

Introduction

In 2014, my wife and I spent three days in Italy. While we were there, we took a guided tour of Old Rome, and there were about fifty tourists in our group. Our tour guide pointed out the different ruins and buildings, and told us what they were. Before we reached the Coliseum, he pointed out an ancient church, known as the Basilica di Santa Francesca Romana. According to tradition, the Apostle Peter fell on his knees, praying and asking God to demonstrate His pre-eminence over the pagan gods that were being worshiped. A church was built on that spot in the tenth century and was named Santa Maria Nova. As our tour guide pointed out this church and its history, I worked my way up to him and explained that this was a church facility, not a church. I told him that the church is people; it is those who have been called out of darkness into the light. I told him that a church had built this facility to meet in; but the church was the people, not the building. So, our tour guide got on his megaphone and told our group that this was a church facility, known as the Basilica di Santa Francesca Romana. Then, he told them that the church is people, not a building. He had heard correctly what I had just taught him.

Our text today is 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, and we are going to look at the definition of church so that people will have a good understanding of church. Second, we are going to look at the Universal church and the Local church. There is also a lot of misunderstanding of this, and I want to clear up some of those misunderstandings. Third, we are going to look at the saints that make up the church. We will be starting in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

What Is the Church (A Biblical View) (1 Cor 1:1-3)

1. Defining Church
2. Universal church and the Local church
3. Saints that Make Up the Church

(1 Cor 1:1-3) "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, {2} To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."

1. Defining the Church

The IRS does not specifically define church, but they have a list of fourteen criteria that they use to determine if an organization qualifies as a church. These include: 1) a recognized creed and form of worship, 2) established places of worship, 3) a regular congregation and regular religious services, 4) an organization of ordained ministers, 5) a distinct legal existence and religious history. The purpose of these IRS guidelines is to determine if the religious organization qualifies for the highly coveted tax-exempt status.

The secular definitions of church are somewhat different from the Biblical definition of church. The Merriam-Webster defines church as: 1) a building for public religious services and especially Christian worship; 2) a body or organization of religious believers; 3) a public divine worship; 4) the clerical profession.

According to Merriam-Webster, our tour guide in Rome was correct in pointing out the building of the Basilica di Santa Francesca Romana and calling it a church. While some say they are going to church, meaning they are attending a church service, they are correct by Webster's definition of church. Our purpose today is to establish a Biblical understanding of church.

Paul addressed the letter to the church of God in Corinth. Scholars say that the church in Corinth was probably around one hundred people. The Greek word that is translated as church is *ekklesia* (Strong's G1577), which means called out. It is used 116 times in the New Testament. This was the church of God, which was not a denomination; it was simply a statement showing that the church belongs to God. Those who are called out, those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, or saints, those who call on the name of Jesus Christ and have made Him Lord, are the church.

(1 Cor 1:2) "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:"

The Apostle Peter wrote that we have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light that we might proclaim the excellencies of God. The church is not an organization, and it is not a facility where people gather; it is the people who have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. We have been called out to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

(1 Pe 2:9) "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"

Paul did not write this letter to a building; he wrote it to the church in Corinth, which was the saints who had been sanctified by Jesus, and were part of this local community of believers. A building was not called out of darkness, and a building does not proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness. The saints who have been called out of darkness worship God and proclaim His excellencies.

When people ask me what I do, I tell them that I am a pastor. They usually ask me where is my church. They want to know the location of our building. I tell them that we meet in my home. When I tell people that, most of them are no longer interested in learning any more about our church. They don't ask what we believe, or what we do; they want to know where our church is. They think the building is the church. A building is a church facility, and a house is a great facility for a church plant or small church.

For many years there was a sign by a private driveway just before the street that takes us to our subdivision, The sign stated, "Church is behind house." They should say that the church meets behind the house. The meeting place or facility is not the church; those that are called out, are the church.

Paul did not write this letter to a church service; he wrote it to the group of saints in Corinth who were joined together as a local body of believers. The Church is not a service, so we do not attend church; we gather together as the church. The church gathers together to have a worship service. We attend and participate in a church service, i.e., a worship service, but we do not attend church, because we are the church.

