

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (8)

Church Membership – Stop Dating the Church!

A. Introduction

1. The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, instructs each local church to appoint a plurality of qualified men to be elders.
2. The elders are to feed, know, lead, protect, care for, and love the flock under their care so that as a local church we display God's glory to the world around us.
3. The primary way the elders are to do this is by ensuring that the gospel is preached and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered correctly.
4. But who makes up the flock that the elders are to shepherd?

The need for church membership – believers that commit to a local church.

B. Is church membership biblical?

1. The early church had some form of membership.

Numbers were known.

"In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)." (Acts 1:15)

"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:41)

"But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand." (Acts 4:4)

Rolls were kept.

"No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband." (1 Timothy 5:9)

Discipline was practiced.

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)

Elders gave an account to God for their flock.

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

Church officers were appointed.

"So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from

among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:2-4)

Doctrinal conflicts were resolved.

"Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad." (Acts 15:1-3)

Finances were looked after.

"Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem." (1 Corinthians 16:3)

Missionaries were sent.

"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:1-3)

2. The biblical images used for a church make sense because of church membership.

A flock has sheep.

A body has parts.

A building has bricks.

A household has members.

A church has members.

C. Who should join a local church?

1. Those who profess faith in Jesus.

Commenting on Acts 2:41, the Holy Spirit "didn't add them to the church without saving them, and he didn't save them without adding them to the church. Salvation and church membership went together; they still do." (John Stott)

2. Is baptism necessary for membership?

We want "to have the size of the door to membership in the local church mirror as closely as possible the size of the door to entrance into the universal body of Christ." (David Mathis)

"[Spurgeon] once told me with appreciation how he was worsted in argument by an American divine. During a drive, the visitor made a number of inquiries, and discovered the practice of the church... how it admitted people to the Lord's Table who were not baptised, and refused them membership unless baptised. "Which means that they are good enough for the Lord, and yet not good enough for you!" said his guest. And Spurgeon had to admit that logic was not on his side." (W.Y. Fullerton)

3. Those who are willing to submit to the teaching and discipline of a particular local church.

D. Why should you join a local church?

1. To demonstrate your love for the church.

If Jesus loves the church, so should you!

2. To prove that you're not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people.

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

3. For your own spiritual good and safety.

Drifting is a real danger.

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." (Hebrews 2:1)

We need to be encouraged to pay more careful attention to what we already know.

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:12-13)

We are encouraged to do this by meeting with other believers regularly.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another— and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)

4. To have your profession of faith affirmed.

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:18-20)

5. To encourage new believers to be committed to the local church.

6. To encourage a ministry.

7. As a witness to the world.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

8. To be accountable to a group of elders.

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

E. What does it mean to be a member of a local church?

1. You attend.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Sunday Services; Lord's Supper; Members Meetings

2. You pray.

"They devoted themselves... to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

3. You serve.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

"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 fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

4. You give.

"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." (1 Corinthians 16:2)

5. You submit.

To the elders.

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

To the discipline of the congregation.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)

6. You love (do all the other 'one anothers' in Scripture).

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

7. You commit.

Stop dating the church!

"Church hoppers are like wife swappers! They get plenty of honeymoons but never know the deeper joys of committed, costly, enduring love!" (Dai Hankey)