

Call to Worship: Psalm 134 Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:46-50

Sermon: "Church Membership" Acts 2:36-47 Benediction: Colossians 1:17-18

## INTRODUCTION

Today I am taking a break from our study through the book of Acts in order to address an important topic: church membership. As a number of you have been meeting with this church for some time, but are not yet formally considered members, and as some of you have asked the church elders about membership, it seems appropriate to devote one of these Lord's Day sermons to that subject.

It seems to me that this decision already has borne fruit, because one of the brothers, hearing that I was planning to speak on this subject, asked that with no more delay he would be presented to the church for membership.

As we consider together church membership, may we at no point glory in ourselves as church members, but may we at every point glory in Christ as our savior. By His grace and for His glory the church of Jesus Christ exists and we are members of it. We are redeemed by His blood, shed for our sins! Our sins are covered by His perfect righteousness, not our own! So as I speak, and as you listen, and as we perhaps discuss these things later today and in days to come, let the glory of God in Jesus Christ be our theme. May all glory be to God in the church by Christ Jesus forever and forever.

## BODY

### I. The Lord Jesus Christ calls poor lost sinners unto Himself to be His saints

#### A. through the ministry of His word (36)

1. Jesus has been crucified
2. but He is now risen and is Lord and Christ

#### B. by the power of His Spirit

1. not all in Jerusalem believed; as a matter of fact, although by God's mercy there were many of the Jews in Jerusalem who believed, the Jews and their leaders in general did not believe, but instead persecuted those who did
2. but there were those who did believe
  - a. they gladly received his word (41)
  - b. they believed (44)
3. this was by the power of the Holy Spirit giving these a new birth
  - a. they didn't come into this world creatures suitable to be the members of Christ's church, but creatures suitable for suffering the wrath of God for sins
  - b. they didn't come into this world with hearts ready to believe in the works of Christ done on their behalf, but determined to believe in their own goodness, on the value of their own works
  - c. because unless a person is born again by the Holy Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God
  - d. unless a person is drawn by the Holy Spirit, as water is drawn from a well, he cannot be saved
  - e. but in the grace of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit effectually calls all of the members of the body of Christ to Him to be His saints

II. These saints of His the Lord Jesus Christ orders into particular churches in this world according to where they live on the earth

- A. we see in this passage the formation of the church of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem (41)
- B. as the book of Acts goes on we see how the Lord forms many other churches in Judea, in Samaria, and in the other cities and towns of that part of the world
- C. in our times the Lord Jesus has sent His gospel all over the world, and there must be millions of particular churches
- D. for most of human history, travel to the gathering place of the church was by foot, and so the definition of a local church was measured in just a few miles; and in many places and times there is one and only one church in a given place; such a situation is relatively simple
- E. today in this country, travel to the gathering place of the church is by car, and so we might drive 100 miles to a church gathering in the time it would take to walk only 5 or 6 miles
- F. also, over time, some churches have so degenerated as to be unsuitable meetings for God's people; therefore, the saints often must bypass many places that say, "Church" on the sign in order to make their way to one of the purer churches of Jesus Christ
- G. yet these complications do not alter the fundamental work of Jesus Christ in this regard---He orders His saints into particular churches in this world according to where we live on the earth

III. These particular churches are formed on the basis of a credible profession of faith in Christ, that is, a person's presenting himself as a believer in a way that is believable to other Christians

A. the saints show each other, they give evidence to each other, that they are obedient to the call of Christ

1. they do this by their words, their profession of faith

a. expressing faith in Christ in words

- i. this is a matter so obvious as to be hardly worth mentioning in the scriptural accounts; the bible doesn't often say, "And then they said that they believed."
- ii. yet we see elsewhere in scripture that the credible profession of faith is made largely in the spoken word

-In Romans 10:9-10, the apostle Paul lays believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth down next to each other as nearly equivalent; the one, faith inside the heart, is the essential aspect of the thing, but the other, confessing with the mouth, necessarily accompanies and follows faith

iii. and we understand by nature that this spoken profession is, on a practical basis, of the greatest importance

-How can I believe you have faith in Jesus Christ if you never even say so?

