands as we see fit.

2. Bible-based inter-church relations must involve:

- _____

No congregation controls any other congregation.

- _____

No man is an island, and no church is either. As much as possible, we ought to get along like brothers and sisters with other congregations of people who claim the name of Christ. With some we may be able to cooperate more than with others, depending how each congregation understands the Bible and practices it.

We should be able to cooperate in doctrine in supporting missionaries, in deciding what to do about members who move from one location to another, and in educating our young people.

3. Bible-based church leadership consists of:

- _____ who rule (1st Peter 5:1-4)

These are the men responsible for teaching and preaching the Word; counseling and encouraging the believers; caring for administration and general oversight of the church.

-- Bible terms describing church leaders⁴

- _____ (1st Timothy 5:17; James 5:14) = "presbyter"

⁴Note that the three terms – elder, overseer, and shepherd – are used interchangeably in Acts 20:17 and 28 to describe *the same group of people*. The biblical pattern does not support the use of these terms in the manner often employed in church history: "elder" referring to a layman; "bishop" referring to an authority over an entire cluster of congregations; and "pastor" referring only to a professional clergyman.

The Old Testament Hebrew word (Exodus 19:7) meant “bearded one”, i.e. “someone old enough to grow a beard.”

The New Testament Greek word meant “aged man.”

The overall meaning: “A man who because of age and/or experience can be trusted for wisdom and example.”

This expression deals with the man’s *character and dignity*; it doesn’t say anything about his duties.

- _____ (Acts 20:28; 1st Timothy 3:1) = “bishop”

The term suggests “foreman, supervisor; one who is responsible for the work of a group.”

This term describes what an elder does, especially his *administrative duties*.

- _____ (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1st Peter 5:2) = “pastor”

- This term means “one who is charged with the health, comfort, and safety of sheep.”

- It describes the *attitude* with which the elder carries out his duties. (In the New Testament, the term is almost always in a verb form, “shepherd the flock.”) This duty is accomplished mostly through the elder’s teaching and preaching ministries.

-- The biblical duties of church leaders

- The ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4; Titus 1:9)
- Overseeing and administrating the work of the church (1st Timothy 3:5; 5:17)
- Evangelism and discipleship of believers (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1st Timothy 3:7)
- Counseling, comforting, and encouraging the members of the body (Acts 20:28)
- Prayer for the church (Acts 6:4; James 5:14-15)

- Anointing the sick with oil (James 5:14)⁵
- The biblical pattern for the number and relationship of church leaders
 - *Plurality*: It was expected that more than one man would fill the duties of leadership (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2-4, 22-23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Galatians 2:9; James 5:14).
 - *Equality*: It was expected that the elders would share equally in authority, with none lording it over the others (1st Peter 5:3; Acts 15:22).⁶
- The biblical pattern for choosing church leaders
 - Select candidates for eldership.

A man may volunteer (1st Timothy 3:1). Recognized spiritual leaders should name those who seem best qualified (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
 - Evaluate each candidate's qualifications for eldership (1st Timothy 5:22; 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; Acts 20:28; 1st Peter 5:1-3).
 - The congregation must ratify or approve those whom they acknowledge as elders (as in Acts 6:5-6).
 - Formally ordain each elder, including the ceremonial "laying on of hands" (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1st Timothy 4:14; 5:22).
- The biblical term of service for church leaders
 - Logically, an elder should be expected to be qualified for life. (Once a man has reached "maturity," does he ever cease to be mature? Once he's reached a respectable level of age or experience, does he lose that age or experience?)

⁵ This topic will be discussed more fully in the segment, "Other FGBC Beliefs and Practices," scheduled for January 2018.

⁶ Practicality requires one spokesman/chairman/moderator. It is for the elders to determine which man among them is best suited to the largest share of "up-front" duties. In some churches, the "administrative pastor" moderates committees and board meetings, while the "teaching pastor" does most of the preaching.

- However, an elder might forfeit his position by falling into sin (1st Timothy 5:19-20). In that case, he must be removed.⁷
- The biblical cautions for the selection of church leaders
- As we evaluate each candidate’s potential for leadership, we cannot consider his manner of life *before he was saved*.
 - In 1st Timothy 1:3, Paul directs Timothy to select elders from within the Ephesian congregation.
 - The Ephesians, prior to salvation, had been wicked individuals (Ephesians 2:1-2; 4:22-23, 28-31; 5:3-10).
 - As we evaluate each candidate’s potential for leadership, we cannot consider his manner of life *before he reached maturity in Christ*.
 - Every verb in 1st Timothy 3:2-7 is in the present tense, referring to his pattern of conduct continuing for a significant length of time in the past into the immediate present.
 - If one’s eligibility for eldership is to be judged by the mistakes one made as an immature Christian, then no one would be qualified.
 - The term “elder” infers that this person has outgrown the foolishness and faltering which characterize a new believer (1st Corinthians 13:11).
- The biblical qualifications for church leaders (1st Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
- An assumed qualification: The elder must be a man.
 - The Greek term “overseer” is masculine.
 - Every Greek adjective in the list of qualifications (1st Timothy and Titus) is masculine.
 - The term “one-woman man” assumes a male candidate.

