

# Church Membership – Family Support & Accountability

(all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version)

## INTRODUCTION

1. The church of Christ is the one group (*body, family, kingdom*) of **all the saved**, both dead and alive (Mt 16:18; Eph 1:20-22; 4:4; Col 1:16).
2. There is **only one church (group)** of all the saved, yet **many local churches (groups)** of Christians. “The churches of Christ greet you” (Rom 16:16). See Rev 1:4; 1 Cor 16:1; 4:17.
3. We do not join the church of Christ to be a member, but are **added to it by Jesus upon receiving the forgiveness of sins in baptism** (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 1 Cor 12:13).
4. After being saved we will seek to be **received as a member of a faithful local church.**  
Acts 9:26-28 <sup>26</sup>And when he (*Saul*) had come to Jerusalem, **he attempted to join the disciples**. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup>But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup>**So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.**

### ONE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

- Composed of all saved, dead & alive
- Only one
- Began on Pentecost in A.D. 30
- Has no organization on earth
- Enter only by being added by the Lord
- The Lord keeps the books of membership
- Consists of only the saved
- Must be in this group to be saved
- Death doesn't affect membership
- Doesn't work or worship as a collective
- Can't be divided

### LOCAL CHURCHES

- Composed of Christians in an area
- Many over all the earth
- Begins when people agree to start
- Has local organization
- Enter by joining ourselves together
- Members can be received or rejected
- May consist of both saved and lost
- May not be in one and yet be saved
- Death affects membership
- Works and worships as a collective
- Can be divided

## I. WHAT IS A “LOCAL” CHURCH?

**A. The New Testament pattern is for Christians to form a local church FAMILY by agreeing to work and worship together** (Mark 3:31-35).

1. Brethren agree to **ASSEMBLE** to worship and encourage one another (1 Cor 11:17-34; Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Heb 10:24-25).
2. Brethren agree to **SUBMIT** to qualified elders (Ti 1:5-9; Heb 13:17; Phil 1:1).
3. Brethren agree to **CONTRIBUTE** funds to a common treasury to do the work of that local group (1 Cor 16:1-2; Phil 4:15-16).

**B. The largest organizational structure Jesus authorized for his church is the local church.**

1. **There is to be a plurality of elders in every church.** The apostles never placed one elder (pastor, bishop) in charge of a church (Phil 1:1; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

2. **Elders were instructed to oversee only Christians among them in their local group** (1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:28).
3. **The church of Christ is not a denomination.**
  - a. Remember, the largest organizational structure Jesus authorizes is the local church. Every denomination is a **man-made organization of local churches, not authorized by Jesus**. Such organizations of churches are not found in the Bible.
  - b. Denominations divide believers into **organized factions**. Divisions among Christians are forbidden by Jesus (1 Cor 1:10-13; Gal 5:19-21). The Lord prayed for believers to be **unified in the truth**, not divided by the teachings of men (Jn 17:17-23).
  - c. In denominations **men assume authority and position and power** not given to them by Jesus (Mt 20:25-28).
  - d. If one is a member of a denomination, one is participating in **an unlawful division** that violates the Lord's will for his church.

## II. LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP INVOLVES SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

### A. Each member of a local church has an important function in building up other members.

1. Eph 4:15-16 <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom **the whole body**, joined and held together by **every joint** with which it is equipped, when **each part** is working properly, makes the body grow so that **it builds itself up in love**.
2. 1 Cor 12:26-27 <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and **individually members of it**.

### B. We are our brother's keeper. All of us are commanded to look out for one another.

1. "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God" (Heb 12:15).
2. Every Christian is commanded to help his brethren **remain with God and get to heaven**.
3. Leaders must **give an account** to God for the souls of those entrusted to their oversight (Heb 13:17).
4. You should **expect** the leadership of the local church to hold you accountable in order to remind you of your need to obey Jesus your King (Heb 5:9; Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19-20). Likewise, your brethren in the church will **expect** you to hold them accountable.

### C. When someone is separated from God by sin, there must be a resolution before receiving one into the fellowship of God's family.