Paul did not write this letter to a recognized non-profit tax-exempt organization. When Paul planted the church in Corinth, he did not file a seventy-five-page application, and pay a thousand dollars to gain tax-exempt status. Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, and laid the foundation of Christ. He began to make disciples and raised up elders. Paul raised up a community of believers who came together to pray, fellowship, hear the Word and to share a meal together.

2. The Universal church and the Local church

There is a Universal church and a Local church. When we think of the Universal church, it is comprised of all the believers around the world. It does not matter what location a believer is in, he is part of the Universal church. It does not matter what denomination he is part of; he is still part of the Universal church. The body of Christ is made up of all the believers in the world.

In Paul's opening to the Corinthians, he wrote, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours." The saints in Corinth are part of that local church, and they, along with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, are part of the Universal church. We see both the Universal and the Local church mentioned.

(1 Co 1:2) "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:"

A. The Universal Church

The universal church is the body of Christ, consisting of all believers who have been united to Jesus Christ and to one another, across all places and generations. Wayne Grudem is a renowned theologian who has published 123 books. His most well-known book is called *Systematic Theology*. In that book, he defined the church as "the community of all true believers for all time."¹ This definition fits the definition for the Universal church, but not the local church.

In Matthew 16:15-18, Jesus had asked His disciples who they thought He is. Peter said to Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus responded to him, saying, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." When Jesus said that He was going to build His church, it was not limited to one particular city, it was the Universal church. Jesus was going to build His church, and there would be believers from all over the world and in every generation.

(Mt 16:15–18) "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" {16} Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." {17} And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. {18} I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Some churches have interpreted this incorrectly. The Catholics use this verse to say that Peter was the first pope and that the church going to be built on Peter, because he is the rock. Some other groups say that this refers to prophecy, and that God was going to build His church on prophecy.

When we lived in Orlando, a Spanish pastor moved into the house next to us, and he pastored a Hispanic Church of Prophecy. His interpretation of that verse was that Jesus was going to build His church on the rock of revelation or prophecy. He completely missed the point. Peter had a

¹ *Systematic Theology*, 1st ed. (Zondervan, 1994), Chapter 44, p. 853

revelation from God of who Jesus is, but that revelation is not the rock; Jesus is the rock. While prophecy is important, it is not the rock that the church is built on. Jesus is the rock. Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. Jesus is the rock that many stumble over. The church is built on Christ alone.

Paul made it very clear in 1 Corinthians 3:10-11. He said that he was a wise master builder and laid a foundation. Another person was building on that foundation, and he was referring to Apollos, who came and led the church after Paul had planted it. He said that each man must be careful how he builds on it, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the foundation that we build on. He is the rock that the church is built on. It is not built on prophecy, Peter, or anything else, but on Christ alone.

(1 Cor 3:10-11) “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. {11} For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Peter also makes it very clear that Jesus is choice stone or cornerstone that the church is built on. The church is made up of living stones, who are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, and it is being built on that precious cornerstone, Jesus. Believers are the living stones that are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

(1 Pe 2:4–8) “And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, {5} you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. {6} For *this* is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” {7} This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner *stone*,” {8} and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.”

Jesus is the foundation that the church is built on, and we are to be very careful about laying that foundation and building on it. Paul said that no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Even though Paul is using building terms, he is speaking about Christ being the cornerstone or foundation. The church is built on the foundation of Christ. We are the church and our lives are built upon the foundation of Christ.

(1 Cor 3:11) “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

When Paul taught on marriage in Ephesians 5, he instructed men to love their wives as Christ loved the church. At the end, he summarized, saying, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” Christ does not have many brides; He has one bride, the church, the Universal church, which is made up with believers from every place and for all time

(Eph 5:32) “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

Those who believe only in the universal church do not believe in the local church. They take all the references in the Scriptures and plug it into the universal church concept. They do not believe in local church membership, because they are already part of the body of Christ. They are free to go here and there whenever they want.

There are many problems with the view that the church is only the Universal church. First, it disregards the majority of Scriptures, where church is clearly referring to a Local church. Another problem with this view is that most of these people are not functioning members of any body. They have no responsibility; they have no accountability, and no one is having to give account to God for them. They have not submitted themselves to the leadership of any church; it is just them and God. I do not believe that this is good doctrine or practice. Usually, good life practices flow out of good doctrine.