⁷ The Scriptures are silent regarding the length of time in which a sinful man is disqualified from service as an elder. Therefore, each congregation may determine the circumstances under which a man may be reinstated as an elder.

- The duty of supervising the church (1st Timothy 3:5) excludes women (see 1st Timothy 2:12).
- A general qualification: The elder must be above reproach.
 - It doesn't require "sinless perfection." Romans 3:10 – "There is no one who does good." "Blameless" (Ephesians 5:27) means "forgiven."
 - It does mean "without a handle" (the Greek word *anepilempton*). The elder's conduct includes nothing by which people could grab ahold and injure his reputation.
 - Scan the list of qualifications. Every conceivable aspect of his life, which might enhance or injure his credibility, is under scrutiny.
 - In Acts 6:3, they chose "seven men of good reputation."
 - The testimony of Timothy (Acts 16:2):

People were talking about him, giving positive feedback.
More than one person was speaking positively of him.
His testimony was good at home and abroad.
 - Summary: "Above reproach" = "not exhibiting traits that fail to harmonize with Christian principles; but rather exhibiting what people naturally expect from a mature person."
- The marital qualification (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

The overseer must be a "one-woman man." Through history, this phrase has been interpreted no less than six different ways. The underlying meaning, however, is that he must be "intimately involved with only one woman, (implying) his wife."⁸

⁸ (1) "He must be married to the Church" – the older Catholic view; inconsistent with the literal method of interpreting Scripture. (2) "He can't be a bigamist or polygamist" – true, but monogamy is the rule for every Christian, Ephesians 5:33. (3) "If his wife dies, he cannot remarry" – not consistent with 1st Corinthians 7:39. (4) "He can't be a bachelor" – not consistent with 1st Corinthians 7:7-9. (5) "He must never have been divorced/remarried" – (a) Nothing in the Greek phrase "one-woman" man demands this view. "Husband of one wife is a biased translation of the text. (b) Nothing in other biblical literature demands this view. 1st Timothy 5:9 is insufficient proof. (c) nothing in early Church history supports this view. In fact, view "1" was the prevailing interpretation in the early Church. (d) The meaning of "above reproach" destroys the logic of this view, although the church is wise to deny leadership to one who has demonstrated a clear pattern of immoral or questionable

- Mental requirements

- He must be temperate (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

In drinking – the term has the modern meaning of moderation in the use of wine.

In deciding – he is one whose sound judgment keeps him from falling into false teaching.

- He must be earnest / sober (1st Timothy 3:2)

He take his church duties seriously. He isn't the "church clown."

- He must be orderly / sensible / self-controlled (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

A well-ordered life reflects a well-ordered mind. The eldership is no place for a man whose life is a long trail of unaccomplished plans and disorganized activity.

- He must be able to teach (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9)

This is someone who has the ability, not only to make people understand the Word of truth, but how to apply it to daily life.

- Personality requirements

- He must be hospitable (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

Literally "loving strangers." People are never going to feel welcome in our church if they don't feel welcome in our homes. The overseer sets the pace for the whole church.

- He must not be a drinker (1st Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

behavior. (e) Scripture must be applied consistently. The same standard is required of deacons (3:12). If a divorced/remarried person is disqualified from *leading*, then he/she must be disqualified from *servicing*. (6) "He must be intimately involved with only one woman, (implying) his wife" – meaning (a) he must have no lasting attachment to any previous lover; (b) he must carry on no inordinate relationship with any woman other than his wife; and (c) he must never be guilty of "roving eyes" or sexual lust.

Literally “not beside wine” – someone who does not linger long at the wine glass.

- He must be non-violent (1st Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

“No striker; not pugnacious.” He’s not in the habit of getting angry enough to punch someone. He has an even temper.

- He must be gentle (1st Timothy 3:3)

An overseer must be willing patiently to yield to others.

- He must be uncontentious (1st Timothy 3:3)

It means not insisting on having your own rights all the time; keeping your temper under control; not going out of your way to argue or fight.

- He must not be a money-lover (1st Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

The elder of the church must be a person who doesn’t hunger for money, and who doesn’t get tainted when he has some of it.

- He must be a lover of goodness (Titus 1:8)

He’s devoted to all that is good and beneficial; an advocate of things worthwhile.

