

## Why We, College-Folks, Need the Local Church

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*“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” --Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)*

“Why bother joining a local church?” is a pretty common question among students my age, “After all, I’m only going to be here for a few years anyway. Wouldn’t I be better off learning how to love the people that God has put right in front of me, here on campus? Isn’t that a better use of my gifts?” Even for those whose Christian faith is a defining characteristic of who they are and what they do, church membership—either nominally or functionally—seems to fall well down the list of priorities.

Perhaps it’s a valid question: why should we bother joining a church community we’re only going to be in for a short time? What does my involvement in a local church do that involvement in any other organization (Christian or otherwise) can’t? As I have chewed on the passage above in the context of my time in college and my life here at Christ Community, I have observed two significant realities of my life that this passage brings into sharp focus.

The first is the reality of the wind and the waves. Why be a part of a local church? “Because of wind and the waves!” says Paul. We all face challenges and struggles from inside and out that make us feel like we’re losing control, losing hope, and going under. I experienced this very feeling this past week with the mound of assignments I have due, the obligations I have, and the menagerie of conflicting ideas that confront me every time I walk across campus. Like it or not, the wind and waves are there.

But where does Paul say that these waves and wind come from? “Teaching... cunning... craftiness... deceitful scheming.” This isn’t just the wrongful “teaching” we can pick up in a classroom; Paul’s talking about the way we look at the whole world around us—how we think about rest and relaxation, how we talk and listen to our roommates and friends. It’s about interpretation of our world, and we all, by nature, are living under a malicious and twisted interpretation of the facts.

So where do we turn? If we’ve been capsized by the waves, then how do we right ourselves? Paul says that we turn to Christ. In turning to Him, we encounter His people—His Body. Notice that Paul’s not just telling us to band together and flatly “be united”. No, instead it is a unity around something—around Someone—a “unity in faith and in the

knowledge of the Son of God.” Intimacy with Christ draws us close to His Body—the church—on both a spiritual and practical level. So when the tempest strikes, washing away everything we have to hold unto, we trust the Word of the One who is “enthroned over the flood” (Ps.29:10). And who does His Word tell us we need? Brothers and sisters, young and old, who will constantly point us back to Him and His Word—as it is faithfully preached and received.

But that’s not all to this passage. Not only does Christ use the church as His means of day-to-day deliverance from where we are, this text tells us that He also uses this as His day-to-day method of deliverance toward our glorious destination! “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” Our reflection of Christ’s glory will come—says Paul—as we intimately are about the business of “speaking the truth in love” one to another. This process is like the blood pumping throughout our entire body—emanating from the one Heart and nourishing each and every member. And here’s the interesting thing about that notion of “speaking the truth in love”: it almost always has to be done in the context of a pre-existing relationship. In other words, while we who in Christ are members of the Universal Church, we are meant to speak the truth in love—to build one another up in the Body— as those who in Christ are members of a local church. Rarely do we call up a fellow Christian living in the Congo or in South Korea whom we’ve never met to give them encouragement about their week. But we have the opportunity every week, to build members of the Body up into the image of their Savior—right here in the context of a local church.

So to return to our initial question, “Why bother joining a local church?” The bottom line that we get from this passage is: Because that’s where the rubber of the Christian life meets the road. We don’t confront the wind and the waves in the homogeneous sameness of only our peers. We confront it with the balance and diversity of the whole body as we build one another up. We don’t just encourage and receive encouragement from one part of the body—we need the whole body!