B. The Local Church

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses his letter to the church of God which is at Corinth. He is not talking about the believers in the church in Jerusalem or in Rome. He is speaking to the believers who are in the church in Corinth. The specific problems that Paul addresses with this church and the warnings he gives them were not for all the churches; they were addressed to that specific local church in Corinth. The principles that Paul wrote apply to other churches, but this letter to the church in Corinth clearly speaks of the local church.

(1 Cor 1:2) "to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:"

A local church is in one location, and it is a spiritual family of believers. The members of the church in Corinth were in Corinth. They worshiped in their church in Corinth. They presented their tithes and offerings in their local church. They may have given towards missions to help establish other local churches in other locations, but their primary support was for their local church.

The saints, believers, members, known as the church in Corinth, took care of the widows in their church. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4 that the church was to take care of the widows, who meet certain qualification. The church in Corinth did not support the widows in Ephesus; they had a responsibility to care for those in their own church family.

(1 Ti 5:3) "Honor widows who are widows indeed;"

This body of believers in Corinth also took care of the pastors in their church. Paul taught that the church should support their pastors, giving double honor to those who work hard. The church in Corinth was not responsible for the elders in Thessalonica; they took care of their pastors who worked hard to watch over them and to feed them.

(1 Ti 5:17–18) "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. {18} For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

A local church has its own church government. In Acts 14, Barnabas and Paul had been preaching the gospel and making disciples in every city. Later, they returned to each city and

appointed elders in every church. The elders in Lystra shepherded, fed, watched over, and managed the church in Lystra. The elders in Iconium preached the word every week and cared for their flock. Each church has its own elders, and their jurisdiction is only in their own church.

(Ac 14:21–23) “After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, {22} strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” {23} When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, who was also an apostle, working under Paul’s leadership, he instructed him to appoint elders in every city as he had directed him, which meant that they needed to satisfy the requirements for being an elder, which Paul gave to him in the next few verses of that letter. Notice that he was to appoint elders in every city; there was a plurality of elders in every church. God’s design for the church was not for one person to lead His church, but for there to be a team of elders, which is called a presbytery.

(Tt 1:5) “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,”

In Hebrews 13:17, God instructs believers to obey their leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. The pastors in each church must keep watch over their members, and they are going to have to give account to God for each one of them. The elders in Corinth will not have to give account for the flock in Ephesus, but they will have to give account for those that God places under their care in Corinth.

(Heb 13:17) “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

We also see in that verse that members of a church must obey their leaders and submit to them. The members of the church in Corinth do not have to obey and submit to the pastors in Ephesus; but they are required to obey and submit to their own leaders. One local church may set aside a few days to pray and fast. At another local church, they are celebrating their tenth anniversary, and are holding a banquet. The members in one church are obeying its leaders by praying and fasting; and the members of the other church are obeying its leaders by celebrating with a feast.

There are many pastors that say that they are not a member of the church; they are a pastor of the church. When I was living in Acworth, Georgia, I became friends with a pastor of a church that had been established before the Civil War. They had about a hundred members, but the pastor did not include himself among them. I told him that in the book of Philippians, Paul addressed the letter to the church in Philippi, including the elders and the deacons. I told him that the elders, or pastors, are included in that church in Philippi. The pastors need the fellowship, encouragement, and ministry that all the other saints provide. They just have a different role than most of the members, to manage, shepherd, watch over, and feed the flock.

(Php 1:1) “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:”

In Matthew 18, Jesus used the word, church, when He was instructing us about church discipline. He taught, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” When church discipline is used, we do not broadcast a person’s sin to every believer in the world, the Universal church; we bring it before the believers in a Local church. This is clearly speaking about the Local church.

(Mt 18:15–17) “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. {16} But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. {17} If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

In Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, he named two women by name that were not getting along, Euodia and Syntyche. He exhorted the church to help these two women get along. It is obvious that this letter was not written to the universal church, but to a local church. Paul asked the elders, deacons, and all the saints in Philippi to help these two ladies in that congregation live in harmony. This was obviously not addressed to the universal church, but to that particular local church. The principles can be used by everyone, but the letter was to that local church.

