

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY TWENTY

Three Cheers for the Church

Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27

The church is the conscience of the nation. As the pulpit stands on moral issues, the people stand. Let the light shine. Let the salt bite. These are our roles. The world expects us to stand for the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVER since Jesus declared, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), He has been growing His worldwide family of believers. From every continent, nationality, and ethnic group, followers of Christ unite around His teachings and hold together with the cords of His love.

Christ’s church is universal in scope, but it is also local. Each church, like a small flame, dots the landscape as points of light in the darkness. Wherever believers gather, music and message mingle to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Ministries of the church refresh sagging spirits, confront wrong, point the way, model the truth, help the hurting, rejoice over new life, and care for the dying—all done in the name of our Savior to the glory of God.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study celebrates the significance of the local church and its uniqueness by examining three passages in the writings of Paul.



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INSIGHT FOR LIVING
MINISTRIES

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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Consider the positive influence of the local church. Most likely, it was at church where you . . .

- Realized God loves you and sent His Son to die for your sins
- Learned the Bible from teachers you respected
- Developed lifelong gifts and talents
- Leaned on others during the worst times of your life
- Met your spouse and were married
- Celebrated the births of your children
- Found close friends who also loved the Lord
- Received comfort when a family member died
- Worshiped with like-minded believers who reminded you that you're not alone

In what ways has the local church enriched you? As you open the Word, say a prayer of thanksgiving for the vital role of your local church in your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Philippians 1, Paul illustrated the significance of the local church. First Corinthians 11:23–28 and Romans 6:1–7 explain the Lord's Supper and baptism as unique practices in Christianity. Let's explore these passages.





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 **Observation and Interpretation: The Significance and Uniqueness of the Church**

Two key questions guide our reading of the Scriptures—*What does this verse say?* and *What does this verse mean?* In the charts below, write down what the verses say by answering the questions in the left column. Record your interpretations in the right column.

The Significance of the Local Church (Part 1) <i>Philippians 1:1–30</i>	
The believers in Philippi held a special place in Paul’s heart. They were the first in Macedonia to receive the gospel. His fondness for them and his zeal for the Lord, expressed in Philippians 1, illustrates the significance of the local church in the world, community, and individuals.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
1a. In <i>Philippians 1:1–6</i> , how did Paul express his gratitude and fond memories for them?	2a. What positive impact can the church have on its members based on Paul’s experience?
1b. In <i>1:7–8</i> , what feelings did Paul express for their support of him?	2b. What emotional and spiritual support does the local church offer in times of crisis?
1c. In <i>1:9–11</i> , how did Paul pray for these believers? Note his key verbs and nouns.	2c. How is Paul’s prayer instructive for the church when it offers prayers of blessing?

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The Uniqueness of the Lord’s Table <i>1 Corinthians 11:23–28</i>	
On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as a regular practice for His followers (<i>Luke 22:14–20</i>). Paul instructed the Corinthians how to observe this ordinance in their church.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
1a. Read <i>1 Corinthians 11:23–28</i> . What are the elements of the Lord’s Supper? What commands did Jesus give?	2a. What do the bread and the cup represent? What truth about our relationship with Christ does the Lord’s Supper symbolize?

The Uniqueness of Baptism <i>Romans 6:3–4</i>	
Jesus instituted baptism as an ordinance of the church in the Great Commission (<i>Matthew 28:18–20</i>). In Romans 6:3–4, Paul explained the spiritual meaning of baptism.	
1a. Read <i>Romans 6:3–4</i> . What did Paul say happens when we are spiritually united with Christ at our salvation?	1a. In what ways does water baptism reenact our spiritual baptism? Why is it important for Jesus’ followers to be water baptized?

*The ordinances are sermons without words. The Lord’s Table is saying, “He died for me.”
 The baptismal celebration is saying, “He lives in me.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Application: Three Cheers for the Church

What a marvelous thing is the local family of God! Where else but in Christ and His church can people of every social class and nationality find true unity? Where else can you link arms with other believers in worshipping God and walking in His path? What other institution still holds fast to godly values and points society in the direction of biblical morality?

In local churches, families are celebrated and strengthened. Children flourish in a loving environment that develops their spiritual capacity. Discouraged youth find guidance and friendship and even family. Single-parent families find support and care. We are able to love God and follow Christ with others in an unbreakable bond of fellowship.

Through this study, what new aspects have you come to appreciate about the local church as well as the Lord's Supper and baptism?

Have you felt disillusioned with the church because of a hurtful experience? If so, who might you talk to about your past? What might help you reengage with a local church?



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If you've never been baptized, what might be the next step in obeying Christ's command to be baptized?

How can you reach out in Christ's love through a church ministry this week?

No other organization makes such a significant contribution to the world, the community, and the spiritual life of believers than the local church. At the center of the church's significance is the faithful preaching of Christ's message and the faithful practice of Christ's ordinances. Christ is the hope of the world, and He has chosen His church to embody and channel His saving message of redemption and renewal.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I love to worship You with other believers in a place that is safe from persecution and free from the world's influences. Guide the leaders and pastors of my church in the wisdom of Your Word. Help me to contribute in meaningful ways for the building up of the body of Christ. In His name, amen.