

**CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**  
**PART 3-WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?**  
**ACTS 2:41-47**

**Introduction**

A great deal of confusion exists concerning Church. Is one faith as good as another? As Christians, we need to recognize that the sole authority for our faith and practice is the Word of God! Understand that the Bible is our fixed point of reference! We must judge all things by the truth of God's Word! We must follow the Lord and be true to Him and His Word! But in doing so we are also to have His loving compassion toward others!

We are to be Biblical! If we stay with the Word of God, we can't go wrong! We will always have our critics! But we should love them too and seek to tell them about the Saviour!

Let's look again at what the Bible says in *Acts 2:41-47!*

The distinctive of the Church is its obedience to the Word of God! We must examine all things by the Bible! In everything we say and do, we should ask, "*Is this what the Bible teaches? Is this the clear teaching of God's Word?*"

Many times there is a family of Scriptures or a group of Scriptures that need to be placed together so that we may have the full idea of what God intends about a certain subject!

***Look at Matthew 16:13-18***

Christ said, "*I will build My Church.*" (When you build something there is structure!)

***Look at Matthew 18:13-17*** (Here we see structure!)

These verses don't include everything that we need to know about Church discipline and dealing with unruly people. But we can see here that the Church has structure and we can see part of the purpose for that structure!

We know that the greatest part of Church discipline is to be about restoring people back into the fellowship of the local assembly following guidelines in God's Word!

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*Galatians 6:1 – Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

So part of what we need to see here is that there was structure in the Church! There had to be some structure or there could have been no organized body to whom one could appeal. They were to tell it to the Church!

The word "Church" in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* meaning, "*called-out group or assembly.*" The Lord Jesus said, "*I will build My called-out assembly.*"

**THE MANDATE for the STRUCTURE of the CHURCH!**

When the Lord Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission to His disciples, He commanded them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The Gospel literally means the "*good news.*"

Consider Romans 6:23: There is *bad news*, and the *bad news* is that **the wages of sin is death**. In light of that, the *Good News* is that **the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**. Without the bad news concerning sin, the Good News would be no news at all!

We are to go out with the Gospel, give clearly the message of salvation, and lead people as God leads them by His Spirit to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus! But we are not to stop there! **We are not only to seek the salvation of the lost; we are to baptize them, and disciple them or teach them all things that Christ commanded! That is part of the mandate that God has given us!**

**When we consider this mandate, how is it to be accomplished? We must fulfill it the Bible way!** Thru establishing New Testament Local Churches! We understand that the local assembly, the New Testament Church, is to be made up of redeemed people, people who have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour!

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The Bible requires a **regenerated membership for the local assembly!**

Now understand that **ALL PEOPLE** are welcome **to come** to the services and listen to God's Word! But according to the Scripture, **the local Church membership should be made up of people who have been born again by God's Spirit!**

We understand that in this mandate we are also to obey Christ in the matter of baptizing those who have been born again by immersion!

And then those who are saved and baptized are to continue in the apostles' doctrine—i.e. the clear teaching of God's Word!

The Bible says in *Colossians 1:17-18*, "*And he [speaking of Jesus Christ] is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*"

The only head of the local Church is the Lord Jesus Christ! He alone is to have the preeminence in all things! This preeminence means He is the "*One and only*" in the Church!

*THE MANDATE for the STRUCTURE of the CHURCH...*

**THE MEMBERSHIP of the CHURCH!**

Some consider membership in a local Church to be unimportant, but what does the Bible teach? (**Look at Acts 9:26**)

Notice the word "**join.**" The word means "*to glue together or to cement together.*" Here we see that Saul of Tarsus (who became known as the Apostle Paul) recognized that there was a local assembly made up of disciples, and his desire was to join himself with them, but they were afraid of him!

Look at what the Bible says in **Acts 9:27-29!**

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Here we see that Barnabas stood up for him! Paul's desire was to join with them! He was not satisfied with simply saying, "*I am going to casually come and go as I please.*" No, he wanted to be solidly identified with that body!

Paul went to that local assembly and saw that this was a Church that was following God's mandate! This was a local assembly that was doing what the Bible says a Church should do! This was a group of people who had solidly joined together and have decided under God that they were going to be obedient to Christ and give allegiance to Christ and Christ alone as the only head! He wanted to join them!