(Phil 4:2–3) “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. {3} Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

There are about thirty-three “one-another” commands in the New Testament. In Romans 12:10, we are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. In Ephesians 5:21, we are taught to be subject to one another. In Galatians 6:2, we are taught to bear one another’s burdens. We cannot be devoted to one another with people who live 10,000 miles from you on the other side of the world. You cannot apply all these commands with people you do not know. The local church is a community of believers who are committed to one another. They are committed to love, serve, care, exhort, comfort, greet, admonish, accept, and to carry out all of these “one-another” commands.

You cannot carry out these one-another commands by watching a sermon online or on TV. These one-another commands show the necessity of gathering together to minister to one another. Peter wrote that as each one has received a special gift, they were to employ it in serving one another. We have to be fellowshiping with one another if we are going to minister to one another. Other people are going to miss out on your ministry to the body if you do not gather together with the rest of the church. At the same time, you are going to miss out on the ministry that others give when you do not assemble with the rest of the body. We must be committed to gathering together with the rest of the body.

(1 Pe 4:10) “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

When we look at these various components, we see that a local church is made up of believers who have committed themselves to their leaders and to one another. They gather together to

worship the Lord together, share meals together, to receive instruction and equipping from their leaders, to serve and minister to one another.

Here is a concise definition of the local church. “A local church is a spiritual family of believers who commit themselves to Christ, to one another, and to biblical shepherds for worship, growth, care, service, and accountability.”

When we read and study the Scriptures, we must make a determination of whether church is referring to a local congregation, or the Universal church. While many of the times that church is used in Scripture it does refer to the local church, there are other times where it clearly speaks of the Universal church. We have to rightly divide the Word of God and when it speaks of the Local church, we must apply the Scripture to the Local church. When the church is referring to the Universal church, the whole body of Christ, we must apply it to the Universal church.

C. Head of the Church

In Paul’s greeting to the Corinthians, he said to the church of God in Corinth. The church belongs to God. That Local church in Corinth belongs to God. In fact, every Local church in the world belongs to God. God is the head of the whole body of Christ. God is the head of each Local church, and of the Universal church.

(1 Co 1:2) “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:”

The church belongs to God, and Jesus is the head of the church, which is His body. In Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22, God makes it very clear that Jesus is the head of the body, the church.

(Col 1:18) “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

(Eph 1:22) “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,”

From a leadership perspective, pastors need to keep in mind that the church belongs to God. Pastors are stewards of the flock that God entrusts to them. They are shepherds, but He is the Chief Shepherd. In 1 Peter 5, pastors are exhorted not to lord over those allotted to their charge. God allots people to pastors so that they can take care of them for Him. Peter goes on to say that when the Chief Shepherd appears, the pastors will be rewarded. God is the Chief Shepherd, and the elders are the under-shepherds.

(1 Pet 5:3–4) “nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. {4} And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul said that he and Apollos were stewards. A steward is one who manages something that belongs to someone else. Pastors lead the church of God. When Paul gave the qualifications of a pastor, he said that they are not to be self-willed. The job of a pastor is to seek the will of the head of the church, the Chief Shepherd, because it is His church.

(1 Cor 4:1) “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

(Tit 1:7) “For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,”

From a congregational standpoint, the church belongs to God. There are some people who try to control the church. Like pastors, they need to recognize that the church belongs to God, not them. It is His will that we want to see done on earth.

3. Saints

Paul has addressed this letter to the church of God, which is at Corinth, and then he gives a description of these people that are called the church. The church is made up of people who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. Second, these people who have been sanctified are saints by calling. Third, these saints are in every place and are calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Cor 1:2) "to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:"

The Greek word that is translated as saint is *hagios* (Strong’s G40), which literally means a holy one. Strong’s said that a saint is sacred, pure, morally blameless or religious, consecrated, holy or a saint. The root word is *hagnos*, which means clean, innocent, modest, perfect, chaste, or pure. Contrary to what some churches have taught, saints are not people who have done exemplary things and have attained a certain status. Every person who has placed their faith in Christ Jesus are saints. We have been made holy by the blood of Christ. We have not been made holy by our actions, and we will not be made holy by our future actions. We are made holy by the blood of Christ.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that “He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus paid the price for our sins and has declared us to be righteous or holy. We call this positional sanctification. We become righteous by placing our faith in Christ. The event of positional sanctification is instantaneous at salvation. Jesus paid the price for our sins, and we are now declared innocent and holy. He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.

