Openly Before the Churches

Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you. (2Corinthians 8:24)

Words are often spoken about the visibility of the individual in daily life. Christians remind one another of the influence that each has in relation to family, community, and the local congregation of God's people. Plaques, posters, and wall murals are frequently seen proclaiming Jesus' instructions to be "salt" and "light" (**Matthew 5:13-16**) or Paul's encouragement to be "lights in the world" (**Philippians 2:15**). How much thought is given to the local church in this same context?

The word "church" is used in two senses in the Bible. It refers, in general, to all Christians—the saved (**Ephesians 5:23-25; Matthew 16:16-18**). It sometimes refers to the Lord's people in a given local arrangement (**1Corinthians 16:1; 1:2; Romans 16:16; 2Corinthians 8:24**). This is the Lord's plan, and as we study the New Testament it can be seen that he placed great emphasis upon the local church. In our above text from 2Corinthians chapter eight, He is careful to instruct the local church to give careful attention to their example to other churches. He places a large responsibility and a high estimate on the local church.

Seen Openly in Work

The Lord's estimate of the local church is seen in that he has made it his agency to accomplish things of great importance. The local church is God's agency for preaching the gospel of Christ (**1Timothy 3:15**). What Paul writes of the church in Philippi is an clear example (**Philippians 4:15,16**). This has long been recognized in some measure, for all religious groups—following God's plan or not—rely upon the local church as they conceive it, to be the bedrock for their missionary work. The local church is is given by God organizational machinery to function to accomplish His work. It is highly significant that, figuratively, He referred to churches as lampstands (**Revelation 1:20**)—even "golden" lampstands (**Revelation 2:1**). Christ thought the local church could get the job done. Paul thought so, too (**Colossians 1:23**).

The local church is God's agency for doing benevolent work. There are nine scriptures which speak specifically about the church doing benevolent work, and only nine, and in each of these it is the local church doing the work (**Acts 2:44,45; Acts 4:32-35; Acts 6:1-4; Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27; 1Corinthians 16:1-2; 2Corinthians 8:1-24; 2Corinthians 9:1-15; 1Timothy 5:16**). God organized the

local church to accomplish this work. He did not authorize the church to generate new additional organizations to do this.

The local church is also God's agency for edification, or building up of the body (**Ephesians 4:11-15**). No school or other outside organization, supported by funds which are given by Christians to do the work of the church, has scriptural authority to do this job. Individual Christians, being charged with this work just as they are with sharing the gospel, may employ a school to help in their work, but this is not the church at work.

Openly to be Inspected

Not only will outside individuals and other local congregations see the local church, but God certainly does, too. The Lord shows his high estimate of the local church in that he inspects each one as noted in Revelation, chapters two and three. We all look after things we think are important—we keep check on valuables. This is also the case with the Lord and His church. He watches.

He sees every member of the local church. The Lord expects each Christian to be a member of a local church. As a matter of fact, He arranged it so that each saved person is part of the church, and then each one is to affiliate with a local church (**Acts 9:26**). There is entirely too much of this business of members of the church "at large," where people are here and there expecting the blessings of being a member of the church but escaping the responsibility of working and serving under the oversight of the rule of elders and with working as a close-knit family to accomplish God's work.

The "religious" world at large doesn't place much emphasis on God's church. The general reaching is that you can be saved without being in the church. They fail to realize that the church IS the saved—it is entirely composed of those that have followed God's instructions for salvation. Likewise, too many Christians fail to give attention to what God expects of the church's local families. Never forget that God organized local churches to do His work openly, being an example, an influence, and a doer of His work. Let us learn to appreciate that for which Christ spent His blood (**Acts 20:28-30**).