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Local Church Membership in the NT; Acts 2:42-47
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Introduction – What is church membership? Do we find it in the NT? How is it practiced? What does it mean? One of the reasons why it is important for us to search the scriptures regarding church membership is that many churches today do not practice or recognize a formal church membership. And many churches who do practice church membership, practice it somewhat loosely. The key question would be is church membership based in Scripture or is it simply a historical or denominational distinctive that is optional.

The reason we are going to look at some texts in Acts is because Acts is a transitional NT book. In Acts the history of redemption is moving from the gospels where Christ came, ministered, died, and rose again to the church era. In this transition we see the formation of the church. Later in the NT we come to the epistles which are written to individual, local churches. The church at Rome, the church at Corinth, and so forth, established, self-sufficient and missionary.

In Acts therefore, we find the DNA building blocks of the church as it is in the formative stage. We should then be able to identify distinctives of the church, and if church membership is indeed a distinctive, we should be able to observe it.

- I. Pictures of the Church Developing
 - a. Let's take a look at the passage that was read and a few more to observe how the church forms into the visible, local Body of Christ.
 - b. Acts 2:42-47
 - i. V42 – Notice these new believers immediately begin to worship together. Corporate worship occurs immediately. (v41 – they become believers, v42 – they begin to worship together)
 - ii. NT believers always assembled together to worship the Lord. They didn't separate themselves from one another and worship individually. They came together as a group to worship. Don't call the golf course, or the deer stand, or the drive to the beach, or watching someone preach online your church. That's not church. The basic Greek word behind the NT

word church is assembly, meaning together! Corporate worship is the first DNA fiber we see in the NT.

- iii. Notice the elements of their corporate worship. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. We have the apostles' teaching recorded for us in the NT. We do the same thing in our worship today. Fellowship. You've got to be together to have fellowship. To the breaking of bread, which I believe signifies the Lord's Supper. And the prayers. Later in the NT epistles we learn that the church would sing and would collect an offering when they gathered for worship. So if you've ever wondered why we do what we do on Sunday mornings, this is why. The corporate worship of the church involves first and foremost the teaching of Scripture as well as fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayers, singing, and giving. It's all worship.
 - iv. V45 – they began to serve one another – to meet one another's needs – to share God's blessings with each other – to love one another. Jesus said that loving one another is a sure mark that we are His disciples.
 - v. V46 – They began to separate from the world and from the Temple worship in order to worship the Lord. They began to assemble separately, which began to clearly draw a line between those who believed in Christ and those who did not.
 - vi. V47 – The line of distinction became very clear. So clear in fact that there was a way to specifically identify and number those who were part of this assembly and those who were not. There was a clear separation from the world. A clear number and record of who was in this new assembly and who was not and who was coming into this assembly. And the line of demarcation was salvation. That accounting is what we call membership.
- c. Acts 6:1-7 – the number of believers have increased so significantly that the ministry of deacons begins to emerge so that no one within this group is being overlooked or neglected. V7.
 - d. Acts 8:1 – The church in Jerusalem is so distinct and separate that members of the church can be identified by opponents of Christianity and singled out for persecution. As a result of the harsh persecution,

the believers are scattered and they take the gospel with them. Now local congregations begin to spring up in Galilee and Samaria.

- e. Acts 9:31 – After Saul’s conversion, the church has rest and now Paul and others begin to go on mission and discover that Gentiles are embracing Christ.
- f. Acts 14:23 – the spiritual structure of the church begins to take shape as elders, or pastors, begin to spiritually care for individual, local congregations, taking the place of the Apostles in their absence.
- g. Acts 16:5 – Now you have multiple churches operating locally and increasing in numbers.
- h. The church is local. It is composed of believers. They meet together for worship. A spiritual structure or church government has formed where each individual local church is led by pastors and deacons. Those basic, foundational distinctives never change. Those distinctives are what we call membership.

II. The Practice of Local Church Membership

- a. The point I want us to see here is that while we don’t see the word membership in the NT, we definitely see the practice of membership. The NT doesn’t refer to the ones who assemble in the local churches as members, but they do function as members.
- b. The words members and membership are simply the words we use to identify what we see taking place in the NT. It’s the same with the word Trinity. We don’t find the word Trinity in the Bible. It’s simply the word we use to identify the doctrine of God that we see in the Bible.
- c. So in the NT, those who received Christ as Savior were baptized and immediately added to the church. We call those coming into the church members. We call the process of adding them to the church membership.
- d. We see in the NT a clear line of distinction between those who are in Christ and those who are not. Those who are in Christ are part of a distinct group, an assembly. That’s what we call membership.
- e. The practice of local church membership is clearly viewed in 3 practices of the NT church.

- i. A clear line of separation between those who are in the church and those who are not. So there is a distinct entry into this group. Salvation in Christ celebrated and marked by baptism.
- ii. There is also in the NT a clear line of exit from the church. Matt 18:15-17. So just as one can be received into the church on his profession of faith, he can also be dismissed from the church based on his refusal to repent of ongoing, public, gospel-defying sin. In other words, he has demonstrated that he is in fact not a true believer because he refuses to repent of sin and live to the glory of God.
 - 1. 1 Cor 5:1-2
 - 2. This clear line of entry, salvation, and this clear line of removal, unrepentant sin, vividly then identifies those who are in this assembly and those who are not. We call that membership. We call them members.
- iii. There is a clear structure of leadership and laity. Hebrews 13:17. How do you know which spiritual leaders to submit to, to follow, to receive spiritual care? You can't obey every Christian leader in the world? How do I know who to watch over? Who to teach? Who to lead? I'm going to give an account to God for this! I can't watch over every Christian in the world? The answer is that Paul is referring here to a local church. Membership identifies for me who God expects and has called me to watch over. It also identifies who you are entrusting to care for your soul.
- f. All of these distinctives are what we call membership. And it is in the membership of a local church that we identify as believers, fellowship, worship together, meet one another's needs, and grow in grace and grow in number as God adds to our number.

III. The Process of Local Church Membership

- a. Here at Grassy Pond, our process of membership is first and foremost that you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- b. Once you have received Christ, we want you to be baptized to announce your salvation and be received into our fellowship. If you are moving from another church and have already been baptized, we simply want to hear how you came to Christ.

- c. Then when you become a member here, we are here to worship together, to serve one another, to share the good news, and praise the Lord!

Conclusion