(2 Co 5:21) “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Paul called the believers in the church of Corinth, saints. The church in Corinth was dealing with division and strife, sexual immorality, lawsuits, and many other sins, yet Paul addressed them as saints, or holy ones. Their behavior was certainly not holy, but Paul addressed them as holy ones. The members of church are saints, those who have been made holy or sanctified by Christ.

(1 Cor 1:2) “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:”

In chapter three, Paul called these Corinthian believers carnal and immature, but they were still saints. They were saints because they had been sanctified by Jesus when they received Christ.

(1 Co 3:1–3) “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. {2} I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, {3} for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

Paul did not address this letter to the sinners in the church at Corinth, but to the saints in Corinth. We were sinners before we came to Christ. Now that Christ has paid the penalty for sins, He has declared us to be righteous, or justified, we now have a new identity, saints. However, we still sin, so we are saints that occasionally sin, and when we do, we repent and confess our sins to the Lord. In the New Testament, there are sixty-one times that believers are referred to as saints.

In Romans 10:9-10, God tells us that if we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. Our righteousness is a result of believing and our salvation is a result of confessing Jesus as Lord. Going to church does not make you sanctified. Giving money does not sanctify you. We are made righteous by believing that Jesus was raised from the dead and confessing Jesus as the Lord of our lives. The church is comprised of people that have placed their faith in Christ and have confessed Him to be their Lord.

(Ro 10:9-10) “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; {10} for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

Sanctification is also a process. Even though we have been declared righteous, our lifestyle, attitudes, words, and habits are not always holy, and may not reflect Christ. When we come to Christ, we come with sinful habits, attitudes, and lifestyles. God tells us that we are not to be conformed to these world patterns, but are called to renew our minds and be transformed. That process of becoming more Christ-like in our attitude, thoughts, words, and actions is progressive sanctification. God calls us saints, and then tells us to act like saints.

(Ro 12:1–2) “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. {2} And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

I have often heard believers referred to sinners. You are not sinners. Sinners refers to people who have not received Christ’s payment for their sins. In the Word of God, we are referred to as saints fifty-nine times. This means that we are holy. We are set apart. We have a new nature. We are to live holy lives. In the New Testament, believers are referred to as saints, not sinners. Only in Paul’s letter to Timothy does he describe himself as a sinner, and his point in writing that was that his life before Christ he was the foremost sinner of all. God’s grace can save anyone, even a sinner like Paul.

(1 Ti 1:12–16) “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, {13} even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted

ignorantly in unbelief; {14} and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. {15} It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. {16} Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

When Karen and I moved to Albuquerque, we tried a number of different churches. One of them was very reformed. They said that I could not even teach Sunday school if I was not a five-point Calvinist. They shared communion one Sunday per month. To receive communion, you had to go up front and receive the elements from the pastor. Before receiving the elements, you had to confess that you were a sinner. I told the pastor that I was not a sinner. I said that I was a saint. I said that I had been a sinner, but had received Christ, and was now considered a saint. I am a saint that sins, but not a sinner by nature anymore. We are holy ones, not sinners.

It is important for us to see ourselves as saints, not sinners. If you wanted to see your son or daughter excel in baseball, you would not remind him all the time that he is a terrible baseball player. You would encourage your child, and help him improve. You would instill a vision of becoming a great baseball player. Similarly, we should not remind people that they are sinners and how bad they are. We should encourage them to walk uprightly because they are righteous.

In 1 Pe 1:14–16, Paul wrote, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” He encourages us to be holy, because God is holy, and we are His children.

(1 Pe 1:14–16) “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, {15} but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; {16} because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Here is a list of some of the more frequent terms used in the New Testament to describe the church or believers. Notice that saints are the fourth most-used term. We are most often referred to as disciples. We are going to look at what a disciple is next week. Second, we are referred to as brethren. The church is a family of believers, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Our family loves to get togeth with one another, and that should be the attitude within the church; we should look forward to assembling together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The third and fourth most used terms are church and saints, which we have been discussing today.

