

The Importance of Being Part of a Local Church

Ecclesiastes 12:11 (NKJV)

¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

- *Ecclesiastes 12:11 provides us with some insights into the importance of hearing and applying God’s word to our lives.*
- *“The words of the wise are like goads” - A goad is a traditional farming implement, used to spur or guide livestock, usually oxen, which are pulling a plough or a cart. It is also used to round up cattle. It is a long stick with a pointed end, also known as a cattle prod.*
- *Wisdom is the application of the knowledge and understanding we have received. For instance, a person may know what things they need to do to improve their health, but wisdom is the application of that knowledge, which results in positive changes in their lifestyle.*
- *The words of the wise are like goads that encourage and challenge us to make wise choices and to step forward in faith so we will grow, develop, and mature in our relationship with God.*
- *The words of the wise find the delicate balance between speaking words of comfort and speaking words of conviction, as Jesus spoke to the woman caught in the act of adultery. “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” (John 8:11).*
- *Jesus did not condemn her, but neither did He allow her to think that her past failures were an excuse for her to continue to make destructive choices.*
- *We need to surround ourselves with those people God has provided for us who have the wisdom to encourage and challenge us to walk with God.*
- *“the words of scholars are like well-driven nails” – the ‘words of scholars’ literally means “master of assemblies or collections,” giving the idea of someone who engages himself in and has mastered the art of studying, researching, and bringing things together in an understandable way, so it is useful to themselves and others. The translators of the NKJV translated the phrase “masters of assemblies” as “scholars.”*
- *“the words of scholars are like well-driven nails” – Well-driven nails represent the idea of something fixed in place, so well established that it does not move and remains stable and strong.*

- *The idea of well-driven nails also suggests the idea of something built up in a structure and so it can represent sound doctrine—having the correct biblical understanding of who God is, who we are, and how He wants us to live.*
- *The words of the wise give us impetus to move forward even when we are facing opposition or adversity, while the words of scholars provides us with a framework that brings stability and understanding so our lives are built on truth.*
- *Together the words of the wise and the words of the scholars bring balance and stability to our lives.*
- *The words of the scholars may be compared to the teaching ministry which provides instruction in the Word of God. The words of the wise may be compared to the preaching ministry which challenges us to respond to the truths we have learned and apply them to our lives.*
- *The key to understanding the true treasure of the words of the wise and the words of scholars is to recognize the source of both, because they are “given by one Shepherd” who is Jesus Christ.*
- *Isaiah 11:2 names the seven Spirits of the Lord and one of those is called “the Spirit of Counsel.”*
- *The Spirit of Counsel is not pointing out to people how far they are from God’s standard. Rather, it is coming down to where they are and helping them to grow in the grace of God, so that they can achieve and fulfill all that God has for their lives.*
- *God speaks to us and instructs us in many ways and each one is important.*
- *God speaks to us as we spend time waiting upon Him in prayer.*
- *God speaks to us through the Word of God as we spend time reading, meditating, and studying the Bible.*
- *God speaks to us through the circumstances of life as He uses circumstances to confirm His leading.*
- *God uses the Body of Christ to speak to us, not only through the spiritual leadership of the church, but also through the individual members of His Body.*
- *It is through the five-fold ministry of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher as well as all the members of the Body of Christ that our “one Shepherd” Jesus Christ speaks to us words of wisdom and understanding.*

- *If we fail to be part of a local church and submit one to another we will rob ourselves of a very important way that Christ wants to speak to us, encourage us, and minister to us. We will also be robbing ourselves of the opportunity for Christ to use us to encourage and speak words of life to other fellow believers.*

1 Corinthians 12:12–31 (NKJV)

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many.

- *Sometimes Christians think of their relationship with God as if it only were between them and God on an individual basis, but in reality there is another equally important aspect of our relationship with God.*
- *Our relationship with Christ is also a corporate one as each believer is a member of His Body and together we fellowship with Him and each other and represent Him to this world.*

¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body?

¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body?

¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

- *Each member of the Body of Christ is equally important and without the diversity found in His Body, His Church would not function properly.*
- *Sometimes the local churches don’t function fully and effectively because the people mistakenly believe that the leadership are to actually do the ministry but in reality the five-fold ministry is meant, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” so that each member can minister. (Ephesians 4:11–12)*

¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

¹⁹And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

²⁰But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

- *Our individual gifts, talents, and ministries are not the result of random chance. “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”*

²²No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

²³And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,

²⁴but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

²⁵that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

²⁸And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

³⁰Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

³¹But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

- *Each one of the members of the Body of Christ is vitally important and in fact, “those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.”*
- *Each member of the Body of Christ, no matter what their role, is of equal honour. In fact, those whose ministries are not highly visible have greater “modesty,” and “a state of beauty and fine appearance.” In God’s sight He sees the beauty of our ministry.*
- *“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” – Being part of Christ’s Body, the Church, provides the blessing of having those who will comfort us during our times of sorrow and rejoice with us during times of victory.*
- *Paul taught believers to comfort others as we were comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We can share our experiences of victory with others in the Body who face the same challenges we faced and overcame.*
- *“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” - Being part of the Body of Christ does not mean we lose our individuality it means that corporately we have gained something wonderful —an unbreakable and eternal fellowship not only with God, but also with one another.*
- *“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” – the nine gifts of the Spirit only operate properly when the person is rightly relating to the Body of Christ and a local church. They operate as we relate to others, not in isolation.*

- *In a local church we learn how to operate in the spiritual gifts, we receive the benefit of being edified by the spiritual gifts. We have the protection of being used by God in a corporate relationship, so the glory is given to Jesus Christ and not to an individual.*
- *“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” – Our calling is from God, but we are not rewarded according to our calling. We will be rewarded according to the degree we were faithful to the calling God gave us, and how we responded to the opportunities God presented to us.*
- *Alongside the calls of apostle and prophet are listed the ministries of helps and administration!*
- *There will be some Believers who were called to be apostles, but because they failed to respond to the invitation they will lose their reward. There will be others who were called to a hidden ministry of service and prayer that will be rewarded by being seated with Christ on His throne!*

Hebrews 10:23–25 (NKJV)

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

²⁴And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

- *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” – We are exhorted to not lose hope, but hold fast to our confession without wavering. The phrase “hold fast” suggests that some temptation is trying to pry us away from our hope in Christ.*
- *The reason we can hold fast to our hope is because “He who promised is faithful.”*
- *But the way we are able to remain faithful and filled with hope is by “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” This is only possible when we are in fellowship with other believers.*
- *The phrase “consider one another” suggests more than a casual relationship, but real fellowship with others where we thoughtfully seek out ways to bless them with good works.*
- *Many Christians are negligent about being actively connected with a local church and so the Word of God warns, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.”*

- *Christian fellowship does not mean simply Christians meeting to fellowship, but fellowshiping around Christ with words of faith and encouragement, “exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
- *The reason this is so important and especially in the times we are living in is because “as you see the Day approaching.”*
- *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” and so we must make sure we are connected with Christ and with His Body. (2 Timothy 3:1).*

1 Timothy 4:1–2 (NKJV)

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

- *These verses describe the end times and how deception and false doctrine will creep in even among believers so that “some will depart from the faith.”*
- *Departing from the faith can also including departing from the faithful.*
- *One of the greatest dangers to believers is isolating ourselves from the Body of Christ. The wolf is always looking for the lone sheep rather than those close to the Shepherd or together in the flock.*
- *In the Great Commission, Jesus told us to “make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples cannot be accomplished in isolation, but by belonging to a local church, where we’re accountable to others and to leadership. We remain disciples even as we make disciples.*
- *Paul taught that “through love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:13). The church is to be a place of service, one to another, something that cannot be achieved in isolation.*
- *Paul also taught us to “Bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2). Again, burdens cannot be borne in isolation.*

Acts 10:9–17 (NKJV)

⁹The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.

¹⁰Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance

¹¹and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.

¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

¹³And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

¹⁴But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

¹⁵And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

¹⁶This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

¹⁷Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

- *Peter saw a vision of "all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air" accompanied by the most startling words a Jewish man could hear, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."*
- *Peter was so startled by this that he even argued with God. "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."*
- *God response to Peter's objection was this: "What God has cleansed you must not call common."*
- *The words of the Lord were repeated three times to emphasis this great truth God had just revealed to Peter that would change the course and composition of the Church.*
- *"While Peter wondered within himself what this vision meant," God provided the interpretation when the Gentile men sent by Cornelius to Peter came to the door of the house where Peter was staying.*
- *It wasn't until Peter went with the men to Cornelius' home and preached the first Gospel message to Gentiles in the history of the Church that he understood the vision.*
- *To Peter's amazement, not only did the Gentiles put their faith in Christ, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues just like the Jewish believers!*

Acts 10:28 (NKJV)

²⁸Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

- **“But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean”**
- *For the first time in recorded history, God revealed the true meaning of the dietary laws. The dietary laws were not really put in place by God to teach about food. They were really a prophetic analogy about people and His plan of salvation!*

Leviticus 11:3 (NKJV)

³Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat.

- *The two characteristics of a clean animal were that they had divided hooves and chewed their cud.*

Proverbs 2:6 (NKJV)

⁶For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;

- *Three words that we see repeated over and over again in Proverbs – knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.*
- *Knowledge answers the question – What? Knowledge is knowing something.*
- *Understanding answers the question – Why? Understanding is knowing the purpose of it.*
- *Wisdom answers the question – How? Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding, so our lives are actually changed.*
- *Knowledge alone will lead to pride and strife and not to maturity.*
- *Understanding without wisdom will lead to frustration, because we can understand what is wrong, but feel helpless about what to do about it. If we do not apply the truths we read about, it leads to spiritual frustration.*
- *Wisdom results in satisfaction and fulfillment, because we are able to apply what we understand to our lives. Wisdom results in a transformed and fruitful victorious life.*
- *For our lives as believers to express the holiness of God so that we can be a light to this world we must learn not only to read the Word (knowledge), but meditate upon the Word (understanding), and ultimately apply the Word to our lives (wisdom).*

Deuteronomy 15:19–22 (NKJV)

¹⁹“All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.

²⁰You and your household shall eat it before the LORD your God year by year in the place which the LORD chooses.

²¹But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.

²²You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer.

- *Here are a few other interesting distinctions that God makes about animals.*
- *Although an animal was regarded as a clean animal, not every animal could be used as a sacrifice to the Lord.*
- *If the animal had a defect or blemish it was not to be sacrificed to the Lord.*
- *If we are holding on to un-confessed sin and unforgiveness, then our sacrifice of praise and the prayers of our lips will not be acceptable to Him even as it says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” (Psalm 66:18).*
- *“All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the LORD your God” – Only those animals that were taken from the herds and flocks were acceptable as a sacrifice.*
- *“You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer” – A clean animal that had a blemish could still be eaten by the people, but not as a sacrifice unto the Lord, but simply eaten in their own homes.*
- *The Scriptures equate a gazelle or a deer with a clean animal that had a blemish.*
- *Since gazelle and deer both chewed the cud and had split hooves they were clean animals and could be eaten, but they could not be taken to the temple and sacrificed to the Lord.*
- *The gazelle and deer were not domesticated animals and were generally wild. They could not be incorporated into a herd.*
- *A gazelle or a deer could be compared to believers who have received Christ and are “clean,” but who are lone rangers and never want to be part of a local church or reap the benefits of accountability and fellowship.*
- *Believers who are independent or “lone rangers” are saved, but they cannot “present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service,” (Romans 12:1) because they are not willing to submit to the authority of God’s Word and become part of a local church family.*

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (NKJV)

⁹Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.

¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.

¹¹Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?

¹²Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

- *Often, Christians venture out in this life alone where the trials and darkness of this world can quickly disorientate them. Christ has put us in a Body where we can stay close to the Shepherd and have our lives enriched by fellowship.*

Malachi 3:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.

¹⁷“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him.”

- *How sweet it is when believers fellowship around Christ. God listens in and takes notes!*