

Serving
GOD

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SERVING GOD

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Preface

Salvation is the end. Once we are saved, we are always saved. Our place in Heaven is forever secure. Knowing we cannot lose our salvation is a wonderful truth that brings comfort and rest to our hearts.

However, salvation is also the beginning. Once we are saved, we have the opportunity to serve God. Serving God is a lifelong and life-encompassing endeavor. Knowing we have an opportunity to serve the Lord while we have life brings a sense of urgency to our hearts. In these six studies you will discover the place you serve, the people you serve, the purpose of service, the power for service, the performance of service, and the preparation for service.

As you study each lesson, take time to examine God's Word, and plan to put what you learn into action. You will never regret using your life to serve God.



LESSON 1

The Place I Serve

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41, 42).

Organizations and clubs bring people together with common interests or goals. Opportunities to join organizations and clubs abound. Weight Watchers brings people together who want to find support in their efforts to be healthy and lose weight. Rotary Clubs bring people together who want to carry on humanitarian projects and support their community. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers brings people together to help prevent deaths related to drunk driving.

What organizations or clubs have you joined? What motivated you to join them?

Based on your experiences at your local church, what makes church different from the organizations or clubs you have joined?

THE CHURCH'S FOUNDER

An organization is often defined by its founder. The founder sets the organization's purpose and direction. The church is no exception. However, the church's Founder is unlike the founder of any organization on earth.

1. Read Matthew 16:18. Who founded the church?

Even though many people in the world could care less about church, its Founder gives the church all the credibility it needs. The church's Founder makes the church the most important entity on earth. The church is even more important than any country in the world.

2. What did the church's Founder say He would do to His church (Matthew 16:18)?

Most founders of organizations just get the organization going and then let other people run it. Christ does not have such a hands-off approach to the church.

3. Read Ephesians 5:23. What other role does Christ play in relation to the function of the church?

The authority in a church lies first and foremost in Christ. A church that sets man up as the authority is not a church in the Biblical sense.

4. Read Ephesians 5:25–27. What does Christ use to help the church grow (v. 25)?

A local church must turn to Christ for direction. Seeking Christ's direction involves going to His Word to see what He says about His church. In a sense, God's Word provides the blueprint for church ministry. If churches follow the blueprint God has given to them, they will see spiritual and numerical growth. Churches that do their own thing regardless of Christ's blueprint will have superficial growth at best.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Since Christ founded the church, acts as its Head, and is active in helping it to grow, it

“Sanctify” means to set apart for a special use.

Christ sanctifies the church for His use.

is imperative that people join a local church. The church is where God's work happens. But joining a church is not like joining an organization that is open to all interested parties. Joining a church is not based on self-interests or likes.

5. What reasons might people have for joining a church?

The Bible gives us specific requirements for church membership. An individual wanting to join a church must first meet the requirements.

6. Read Acts 2:41. What requirements for joining a local church are found in this verse?

Gladly receiving God's Word is a reference to salvation. All those who want to be members of a Biblical church must first trust in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16). Notice that the people in the early church did not join the church in order to get saved; rather they were saved and then joined the church (Acts 2:41). Church membership has nothing to do with securing salvation.

7. Do you trust in Christ's death on the cross as sufficient payment for your sins? If not, what is keeping you from trusting Him?

Unless you have received Christ as your Savior, the rest of this Bible study will be meaningless. Serving God is possible only after you have gone to Him for salvation. Salvation gives the believer a new life with the opportunity to devote him- or herself to serving God (Romans 12:1, 2).

Baptism by immersion is the believer's first step of obedience. The three stages of immersion baptism identify the believer with Christ. When the believer is standing in the water, he or she pictures Christ's death. When the believer is submerged in the water, he or she pictures Christ's burial. When the believer is brought up out of the water, he or she pictures Christ's resurrection. Immersion baptism is a testimony of Christ's work in the believer's life. However, baptism does not play a part in a person's salvation. Notice in Acts 2:41 and 42 that baptism comes *after* salvation but *before* church membership.

8. If you have not been baptized by immersion, what is keeping you from taking that step of obedience? What do you fear that is greater than an opportunity to obey and serve God by being baptized?

The Bible clearly teaches baptism by immersion. Immersion baptism requires the person to be totally submerged in water. Sprinkling and pouring are not Biblical methods of baptism.