- | |
|----------------------|
| 1. Disciples (239 X) |
| 2. Brethren (190 X) |
| 3. Church (77 X) |
| 4. Saints (59 X) |
| 5. Elect (23 X) |
| 6. Believers (12 X) |

When a saint is not living a holy life, he has good reason to examine or test his faith to see if he is a true believer. The apostle John gave a number of different ways for a person to know if they are a believer. In 1 John 3:7-8, he wrote for us to make sure that no one deceives us, “the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning...”

(1 Jn 3:7–8) “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; {8} the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

Believers are saints, and if they are not practicing righteousness, they have every reason to question whether they have genuinely believed and confessed Jesus as their Lord. When a person is born again, the Holy Spirit comes in them, and they are a new creation. The old things pass away and new things come. There is a change. Believers have their hope fixed on Jesus, and because of this, they purify themselves, because Jesus is holy. Notice what John wrote in 1 Jn 3:3, “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” The Greek word for pure is *hagnos*, and it comes from the same root word as *hagios*, the word for saints. Saints are to purify themselves or make themselves holy, because God is holy.

(1 Jn 3:3) “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

How do saints make themselves holy or purify themselves? How does this process of progressive sanctification work? How are our lives transformed, and how do we become more holy? First, in Christ, we are as holy as we can be. But in our lifestyle, we can become more holy. In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth.” We are sanctified, transformed, and made holy through truth, the Word of God being applied in our life.

(Jn 17:17) “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul urges us to present our lives to God as living and holy sacrifices. Then, he exhorted us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. How are our minds renewed? Our minds are renewed with the word of God: truth. We have to fill our minds with truth. That process of becoming more Christ-like in our attitude, thoughts, words, and actions is progressive sanctification. This is the sanctification that Jesus is asking the Father to do in the disciples.

(Rom 12:1–2) “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. {2} And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

In John 8:31-32, Jesus said that if we are truly disciples of His then we will continue, abide, or dwell in His Word, and that we would know the truth, and the truth would make us free. We have to renew our minds with the Word of God. It is not enough to have knowledge of truth; we must apply the truth in our lives. We have to be doers of the word, not merely hearers of the word. We have to prove the will of God in our lives by applying truth in our lives. The result is that we will be set free from sin, and will be made holy. It is a process of becoming holy.

(Jn 8:31–32) “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; {32} and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

What is God’s will in our lives? In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul wrote that God’s will for our lives is for us to be sanctified. When we renew our minds with God’s word, we prove the will of God in our lives, our sanctification.

(1 Th 4:3) “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;”

In Hebrews 12 we are exhorted to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. You and I have a part to play in this sanctification, and at the same time, Jesus is perfecting and maturing our faith. He is working on each one of us. We are a work in progress.

(Heb 12:2) “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In Philippians 1:6, Paul wrote that he was confident that He who began a good work in each of us will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Jesus began a good work in us, and He is continuing to perfect us. As we fix our eyes on Him, and follow Him, He will lead us down the paths of righteousness. God will do His part; the critical thing is for you and I to cooperate with Him in the process of becoming more like Him.

(Php 1:6) “*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Conclusion and Applications

We have taken a deeper look at 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, where Paul addresses the church of God in Corinth. He not only addresses the Local church in Corinth, but he also mentions the saints in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, known as the Universal church. While every saint who has placed their faith in Christ is a member of the Universal church, the majority of Scriptures about church pertain to the Local church. For us to walk out our Christian faith, we must be joined to a local church. We cannot carry out all of the “one-another” commands if we are not actively involved in a church family.

We saw that the definition of the local church is “a covenant family of believers united to Christ and committed to one another for worship, discipleship, mutual care, accountability, ministry, and the advance of the gospel under biblical shepherds.”

Our first application comes from that understanding. Have you joined a Local church? Are you committed to that local body? Are you committed to serve with your special gift? Are you committed to encouraging and ministering to others in that church? Are you submitted to the leadership of that church? Are you supporting the work in that local church with your tithes and offerings? It is God’s will for you to be part of a church family. If you are not plugged into a local church, make a decision today to join a local body of believers.

