

“Placing Local Church Membership”

by Wayne Goff

Occasionally you will find a Christian who *complains* about “placing membership” in a local congregation, citing the fact that such a phrase does not appear in the New Testament. Yes, they are correct that “placing membership” is not a biblical term, but I would strongly argue that it is a **biblical concept!**

Other Christians *confuse* the **concept** of the universal church versus the local church, and simply say that Jesus Christ “*adds*” us to the church, **Acts 2:47**. Yes, Jesus adds us to the “universal church,” but that does not suffice for membership in a “local congregation.”

We see an example of Saul of Tarsus attempting to “*join*” (“place membership in”?) the local church in Jerusalem, **Acts 9:26**. We know that he was saved in Damascus when Ananias taught and baptized him, **Acts 9:17-18**. We know that the Lord recognized him as a Christian and added him to the church. But when he came to Jerusalem, the disciples were afraid of him because of his reputation of being one who brought threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, **Acts 9:1**! But once Barnabas confirmed that Saul was indeed no longer a persecutor, but a believer, they accepted him into their fellowship, **Acts 9:27-28**. All of this illustrates the process of what we call today “placing membership” in a local congregation. The idea is simply that each local congregation must determine for itself **who** is in fellowship with the Lord, and **who** is not, and thus extend fellowship to the one the Lord fellowships! Read **1 John 1:1-3**.

Corinth was in fellowship with one who was **not** in fellowship with the Lord, **1 Cor. 5**. This person was living with his father’s wife, and thus living in a state of adultery! God does not tolerate such behavior and sin, and neither should the local church! Paul’s apostolic instruction corrected the matter, and the erring church repented and corrected its mistake.

A local church with a brother named Diotrephes **refused** to extend fellowship to the apostle John himself, **3 John 9-10**! Thus that church was refusing a brother whom Christ accepted and approved! John said that he would deal with this

continued on page 361202

361201