

“Placing Local Church Membership”

by Wayne Goff

continued from page 361201

issue when he arrived there. So you see the issue with each local congregation. The eldership must decide to the best of their ability who is in fellowship with the Lord, who is not, and extend fellowship accordingly.

Implications Of Local Membership

Throughout the New Testament, there is not only a *distinction* between the local church and the universal church, but there is everywhere **implied** that one must “*join*” a local church to be recognized by that church and to be what God wants him to be. Let me give you a few examples:

Hebrews 13:17 ~ *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”* Notice in this verse that there are those who (1) rule over you, and those who (2) are to be submissive. This is referring to the relationship between the eldership and a faithful member. Elders cannot “**rule over**” those who are not a part of their congregation. Disciples cannot submit to those elders if they are not a part of that local congregation! So you see the obvious implication of each Christian “**joining**” or “*associating*” themselves with a local church. That is the only way one can have a relationship together.

1 Peter 5:2 ~ *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.”* The apostle Peter instructs “**elders**” (**5:1**) to “*shepherd*” or “*feed*” (**KJV**) “*the flock of God which is among you.*” Who are the “*sheep*” of the “*flock... among them*”? Elders may only shepherd one flock, the flock among them. But who are those sheep and how did they get to be among them?! Again, there is the obvious implication of a *relationship* between the Shepherds and the Sheep that began when each “*sheep*” joined the local “*flock*” (congregation). Otherwise, the eldership (shepherds) would have no idea who these people were. In spite of such obvious evidence, there are still those who are “*members at large*” — never joining a local congregation, but visiting around from place to place. This is not according to the Lord’s blueprint.

1 Corinthians 1:2 ~ *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”* There were “*saints*” which constituted “*the church of God which is at Corinth.*” How did that happen? How did each baptized disciple (saint) become a member of the local church at Corinth? Not every baptized disciple in the world was a member at Corinth! Obviously the implication is that when disciples lived in the area of Corinth, they “**joined**” that local church by “*placing membership*” in it. The same could be said for the local churches of Ephesus (**Eph. 1:1**), Philippi (**Phil. 1:1**), Colosse (**Col. 1:2**), Thessalonica (**1 Thess. 1:1**), etc. Each local congregation had members, elders (see **Acts 14:23**), organization, and worship. These brethren banded together to do together what God has commanded brethren to do together! You cannot be a “*member at large*” and fulfill your duties to a local congregation. If you are guilty of such behavior, then I urge you to repent and “*place membership*” with a faithful local church!

Ephesians 4:16 ~ *“From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* Paul is instructing the local church to behave like our physical bodies behave — in unity, harmony, and careful conduct and organization. Every member of every physical body has a part to do, and must do that part in order for the body to be sound! We understand that, don’t we? But the application is to the local church! Each member of the spiritual body has a part to do, and must do that part in order for the spiritual body to be sound and grow! Dear reader, are you a member of a faithful local congregation, and are you doing your part?!

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