We also looked at the Universal church. It is the entire body of Christ, consisting of all believers who have been united to Jesus Christ and to one another, across all places and generations. We are connected to believers all over the world by our faith in Christ. The saints in Iran, Philippines, Australia, Kenya, Malawi, China, or South Korea are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our second application is to show concern for all believers in all places, the universal church. Keep your brothers and sisters in Christ in all places in your prayers. We need to be concerned about them. We need to support the gospel efforts in the rest of the world. We need to pray for our brothers and sisters around the world, who may be experiencing hardship. We are all part of the universal church of God and connected to one another.

We also looked at the saints in Corinth. We saw that the word saint means holy ones. The believers in Corinth were anything but holy in their lifestyles, but Paul called them holy. When a person believes and puts their trust in Christ, they are forgiven, cleansed, and justified. They are declared righteous, and are saints. That is positional sanctification. Then, we saw that God's will for us is sanctification. We are to live holy lives, just as Jesus lived a holy life. The process of being holy in our lifestyle is called Progressive Sanctification. God is doing this work in our lives, and we also have a part in the process.

Our third application is to be saints, or holy ones. God's will for us is sanctification, that is to live a holy life. His will for us is to abstain from sexual immorality, and to possess our vessels in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion. If you are involved in an immoral relationship, God wants you to repent, confessing and forsaking your sin. He promises to forgive and to cleanse you. I encourage you today to repent, and make a commitment to living a holy life.

(1 Th 4:3–4) “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; {4} that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,”

Our fourth application is to commit yourself to renewing your mind so that your life can be transformed. Make a commitment today to read, meditate, study, and apply God's word in your life. Fill your mind with the Word of God. Let it richly dwell within you.

Closing Prayer

Father God, help us to be true saints, holy ones, who purify ourselves and walk righteously. Help us to become more like you. Father, there are so many people who claim to be Christians but are not part of a local church. I ask You to convict them of their need to be joined together with other believers and to be committed members. They need others, and others need their ministry in their lives. Lord, I pray for there to be a strong resurgence of believers returning to their local churches. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Why does it matter what definition we use for church?
- What is the significance in us being the church rather than church being an organization or building?
- Since Paul mentioned both the local church and the universal church in his address, how would this influence the Corinthian believers' views of other churches and believers?
- How were the early churches connected to one another?
- Are the churches today as connected? Do they work together in a similar way that they did in Paul's time?
- Are the one-another commands being practiced today? If not, what are the possible reasons?
- What is the best way for believers today to carry out all the one-another commands?
- What is the significance of being called a saint? How should that affect our behavior?
- Saints are those who have been called out. According to Peter, what have they been called out from? What have they been called out to do?

What Is The Church (An Understanding of Church)

Introduction (1 Cor 1:1–3)

1. Defining the Church (1 Cor 1:2, 1 Pe 2:9)

2. The Universal church and the Local church (1 Co 1:2)

A. The Universal church (Mt 16:15–18, 1 Cor 3:10–11, 1 Pe 2:4–8, 1 Cor 3:11, Eph 5:32)

The universal church is the body of Christ, consisting of all believers who have been united to Jesus Christ and to one another, across all places and generations.

B. The Local church (1 Cor 1:2, 1 Ti 5:3, 5:17–18, Ac 14:21–23, Tt 1:5, Heb 13:17, Php 1:1, Mt 18:15–17, Php 4:2–3, 1 Pe 4:10)

A local church is a spiritual family of believers who commit themselves to Christ, to one another, and to biblical shepherds for worship, growth, care, service, and accountability.

C. Head of the Church (1 Co 1:2, Col 1:18, Eph 1:22, 1 Pet 5:3–4, 1 Cor 4:1, Tt 1:7)

3. Saints (1 Cor 1:2, 2 Co 5:21, 1 Cor 3:1–3, Ro 10:9–10, 12:1–2, 1 Ti 1:12–16, 1 Pe 1:14–16, 1 Jn 3:7–8, 3:3, Jn 17:17, Ro 12:1–2, Jn 8:31–32, 1 Th 4:3, He 12:2, Php 1:6)

- | |
|----------------------|
| 1. Disciples (239 X) |
| 2. Brethren (190 X) |
| 3. Church (77 X) |
| 4. Saints (59 X) |
| 5. Elect (23 X) |
| 6. Believers (12 X) |

Conclusion and Applications

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.