In Acts chapter four, the disciples were having difficulty! They were being persecuted for their faith! We read in *Acts 4:23*, "*And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.*"

Notice that there was some group to whom they could report. "*They went to their own company.*" They had their own company.

Now look at what the Bible says in **Acts 5:12-14!** A strange thing happened in Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira had been struck dead by the power of God and a great fear came upon that assembly. It was not a terrorizing fear or some sort of frightening thing as someone running from a fire or from a natural disaster. It was a fear in reverence and awe of God!

People gave very serious thought as to whether or not they wanted to join a group of people who were having such things happen! They understood from the outside looking in how serious a matter it was to be identified with God's people!

The preaching began! There was a large gathering in an area called Solomon's porch, and in the congregation there was an assembly of people who were identified with this local New Testament Church!

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Solomon's porch was a large space where they could gather to preach in the temple area. There was something very serious about being identified with this local assembly of baptized believers!

I say to you in all kindness that so little is being made of Church membership in most places today that individual Christian people think they can hop from Church to Church and do as they please, never committing to anything. But that is NOT God's way!

Could I tell you that I believe this is one of the main reasons why so little is actually being accomplished in the work of God today! People unwilling to commit to God's Local Church!

Let's consider another example concerning Church membership.  
Look at *1 Corinthians 5:9-10!*

This Church in Corinth was having to deal with people in the Church who were involved in sexual sin and immorality!

This is such a powerful passage about the Christian life! Paul said, *"I'm not saying that you cannot have any contact with these fornicators or the covetous, or the extortioners, or the idolaters."* In other words, if you were going to get away from all sinners, you would have to leave the world!

But, they had to deal with this in the Church because of the testimony of the Church! **The testimony of Christ in that city was no more powerful than the testimony of that Church!**

With the shape many so-called Churches are in today, its no wonder that people think so little of God! There is no wonder that false religions are growing by leaps and bounds! And, by the way, the fastest growing religion in America is not Christianity! You know what it is? Islam!

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If Churches were doing what they should do, if each local Church was on fire with the Spirit of God, living the Christ-centered life, magnifying the Lord Jesus, taking seriously what God has given us to do, then there would be such moving of God that little or no attention would be given to false religion!

Paul explained that it is one thing when sin is in the world; it is quite another thing when it is in the Church! Look at *1 Corinthians 5:11!*

If there comes a time when there is a disorderly brother who is divisive or engaged in one of these named sins or something else we know to be in direct disobedience to God, the Bible says that we must not even eat with him!

It sounds cruel, but that is how much God is concerned about His name and the testimony of His people in this world!

Look at what the Bible says in *1 Corinthians 5:12!*

Notice the word **"without"** and the word **"within."** The next verse, Verse 13 says, *"But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."*

Paul declared that if there is someone in the world, lost without God and without hope, God will deal with that person. **But in the local assembly of baptized Believers that people mutually agree to be a part of, it is important that the testimony of that Church be upheld and that sin be dealt with inside that Church!**

We are free people! We are to remain free from all unholy alliances! Our allegiance is to be to Christ and Christ alone!

It is important to understand that there was a group **without** and a group **within.**

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If there was a group *without* and a group *within*, evidently they had membership and they mutually agreed to certain things that they would follow and a body of truth they would adhere to.

*THE MANDATE for the STRUCTURE of the CHURCH...*  
*THE MEMBERSHIP of the CHURCH...*

**THE METAPHORS USED to DESCRIBE the CHURCH!**

I want to emphasize several metaphors because these figures of speech are used in the Bible! These are expressions that give clarity to what we are all about! Let me give you a few that help explain the structure of the New Testament Church!

**A. The Body of Christ! (1 Corinthians 12:12, 26)**

This first metaphor is the *body!* This local assembly is a *body!* We only have one head, and that head is the Lord Jesus!

Think how precious this metaphor reveals the local Church to be!

As other members of this body grieve over the loss of loved ones who have died, we grieve with them; we sorrow with them! We also rejoice with them knowing their loved ones are with the Lord! They are a part of our body!