-How can I accept that you are a Christian if you don't say what you mean by that?

-How can I know that you believe in justification through faith in Christ, not by works, if your testimony of conversion is just a story of what you did?

b. not making their profession dubitable with foundational errors

- i. for example Simon Magus, who said he would like to buy from the apostles the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit

2. they do this also by their walk, their obedience
  - a. submitting to baptism
  - b. gathering to do what the church does
    - i. devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching
    - ii. taking the Lord's Supper
    - iii. praying
    - iv. sharing their wealth
    - v. eating together with gladness and oneness of heart
    - vi. praising God
  - c. obeying the commands of Christ regarding our life in this world
  - d. not making their profession of faith dubitable by unrepentance toward sin
- B. understanding that there will be, from time to time, false brethren who make a false but believable profession of faith
- C. yet the basis for the formation of the local church cannot be actual, authentic faith in Christ, but must be credible profession of faith in Christ
  1. we do not have the ability to see the heart of other people
  2. we can only hear their words and see their actions

IV. This mutual credible profession of faith in Christ makes the saints in one locality willingly consent to walk together in obedience to Christ in a particular local church

- A. We do not have an essential unity with the people of this world
  1. we were one with them, but Christ has called us out
  2. we live among them, but we are not of them
  3. we refuse to live yoked together with unbelievers
- B. And so we are not willing to walk together with them; we wisely but painfully refuse to be yoked together with them
  1. if they do not profess faith in Christ as all
  2. all the more so if they do profess faith in Christ, if that profession is not credible, not believable
- C. But with those who do make a credible profession of faith in Christ, we willingly consent to walk together in unity; we gladly agree to it; we are so glad to walk together with these that we fairly run into each other's arms
- D. We then find it a joy to walk together in obedience to Christ
  1. teach one another to obey the commands of Christ
  2. cooperate with one another in preaching the gospel, making disciples for Christ
  3. encourage one another to remain true to Christ
  4. spur one another on to love and good deeds
  5. draw one another back when sinning
  6. serve one another, each according to his gifts
  7. edify one another, building each other up in the faith, according to what each person needs
  8. we obey the Lord's command to love one another, and to show the world we are His disciples by our love for one another
- E. So, understand that when you ask for membership in this particular church, you are agreeing to walk together with the other believers in obedience to the commands of Christ; when you accept someone into the membership of the church you are agreeing to walk with him in obedience to the commands of Christ
  1. this is where the idea of a church covenant comes into the discussion
  2. entering the membership of a church necessarily carries the aspect of agreeing or promising or covenanting with the church to walk together in obedience to the commands of Christ

V. These saints who consent to walk together in a particular local church are called members of the church since that is what they are by nature (1 Corinthians 12:13-14)

A. There is a spiritual baptism by the one Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ

B. In this spiritual baptism the dead, unbelieving heart is made into a new, live heart that believes in Jesus Christ

C. That spiritual baptism by the one Holy Spirit makes us the one body of Jesus Christ

D. As a whole, we who believe in Christ are the one body of Christ; individually believer each is a member of the body of Christ

E. Because we are spiritually, by our new nature, members of the body of Christ, we adopt that language in the local church and refer to one another as “members” of the church

1. some more generic word might have been used

a. a person of the church

2. some other word for the same idea might have been used

a. “parts” of the church

3. but the term “member” in Greek and in Latin has been used for this purpose as far back as we can tell

4. and the English word “member” has been used for this as far back as we can tell, at least to the early 1300s

## CONCLUSION

As to becoming a member of this particular local church, we are trying to have our procedure be the no more than what is necessary, so as not to burden anyone with requirements not necessary. Yet we must at the same time ensure we do not omit any requirements that are necessary.

So here is our procedure [explain]

You should not ask to be considered a member of this church unless and until you perceive that you are hearing and seeing a credible profession of faith from the members.

Members, that gives a word to you, too, doesn't it?