- Domestic requirements

- He must be a good manager of his household (1st Timothy 3:4-5)

His home functions smoothly. That often means a cooperative wife. His knack for administration at home is a sign that he can lead the church.

- He must have good control of his children (Titus 1:6)

His kids are obedient, and they know how to conduct themselves properly. In fact, they must be believers, and act like believers: not drug-users or rebels. Can we follow the lead of this potential elder? We’ll know we can, if we see his children following his lead and learning to love Christ.

- A maturity requirement (1st Timothy 3:6)

He must not be a new convert, literally “not newly planted.” Why? Because if he becomes prideful, it will cloud his judgment, harming the work. And if he lets his position go to his head, he won’t be an elder very long.

- A reputation requirement (1st Timothy 3:7)

He must have a good testimony with his neighbors and coworkers. To win them to Christ is the reason we are here. If the community speaks well of the elder, it reflects favorably on the whole church.

- _____ who assist (Acts 6:1-7; 1st Timothy 2:8-12; 3:8-12; Romans 16:1-2)

If the elder is a “player-coach” on God’s team, then the deacon is an “assistant coach.” As such, he must be a master of the game plan and of the skills of a player.

-- Requirements for any deacon

- His personal character

- He must be dignified (Acts 6: “full of wisdom”)

So many are depending on him; he doesn’t disappoint them

- He must be honest (“not double-tongued”)

- He must be sober (“temperate”)

He must neither be addicted to alcohol nor to anything else that would hinder sound judgment.

- He must be unselfish; not greedy.

- His spiritual life

- He must be doctrinally secure (Acts 6: “full of faith”)

He knows what the Bible says, believes it, and interprets it correctly.

- He must be morally pure (Acts 6: “full of the Holy Spirit”)

He holds to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, implying a pure life.

- His Christian experience

- He must be well-known

He must have proven, over a reasonable period of time, that he qualifies for the position.

- He must be above reproach

No one can find a handle on this person’s life with which to drag him down from his position. This doesn’t require sinless perfection; it does require that people are able to respect him and to follow his leadership.

- His domestic situation (1st Timothy 3:12)

- He must be a faithful husband (“one-woman man” – see page 282, note)

- He must be a successful father (see discussion of 1st Timothy 3:4-5 above; Titus 1:6)

- He must be a successful household manager

He doesn’t expect his wife to take all of the responsibility for a well-ordered home. He knows that God holds him accountable.

-- Requirements for female deacons

- Questions about her eligibility

- May women serve as deacons?

Note that the mention of “women” in 1st Timothy 3:11 is in the middle of a discussion of deacons.

Romans 16:1-2 describe Phoebe as a “servant,” using the same term translated “deacon” in 1st Timothy 3.

- Is 1st Timothy 3:11 a reference to “deacons’ wives”?

The Greek noun is “gyné,” woman. The term “wives” (KJV) is a biased translation. (Even unmarried women may use the services of a gynecologist.)

If verse 11 must be interpreted “wives of deacons,” then we have a theological difficulty: The qualifications for the deacon’s wife are more stringent than the qualifications for the elder’s wife.

- Qualifications special for her gender

- She must be dignified
- She must be careful in speech

She may work with Christian ladies who view gossip as a harmless recreation. But see Romans 1:29. The woman who serves the church must withstand the temptation to spread gossip.

- She must be sober (see discussion, page 285 above)
- She must be dependable

- Restrictions on her ministry (1st Timothy 2:12)

- She shall not teach

Exceptions: She should teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5) and children (2nd Timothy 1:5 with 3:15)

- She shall not rank in authority over men

This restriction is limited to her home and church life (see Ephesians 5:22). It may be waived in the church in time of dire need (1st Corinthians

11:5-12), but even then a symbol of her submission to authority is required.⁹

Resources

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Assignments for Next Segment ("Eschatology: The Doctrine of Future Things")

⁹ This topic will be discussed more fully in the segment on "Other Brethren Beliefs and Practices," scheduled for January 2018.

1. Read Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, chapter 54.
2. Answer one or more of the "Questions for Personal Application" at the end of each chapter, and be prepared to share and discuss your answers in class. Or compose a question of your own (which relates to the subject matter in those chapters), research the topic, and be prepared to share your answer with the class.

Answer Key

professing	Praise	a place to serve
one place	counted	training for service
functions	lists	a voice in decisions
visible	leaders	biblical
false	Discipline	democratic
Teaching	salvation	spiritual
Fellowship	baptism	congregational
Worship	association	independence
Prayer	spiritual gifts	cooperation
Sharing	other members	Elders
Testimony	evangelism	Elder
where people were	business	Overseer
loving accord	nourishing truth	Shepherd
enhanced their words	loving help	Deacons