When we enter into this body, we are all members of this one body!  
It is unthinkable that one member of our physical body would attack another member of our body!

Would we take an axe in one hand and chop off the other hand? No!  
Would we do something terribly detrimental to one part of our body with another part of our body? Absolutely not!

When I am living in obedience to what I know to be true in my head, I would never do such a thing! When we are in obedience to our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, we will treat every member of this body the way every member of the body should be treated! (Vs 26)

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From time to time our members suffer. All of the members suffer. How many of you have ever known a member to be honored? When that member is honored, all of the members rejoice over that honor. They are not jealous over the honor that member receives; they rejoice over that honor.

We understand when we truly have a Church like God wants it to be, then we suffer together, we rejoice together, we praise God together! It is a wonderful thing to be one body! That is what the Lord has given us in the local Church!

**B. The Household of God! (Ephesians 2:19)**

The second metaphor is "*household.*"

We are a family, a household. I have a household, and I am the head of our household. My wife and I had the privilege of rearing two children for the Lord in our household.

I was not more important than my wife, and we were not more important than our children as far as value is concerned.

As far as structure and function is concerned, someone had to be the head in that household! Here is something beautiful that God teaches us in this household of faith—the household of God!

The pastor is not, as far as value to God, more valuable than any other member! The Lord loves us all!

Think of the Old Testament priest who wore the name of every tribe engraved on beautiful stones on a breastplate. There were also six tribes on one shoulder and six tribes on the other shoulder. He loved each of them individually, as displayed on his breastplate. But he loved all of them equally, as demonstrated by them being distributed equally on each shoulder! God loves all of us individually, but He also loves us all equally!

In order to function as a household, someone must lead! That is why we find a whole body of Scriptures in the New Testament about a pastor leading, a

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pastor ruling, a pastor being the bishop and overseer!

The people in willing submission understand that we need a pastor and the pastor leads in this local household! We treat one another as a family because we are a family!

I am grateful that we can forgive in a family! We do not hold grudges in a family! We do not bring up the sins of the past in a family! Think how beautiful, how spiritually beautiful a Church truly is when it behaves as a household! I am glad to be part of a household like that!

We pray for one another in our household! We are tender with one another! When we are ill, we care for one another! When we are weak, we help carry the load for one another!

If someone in your household is incapable at present of doing something that is a normal part of his routine, you help with that routine! You get under that load! That is a household; that is a family!

It is a wonderful thing that God has structured the Church this way. This was modeled for us in the Church!

We are not to have Churches within the Church, just as we are not to have a household within a household! I mean by this that we are one household! All are members of the same household! Never take actions that will divide the household and create schisms in the household!

**C. The Building of God! (Ephesians 2:20-21)**

Another metaphor used in reference to the church is a *building*. The Lord Jesus is the foundation. Do you know that in a building, the parts for the building are of little value when separated?

You could take stones for a foundation and put them on the ground, but they must be put in the foundation of the building to be of most value. You may

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take the windows out and lay them somewhere on the ground, and the windows are of little value until they are placed where they should be placed in the building. God says that we are a building and that we are fitly framed together.

**Conclusion**

Look at what the Bible says in *Ephesians 4:14-16!*

We've looked at a few of these metaphors—*a body, a household, a building*.

The Lord uses these words to tell us more and more of what He expects each local Church to be! As we follow God's Word, the Church can be a colony of heaven on earth for just a while until we meet our Saviour face to face!

I love the local Church. I love being a member, and I am willing to adhere to the body of doctrine we have found in the Bible.

I love behaving like a member should behave, because it is not only beneficial to me; it is also beneficial to all others—to the body!

When someone needs to be disciplined, then God has told us how to discipline a person in the membership! If you ever leave your local Church and you are going to identify with another local assembly, make sure it is an assembly that adheres to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice!

It is a beautiful thing to represent our Lord Jesus Christ in the local Church, which is *His body!* When we assemble together, we hear the Word of God, and that helps us to know what we should be!

As we leave the place of assembly, we should go out and behave ourselves as Jesus Christ would have us behave! The local Church is to move forward doing God's work God's way, seeking to win the lost!

We should want to know what the Bible says about things so we can say, "*Lord, I want to live in obedience to Your Word.*"