

Belonging (Why We Need the Church)
The Church is a Place to Give and Receive Instruction
Nehemiah 8:1-8

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Introduction: We conclude our series this morning on the necessity of the local church. I read somewhere this week that a person can love the church without loving Jesus, but it is virtually impossible to love Jesus and not love the Church. We have specifically looked at several benefits of belonging to the local church.

We have learned that we need the church because it is the place where we:

1. Encounter God through Worship.
2. Exercise our spiritual gifts.
3. Invest in eternal things.
4. Give and receive encouragement.

Today we learn that the church is the place where we give and receive spiritual instruction. I came across this piece this week about the many instructions that we encounter.

It seems that even the obvious things in life can't be taken for granted: After a woman sued McDonalds because she wasn't warned her coffee was hot, companies are changing their instruction manuals and product warning labels to cover themselves from liability. Listen to a few of these: On a particular brand of soap- Directions: Use like regular soap. On a frozen dinner - Suggestion: Defrost before eating. A Christmas pudding - Product will be hot after heating. On a string of Christmas lights- For indoor or outdoor use only. A packet of peanuts warning - May contain traces of peanuts. On a chain saw- Do not stop chain with hand. On a motorcycle helmet mounted mirror - Remember, objects in the mirror are actually behind you. And my favorite which is on a sleeping aid—May cause drowsiness.(Source Unknown).¹

This piece simply serves to remind us that we need a place to figure out the important instructions for life. That's what we want to talk about today, but in a much more serious way.

Let's stand in honor of the book of books from the King of Kings—the one whose instructions are absolutely infallible.

Text: ¹ When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had given Israel. ² On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. ³ While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/illustration/Instruction/201193/>

his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.⁵ Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up.⁶ Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

⁷ Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places.⁸ They read the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

In my Bible, I have a list of Scriptures that I have found along my own devotional reading that serve to remind me of the task that I face each time that I preach. Nehemiah 8:8 is one of those verses. Here is my job description in case some of you are wondering about what my job is. I am supposed to stand each week, as I understand it, and read the Scripture, give translation to the Scripture in such a way that gives meaning, but do so in a way where people can understand the Scripture.

The man Nehemiah was a leader of the Jews who helped to rebuild Jerusalem after the exile. He helped rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem was only part of the project. The much more difficult aspect of the rebuilding was to rebuild worship. Nehemiah 8 tells us of that effort to get people to realize the importance of worship.

3 Introductory Issues: Why do I need the church in order to be taught about spiritual issues? Isn't it true that as a believer in Christ I am filled with the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate guide to truth? According to John 16:13-15, that is absolutely true, but we need to consider some other issues.

- (1) Scripture commands that we give attention to the public reading of Scripture.
 - Acts 2:42 "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching."
 - 1 Timothy 4:13 "...give attention to the public reading of Scripture."
- (2) Scripture confirms that some are uniquely gifted in the area of teaching.
 - 1 Timothy 4:14 "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you."
 - Ephesians 4:11 "And He gave some ... as teachers and pastors."
- (3) Scripture commends that we engage in both public and private Bible Study.

Remember: Public Bible Study is no substitute for private study and meditation of God's Word.

 - Joshua 1:8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it night and day."
 - Acts 17:11 "...for they received the word with great eagerness examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

3 Reasons We Need to Meet Together for the Study of God's Word:

- (1) God desires to speak to us as a church.
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ Also, this is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the message about God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the message of God, which also works effectively in you believers.

(2) The Bible is sometimes a difficult book.

- Nehemiah 8:8

They read the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

(3) We need to guard against the deceitfulness of false doctrine.

- 2 Timothy 4:1-4

¹ Before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom, I solemnly charge you: ² proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will accumulate teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. ⁴ They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

2 Critical Questions in Choosing a Church:

(1) What about the priority of God's Word in the church?

(2) What about the purity of the people teaching God's Word in the church?

Chuck Colson writes in his book, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*:

We cannot treat the local church like a restaurant, picking and choosing from the menu, visiting another whenever we feel like it. Church membership involves making a covenant with fellow believers. It takes time to develop unity with others at any depth, and this never takes place, ever—not at any time or anywhere—without conflict.²

There is another Scripture that I keep in the front of my Bible. In fact, in many respects, it is the most important. I list it first. It is Ezra 7:10.

Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Simply put, it does us no good to study and teach the word of God if we have no intention of obeying the word of God.

² Chuck Colson, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*, Zondervan, 2008, 155.