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I would ask all my Students to carefully read each Study and carefully look at all references. In this study we look at:

The Functioning of Local Churches

The book of Acts gives **examples** of what these first Christians and churches did – **their actions!**

The Epistles of Paul, James, Peter and John give individual believers and local churches **teaching or doctrine on what we should believe and how to live holy lives.**

After the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Church was formed (Acts 2:1-4) there were about 120 disciples in Jerusalem! Peter preached and 3000 were added (Acts 2:40-41).

These first believers “...continued steadfastly in the apostles’ **doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers**” (Acts 2:42). Note these four things the first Christians in Jerusalem “continued steadfastly” in **doing. These are the meetings of local churches:**

1. For Teaching the apostles’ ‘doctrine’ (or teaching). The apostles simply taught what the Lord had taught them (Acts 1:1-3) and what He later revealed to them (Ephesians 3:1-12). This is now found written in the New Testament and it is there for us to teach and obey as well (Acts 16:4). The Bible is complete, for that which is ‘perfect’ has been written (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Jude 3) and nothing is to be added or taken away from its pages (Rev. 22:18-19). The Word of God is the only ‘perfect’ thing in this world.

2. For ‘Fellowship’. This word means **‘things shared in common’**. We **enjoy together** the things of the Lord that we share in common through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. We also encourage and support one another along the journey of life. We have been called into this fellowship and are maintained in it by God Himself (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:14-16; 1 John Chapter 1). We need a loving and caring ‘fellowship’ together.

3. For ‘The breaking of bread’. On the night when our Lord was betrayed He told the disciples to do this in remembrance of Himself by partaking of **the bread and cup** (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-34). The **bread** reminds us that His body was broken for us on the cross. The **cup** that He shed His blood so our sins could be forgiven (Ephesians 1:7).

This was done on the “*first day of the week*”, the resurrection day (our Sunday) when the local churches met (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). God began His creation on the first day and ‘finished’ it on the sixth day. When Jesus died He said *‘It is finished’* (John 19:30). He was in the tomb under the curse of a broken Law on the Sabbath (Saturday), but rose on the first day (Sunday). **Christians are His new creation** (2 Cor. 5:17) and so should meet on the first day of the week to partake together the Lord’s supper.

4. ‘And prayers’. The church began at a prayer meeting (Acts 1:14; 2:1) and continued in prayer (Acts 4:23-31; 12:12). A suitable time should be set aside for the church to meet for this when the members can be prayed for along with many other needs as well. From **1 Timothy 2:23-31** we learn that this is an apostolic “*first of all*” for local churches and therefore is very important.

The various aspects of prayer are:

Supplications – why we pray – occasioned by a need felt.

Prayers – to whom we pray – to God in reverence and faith.

Intercessions – praying for others – we have freedom of access, confidence, holy intimacy of approach to our heavenly Father and can make all our requests known to Him.

Thanksgivings – reasons to pray - results from prayers answered and needs met.

For all men – for whom to pray - without partiality.

These are the meetings of a local church and should be times to enjoy fellowship together.

Meetings of the church and roles of men and women

When the Lord instituted the Supper, He asked His disciples to "*do this in remembrance of Me*". He used **the bread and wine** of the people among whom He lived. The bread used by churches will therefore vary from country to country.

The wine: it was most probably fermented grape juice diluted with water as many believe the custom of the Jews was at the time. Many poor and isolated tribal peoples have **no access to this** and so a suitable alternative may have to be used. Many believers will not drink alcoholic wine, and so I taught in Kenya to make black tea with sugar to sweeten, cool and use this for wine.

The bread: it is not possible to make bread like Jesus used, so in Kenya I taught the believers to make the bread from maize flour that was their staple bread. **God looks on the heart as we remember Him.** The bread and wine used by our Lord is not available today. There is no magic in these emblems; it is "*Only bread and only wine, yet to faith the solemn sign, of the heavenly and divine.*"

Worship: Before breaking bread, take time to **worship** the Lord in prayer, by singing suitable hymns and reading and meditating on Bible passages that tell us about Christ.

Any of **the brothers** may join in this worship, and not just the elders. The **entire congregation** is involved in the worship of God in singing and saying 'Amen!' Men in the church are free to lead through praise, thanksgiving, prayer, meditation or an exhortation from God's Word befitting to the occasion as led by the Holy Spirit. Being led by the Spirit does not preclude individual preparation. Participation should be orderly, timely, reverent, honouring to God and edifying to the body.

The brothers should lead in the above meetings of the church; the sisters should not take a public part. Principles relating to this are found in 1 Corinthians chapters 11 to 14 and in 1 Timothy chapter 2.

The Bible teaches that in meetings of the church men should have **heads uncovered and women should be covered**. The reasons are given in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 are as follows:

- (a) The headship of Christ and God over women and men.
- (b) The original order of the creation of men and women.
- (c) Because the angels are spectators to local church order.
- (d) Because it was the '*custom*', or the '*customary usage*' or '*practice*' of all the churches in Paul's day, as taught in all churches. **Note especially Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:17.**

Corinth was a multi-cultural seaport, a melting pot of many cultures. What Paul taught here had nothing to do with **Corinthian culture**, but everything to do with **God's given order**. It was even contrary to Jewish practice, where men cover and women uncover in many synagogue services.

Roles of men and women: In the home and local church men and women have differing 'roles'. However, women are not inferior to men, for all are "*one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28). Women also have special gifts and God given ministries, especially teaching other women and children and in their witness outside church meetings (Titus 2:3-5; Phil. 4:3). Deborah prophesied but not in the Tabernacle (Judges 4:4-5) and Philip's four daughters did likewise, but not in church meetings (Acts 21:8-9). The Bible does not contradict itself.

While the husband is the head of the wife and she is to submit to him, he should love her as Christ also loved the church (Eph. 5:22-33). He should seek to build her up in the faith and see that she reaches her full potential as a wife and mother, encouraging her to use and to develop her special gifts because she is also part of His body, the Church. The Christian home should be a place of Christian love and harmony, an example to those around who do not believe.

The windows of the church can be open to the winds of worldly wisdom and the cultural changes of the world, and elders should resist changes that contradict biblical teaching, simply coming from a worldly point of view. Today homosexuality and abortion have been legalised in many lands. The Bible teaches that God will judge those who practice such things.