1. Has one obeyed the true gospel of Christ? (Acts 2:38-41)
2. Is one living in open sin? (1 Cor 5:11-13; 2 Ths 3:14-15; Rev 2-3)
3. Has one been participating in divisive behavior or teaching? (Titus 3:10-11)
4. Is one's previous local group willing to provide a recommendation, or are there unresolved matters still needing to be addressed? (Rom 16:1-2)
5. Inquiries before membership benefit the prospective member and the local church.

### D. Each member of a local church is to obey the many "one another" commands. Here is a partial list of "one another" duties toward our brethren:

1. Through love, serve one another (Gal 5:13)
2. Stir up one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24)

3. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom 12:10)
4. Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
5. Admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak (1 Ths 5:14)
6. Comfort one another (1 Ths 4:18)
7. Encourage and build up one another (1 Ths 5:11)
8. Teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16)
9. Pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
10. Be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)

**E. Each member of a local church is to assemble regularly for worship.**

1. Brethren came together "as a church" to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) and to fellowship in the work of the church. The pattern authorized by Jesus is to assemble on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2).
2. When the church assembles for worship and bible study, **we should want to be there** to encourage our brethren and fellowship together in our common faith (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25).
3. In the assemblies men volunteer to serve various functions (1 Pet 4:10-11; 1 Cor 14:26).
  - a. How can I help? What can I do to serve? No one will force you to serve publicly, but you may choose to read a scripture, serve the Lord's Supper, lead a prayer or a song, or give a Wednesday night invitation talk, as you are able and willing.
  - b. We have a monthly duty roster that identifies the tasks men perform in the assemblies. Be sure to let someone know in what ways you would like to serve.
4. When We Choose NOT to Attend Services...
  - a. We Choose NOT to Seek the Kingdom First
  - b. We Choose NOT to Love Our Spiritual Family
  - c. We Choose NOT to Grow Spiritually
  - d. We Choose NOT to Set the Best Example
  - e. We Choose NOT to Obey God's Commands
  - f. We Choose NOT to Give God the Glory
  - g. We Choose NOT to Imitate our Leaders
  - h. We Choose NOT to Do Good – Jas. 4:17

**III. WHY DO SOME CHRISTIANS REFUSE TO BE A MEMBER OF ANY LOCAL CHURCH?**

**A. Some are so inflexible in their opinions that they cannot tolerate anyone who does not yield to their views.**

1. Paul says to reject such people after two warnings (Titus 3:10-11).
2. Often this kind of person ends up not being a member anywhere.

**B. The PRIMARY reason is that some do not want to be held accountable for their conduct.**

1. Some do not want to be accountable for faithful attendance or any other responsibility.
  - a. They may not want to have their lifestyle evaluated according to the scriptures.
  - b. They may reject the idea that they should be under the oversight of elders.
  - c. Perhaps most of all, they do not want to be in an environment where they might be subject to the discipline of the local congregation.

2. In a word, some want the “name” of being a Christian, but without the commitment. Such folks may deceive themselves into thinking that they are serving God, but it is not an option to ignore God’s commands to work together with our brethren.

**C. A Christian with resolve and commitment to obey Jesus will find a way to join with other Christians to serve God as a local family.**

1. If one lives in an area where there is no faithful congregation of the Lord’s people, it may be necessary to make a long drive to a nearby city.
2. If one is unable to find a faithful group to work with, he should worship on the Lord’s Day in his home, seek to win others to the truth, and establish a new congregation in his town as soon as possible.

**IV. EVERY CHRISTIAN IS RESPONSIBLE TO WORK WITH A FAITHFUL CHURCH.**

**A. Our first consideration in choosing a local church is to avoid partnering in error.**

1. 2 Jn 1:9-11 <sup>9</sup>Everyone who goes on ahead and **does not abide in the teaching of Christ**, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup>**for whoever greets him takes part in (*partners with*) his wicked works.**
2. Eph 5:11 **Take no part in (*do not partner with*)** the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

**B. Jesus can remove a local church’s lampstand when it continues to teach or practice error (Rev 2:5).** We do not want to be a member of such a church.

**CONCLUSION**

1. Membership in a local church is required by Jesus.
2. The family of God is stronger when every member is doing his or her part in encouraging and building up other family members.
3. We are commanded to be accountable to our brethren, and to hold each other accountable, so that we might help one another get to heaven.

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