

An Orderly Church

Week 27: July 2-8 – 1 Corinthians 11:1-15:11

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Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys (p.59)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

During his third missionary journey, Paul stopped in Ephesus for three years. While he was there, he received a disturbing report about the church in Corinth. Before he could visit in person, he sent a letter addressing several issues in the church — quarrels, questions, and ungodly behavior. Thus, *1 Corinthians* is a letter about how a local church should function. We would be wise to follow Paul's instructions and organize our church as God ordains. In this review, let's consider what the Bible says about how to order a church.

- What Is a Church?

Before considering how to order a church, let's first define it. The word *church* is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning "called out ones," those whom the Lord has called out (elected and saved) to be His followers. The church can be both universal and local (*1 Cor. 1:2*). The universal Church (capital C) refers to all believers from all places and times. The universal Church is sometimes called the invisible Church. The local church refers to one congregation in a specific location. It is sometimes referred to as the visible church because we can see it and participate in it. We commonly refer to the local church as a building, but Paul makes it clear that the local church is a body of believers, not a building (*12:12-27*).

One day, we will unite with the invisible, universal Church in heaven and worship the Lord together for eternity, believers from every tribe, tongue, and historical era. Since Paul's letter is to the Corinthian church, his instructions were meant for a local church. Therefore, let's consider how the local church should be organized and how it should operate.

- An Orderly Church

God expects an orderly church because He is a God of order. As a reflection of Him, His church should be organized, and it should operate in an orderly manner (*14:33, 40*).

1. **Membership:** While the Bible does not mention church membership specifically, there are several references that help us develop the concept (*1:2; 5:2, 12, 13; 6:4; 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 12:12-27; 14:23, 26*). One must be a believer in Christ to be a member of the body of Christ, the true Church. Therefore, a local church body is comprised of believers in Christ (*Acts 2:47*) who commit to meeting together for various reasons (#6).
2. **Doctrine:** Of all aspects of a church, its doctrine is the most important, because a church will preach, promote, and practice what it believes. Therefore, a church's doctrine must be purely biblical, only aligning itself with Scripture (Old and New Testaments) and avoiding extra-biblical influences (*11:2; 15:1-58*). Likewise, the church must protect Christ's followers from false teachers and false doctrine.

3. **Authority:** Every institution has an aspect of authority, headship, or leadership, and the church is no exception. Christ is the Head of the church (*11:3*), and all must submit to His word and will. Under Christ, the congregation is the authority. Several times, we see the church body electing leaders and making decisions (*5:2, 13; Acts 6, 15; 2 Cor. 2:6*). The leaders of the church are under-shepherds called elders or pastors, and the deacons assist the elders or pastors as needed (*1 Tim. 3; Acts 6:1-7*). As man is the head or authority of the woman, God delegated church leadership to men (*1 Cor. 11:3, 8, 9*).
4. **Ordinances:** The Lord established two ordinances for the church — baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a profession of faith, an external picture or symbol of what has taken place internally through salvation (*1 Cor. 1:10-17*). The Lord's Supper is an act of worship, remembering Jesus' death and resurrection (*11:23-34*). The body of Christ (church) should perform these ordinances, as commanded, on a regular basis (*11:17-34*).
5. **Spiritual Gifts:** God equipped every believer at salvation with at least one spiritual gift to be used for the good of all (*12:1-31*). Thus, it is important that Christians discover and utilize their spiritual gift, in love, to the best of their ability (*13:1-13*).
6. **Activities:** When a local church body gathers, what should it do? A church service should include teaching/preaching, fellowship, prayer, singing, the ordinances, giving, serving (using our spiritual gifts), testimonies, and more (*Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:26; 16:1-3*). Whatever is included in a service should be done in an orderly manner for the glorification of God and the edification of believers.
7. **Accountability:** It is in the local church that Christ-followers can practice all the "one anothers," including keeping one another accountable to living godly lives and growing in Christlikeness. One of the ways that a church keeps its members accountable is by executing church discipline when necessary (*Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:1-11*).

The Bottom Line

As God is a God of order, He expects all things in His church to be done in an orderly manner.

Questions to Consider

1. What is your experience with the church? When did you realize the importance of the church, why you attended, how it operated, and what was taught?
2. Do you believe that church membership is important? Why or why not?
3. Should church members be expected to do certain things? Explain.
4. Should churches keep track of numbers (attendance, budget, etc.)? Why or why not?
5. Should a church have bylaws or a constitution? Why or why not?
6. Share a time when you have witnessed how twisted doctrine has hurt the church?
7. Why are there so many church denominations? Should there be? Explain.
8. When and how did you discover your spiritual gifts? What are they, and how are you using them in your local church?
9. Are there any other activities that could be included in a church service? What would be some activities that should not be included in a church service?
10. How does your church deal with discipline issues?
11. Like the Corinthians, we still have problems in the church. What are some common problems? How could/should we deal with them?
12. With so much focus on believers, where do unbelievers fit in at church?