As you can see from Acts 2:41, membership in a local church is a privilege. Membership is only available to those people who know Christ as their Savior and who have been baptized by immersion. If you are already a member, you should not take your membership lightly. Your local church is the most important entity to which you can belong.

9. Read Hebrews 10:25. What does this verse say about a church member's church attendance habits?

Sometimes physical ailments make church attendance impossible. It is still important to join a church and become as active in its ministry as possible

There is no substitute for the local church, and there is no ministry that is comparable to it. Watching a preacher on a television program or listening to a preacher on a radio station on Sunday mornings does not qualify as attending church. Hearing a message preached is not all that is required of a believer. God requires a believer to meet with other believers. Believers need each other. A believer cannot isolate him- or herself from other believers without being disobedient to God.

The place the church meets is inconsequential, but regular services are essential (Acts 2:46). You should be as faithful as you can in attending the services at your local church.

Sometime in the future you may have more than one local church from which to

choose. Ask God for direction in choosing a church. Join it and be faithful in your attendance to that one church. Attending more than one church will hinder your service in those churches.

MEMBERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Church members are part of a church for a purpose. Membership is not an end in itself. Being part of a church does not mean you have fulfilled all God requires of you. Joining a church brings new responsibilities to the new member.

10. Read Acts 2:42. What did the people of the church do once they were members?

Part of the believer's responsibilities is to acquaint him- or herself with the Bible. The "apostles' doctrine" is the teachings of Scripture. The local church helps believers to understand and practice God's Word. In addition, believers are responsible to study and apply God's Word on their own (2 Timothy 2:15).

"Fellowship" refers to the care and concern the believers in the church should have for one another. Believers are responsible to love one another, especially those who are fellow members in their church (Galatians 6:10). The love that church members have for one

another will stand out in a world filled with hate (John 13:34, 35).

“In breaking of bread” most likely refers to the regular meals the early believers shared together and the celebrating of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). Christ gave the Lord’s Supper to the church as an ordinance (Luke 22:17–20). The Lord’s Supper is a memorial to Christ’s death and a reminder that He is coming again. The Lord’s Supper is also a celebration of believers’ unity with Christ and with each other as a result of Christ’s death on the cross (1 John 1:3). The Lord’s Supper reflects the unity that the members of a local church are responsible to maintain (Acts 2:46, Philippians 2:2).

“Prayers” does not refer to ritualistic or scripted prayers, but rather to personal talking with God. Praying for and with believers is one of the believer’s most basic responsibilities (Ephesians 6:18).

11. Read Ephesians 6:18. How does this verse describe the prayer believers should have one for another?

A believer is also responsible to share his or her faith (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8) with the lost and to praise and worship only God (Acts 2:47).

The two ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—are practices Christ commanded the church to carry out. They are not sacraments. Sacraments are means of grace. There is no Biblical support for sacraments.

A believer's responsibilities could be summed up in one word: service. And the local church is the center for his or her service. In fact, a believer cannot be all God wants him or her to be if he or she refuses to join and become active in a local church. No matter how much a believer does in the way of service, he or she is being disobedient by not participating in a local church.

12. What responsibilities do you have in the organizations or clubs you have joined? What are the consequences of not fulfilling those responsibilities?

Your decision about how seriously to take your responsibilities as a member of an organization or club may or may not have grave consequences. However, your part in your local church is definitely important. To ignore your responsibilities would be costly to you and your church.

13. What are some possible consequences of not fulfilling your responsibilities as a servant in your local church?

God wants you to be active in your local church. He underscored the importance of your personal part in your local church by using an illustration in Ephesians 4:16.

14. Read Ephesians 4:16. To what does God liken the local church? How does this illustration help you to understand the importance of fulfilling your responsibilities as a servant in your local church?

Think about all the members in your church. What else, besides their common relationship with Christ, would draw all of them together on a consistent basis over a long period of time? Most likely no cause would be great enough. Yet, they all are “fitly joined together and compacted” to form one body whose Head is Christ Himself. Their common relationship to Christ acts as a magnet to draw them together.

Your local church is your place of service. It is vitally important that you join it and become active in it.

The local church is where you are supposed to serve. *But*, you may be wondering, *who am I supposed to serve?* Lesson 2 will cover the people you serve.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. How should knowing that Christ is the Head of your church affect your church?
2. How much spiritual success do you predict for a church member whose church attendance is sporadic?
3. What, if anything, is keeping you from faithfully attending your local church? What do you need to do about that issue?



