

Introduction: as a “reforming” church we should frequently ask ourselves “why do we do what we do?”

- recently had a number of inquiries regarding membership

I. WHAT?

- What is the church? “A church is a local collection of Christians committed to Christ and to one another” (Dever)
- Does the NT describe the church as a undefined occasional gathering of individual Christians, or a unified, committed, numerable group of believers?

Biblical analogies: warring army; household; community; building (of people) – all which are identifiable

- one central one is a flock; come back later to this analogy

Description of NT Churches – be counted (Act2:41-42; 4:4); be added to (Act2:47; 5:14); be called upon to select leaders and representatives from among itself (Act6:1-6; 2Cor8:19, 23; Act15:22); be officially gathered together (Act14:27; 15:22); carry out church discipline by vote (Mat18:17; 1Cor5:4, 13; 2Cor2:6); observe the Lord's Table as a wholly present corporate assembly (1Cor11:17-20, 33-34)

- NT letters written either to specific churches (with people named) or leaders of churches

II. WHO?

A. Converted

- the members of the NC church are those who fit the NC description; who have made a valid profession of faith
- this is one thing that makes us differ from our Paedobaptist brethren; more than mode, but ecclesiology

B. Committed

- 1.) Word of God with essential doctrinal agreement (confessional)
- 2.) Corporate gatherings of the church (to miss BC is to miss 50% of feeding; prayer meeting – engine of the church)
- 3.) Financial support (for ministry, benevolence, and missions)
- 4.) Ministry of the body (involvement, more than a preaching center)

III. WHY?

A. Helps clarify our pastoral responsibilities

- One great shepherd (Heb13:20; 1Pet5:4 archipoinain); there are [under]shepherds who have the responsibility to do the work of Christ (1Pet5:2; Heb13:17)
- shepherd knows sheep by name (Jn10:3); knows when one is missing (Lk15:4); must take heed to them (Acts20:28)
- as pastors, we ask ourselves do we have responsibility for everyone who walks through the door? Then how long? Who decides?

Illustration: “two fences”; cannot neglect those we know are our flock;

B. Helps clarify your responsibilities

- people are to know leadership (Heb13:17; 1Thes5:12-13); submitting to one another (Eph5:21)

C. Enables us to participate in the more intimate life of the church

- financial decisions; church discipline; pastoral oversight/counseling; recognition of leadership; benevolence (giving and receiving)
- imagine a sheep without shepherds, wandering about from flock to flock, never really becoming a part; isn't Jesus enough? Ask that question to the NT and what answer do we get?

IV. HOW?

- 1.) Courtship – to get to know one another; see interaction and atmosphere of church; get to know leadership
 - 2.) Application/interview – not to grade, but seek to find where someone is spiritually, their family life; their gifts; their understanding of the Gospel and commitment to the church
 - 3.) Reception/Covenanting – a public commitment and vow
- trying to strike balance between hastiness, and delay

Question: why do some not commit themselves in this way? (1.) simply doesn't know (2.) they sincerely desire, but cannot find a church they can commit to (3.) afraid of commitment (4.) against commitment

- for we who are members, remember the nature of this commitment; those who are not, graciously challenge you