

Email afairweather1@gmail.com for these studies

I would ask all my Students to carefully read each Study and carefully look at all Bible references. These can be a blessing to many more if translated into your mother language and handed out.

I used the capital 'C' for the **Church Universal**. For the **local church** we will use a small 'c'. This will help us to distinguish between the two. **The context** tells us if it is a local gathering of the church or if it is the Universal Church, often called *'the church of God'*. The word '**Universal**' is not in your Bible, but conveys the truth that it refers to **all believers around the world**, not to just the local church.

Christians should gather near where they live to form a local church and meet in the Lord's name. All who believed from the day of Pentecost (when the Church Universal began in Acts Chapter 2) until today, form the body of Christ, and this we call the Universal Church, or the Church of God. Soon we will all be together forever in heaven in the presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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The Local Church – Our reading is from Matthew 18:1-20.

The **local church** is first mentioned by Jesus in **Matthew 18:17**. The book of Acts teaches that when people were saved they were **gathered together** in local churches (Acts 2:42). All believers should seek to meet with a Bible believing church. Jesus taught His disciples to gather **in His name** (Matthew 18:20).

The local church is not **the building** that believers meet in. All **believers** are members of the Church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Matthew Chapter 18 is the teaching Jesus gave preparing the disciples for the time when local churches would be formed. Remember, the Church was still future!

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Note these points from this chapter about the local church:

1. (Matthew 18:1-4). The members should all be the **converted**, not mixed with **unsaved people** as in many churches. We must come to Christ as little children, humbling ourselves, confessing our sins and trusting in Jesus as our Saviour from all sin. Coming as children, God begins a new work in us, and promises to complete it (Phil. 1:6). We have much to learn, and much of our worldly ways to unlearn.

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2. (Matthew 18:5, 15-18). The church should receive into it's fellowship **all** those whom the Lord has received. But we must **reject some** who **cause divisions** (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11) and put away **those** who live **immoral lives** and will not repent (1 Cor. 5:1-5). It is the local church which must do this.

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3. (Matthew 18:6-14). We should not stumble or despise or lead into sin those who are His children. We must live before believers and before the world pleasing to the Lord, watching our **words and our ways**, not leading astray any who are observing our lives. For we read *"that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,"* (Phil 1:10). In this we also have the example of Jesus: *"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"* (John 8:29).

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4. (Matthew 18:15-18) The local church should be a place where sin is **not tolerated** and where Bible teaching is followed to deal with it; for the local church has authority to **discipline** and should so do. If our brother sins, the first step is to go to our brother **alone** and try to win him from his sin. We should not spread abroad his sin. Next we take two more to confront him in a loving, caring way. In all this we must remember we also are prone to sin and must seek to **restore** the brother (Galations 6:1). The last thing is to take it to the church for all the members to decide. If we do this in a godly caring way, the Lord will bind (support) our decisions in heaven and on earth.

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5. (Matthew 18:19) **The local church** should be a place on earth where all learn to 'agree', and this word to 'sound together' in 'harmony' like many musical instruments, for when all 'agree' and walk in love and unity, then prayer will be answered.

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6. (Matthew 18:20) **This is the simplest form of a local church:** Jesus said: "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*". So we do not gather to any human leader, a denominational structure or any cult. We gather to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all.

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The Local church is unique

Each local church should be **autonomous**, and answerable to God alone. In Revelation chapter 1 the Lord Jesus walked among the golden lampstands which represented the seven churches He addressed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. **Notice:**

Jesus, and later Paul, did not place one church over another; each was responsible to our Lord alone.

Each local church should aim to be self governing, self supporting and self propagating.

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Reception Policy

While churches should receive the Lord's people in a loving and caring way (Rom. 14:1; 15:7), they must not be open to receive any false teaching or problems some people may bring.

It is the responsibility of the elders (and gifted Bible teachers) to teach in the local church, and the elders should meet with newcomers who have a differing belief to show them the true teaching (Titus 1:5-9).

The Bible teaches:

- a. To take note of and avoid those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the true doctrine (Rom.16:17-18).
- b. To put away from your fellowship those who are immoral, drunkards etc. (1 Cor. 5:9-13).
- c. To stand fast against legalistic observances. We are under grace, not the law of Moses (Gal. 5:1-5).
- d. To reject after the second admonition a divisive man ('heretic' KJV); that is, anyone who is self-opinionated and will not be taught or corrected. He is a trouble maker causing divisions (Titus 3:10-11).

So the Word of God teaches that the local church has the responsibility to maintain good order and uphold the doctrines that the apostles taught, and to refuse fellowship to those who promote error or live immoral lives.

We are called into liberty – the liberty to do what is **biblically right**. However, this is not the **license** to do what **we please** contrary to God's Word. A driver's licence gives us the liberty to drive a car, but not the license to drive on the wrong side of the road and endanger the lives of other people! It is not 'Christian liberty' to be disobedient to the Word of God.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thess. 2:15).

In Study 4 we will look at the functioning of local churches.