

**"Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD!" -1King 22:16**

### Placing Membership

The word "church" in our English Bibles is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia". This word is also translated as "assembly" in **Acts 19:32, 39, and 41; Acts 7:38, R. V.;** and as "congregation" in **Heb. 2:12, R. V.,** as well as an alternate reading in **Mt.18:17, R. V.**

In relation to Christians, the word "church" is given two different applications in the New Testament. (1) The totality of all the saved (redeemed, saints, etc.) of the whole world. Such usage is found in **Mt. 16:18, Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18.** We generally speak of this usage as the "universal church". (2) A group of Christians who have united together to work and worship as a single unit. Such usage is found in **Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:13, 1 Thes. 1:1.** We usually speak of this as the "local church".

In **Acts 14:23,** and **Phil. 1:1,** we find that the "local church" is given a plurality of elders whose task is:

(1) to "oversee" (**Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2**); literally, "to look over — or after — a flock". (2) To "feed (or tend) the flock" (**Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2**). (3) Teaching (**1 Tim. 3:2**). (4) Protect (**Tit. 1:9**). (5) "Rule" (**1 Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17**); literally, "To stand before" or "To be at the head as leader". (6) To be an example, or pattern (**1 Peter 5:3**). (7) To watch after, and give an account to God for, souls in their charge (**Heb. 13:17**).

If elders adequately perform their God-given tasks, and discharge their responsibilities to the flock, they must know who are members of the "local flock — church", which they oversee. This necessitates what is generally called "being identified" or "placing membership". By this process the elders know that you are not "just a



visitor" but that you intend to "work and worship" as a member of that congregation, and to be under their oversight.

The scriptures indicate that Christians should be not only a part of the "universal church", but also a part of a "local church". When Paul arrived at Jerusalem, he endeavored to "join himself" to the disciples there (**Acts 9:26**). Paul and Barnabas later became "identified" with the church at Antioch (**Acts 11:26, 13:1**).

Though it is conceivable that conditions may exist, where for a time one is a member only of the "universal church" (**Acts 8:35-39**), he should, as soon as possible, become "identified" with a "local church", as did Paul and Barnabas (**Phil. 4:9**). If there is not a faithful congregation of the Lord's people meeting in that area, he should begin one. Thus, the idea that one can be a member of a "local church" where he has not worshipped for weeks, months, and sometimes years, is denominational in origin and unscriptural in concept.

Some, to avoid responsibilities and discipline will become "floating members"; just visiting around from place to place, never "identifying" with any one congregation. If these people become needful of discipline, and are approached by the elders of any of the congregations where they attend, their immediate reply is; "but, we're not members of your congregation!" Therefore, to eliminate this, when we move to another town, or permanently sever our connection with a congregation, we should find another faithful congregation of the Lord's people and "join" ourselves to them; settle down and go to work.

Also, we should not lightly sever our connection with one congregation and "place membership" with another. Naturally, if we move from one town to another, it becomes essential that we do so at once. Sometime we may deem it necessary to become part of another "local church" within the same general area where we have previously worked and worshipped because: (1) We feel it

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necessary for our own spiritual growth. (2) We feel that such will enable us to be more effective and useful for the Lord. (3) There are unscriptural doctrines and/or practices in the former congregation which we are unable to correct. However; let us be sure that we can substantiate our claim of such. (4) There is such a strong difference of opinion as to the advisability — not scripturalness — of a particular work or activity that we feel it is better for peace and harmony that we work and worship elsewhere (**Acts 15:36-41**). If this is the reason, when at all possible, we should “forbear” with one another (**Eph. 4:2**). (5) We have been unscripturally and unjustifiable “withdrawn” from and are unable to get the mistake corrected. This sometimes happens. But let’s be positive it is they that are wrong, and not us! Also, that we have done ALL in our power to rectify the error!

When we leave one congregation and become “joined” to another, we should be ENTIRELY POSITIVE that our motives are honest and justifiable. It should never be done: (1) To put pressure on the former congregation to honor our particular whim. (2) Because the truth has been preached and our toes thereby stepped on. (3) To escape discipline or responsibilities. (4) Through jealousy and envy because we have been passed over for some particular work. If it be for such reasons as these, we will soon be dissatisfied with the new congregation!

When one “identifies” himself with a congregation, he should be admitted into the fellowship of that “local church”. If there seems any reason to doubt or question his previous faithfulness, the elders should exert every effort possible to satisfy themselves that this person is faithful and not in need of restoration. If it is found that he has not been faithful, or transferred membership to escape needed discipline, then the church should institute disciplinary action against this new member just as they would against any other. Likewise, if we seek to sever our connection with one congregation that we may be “joined” to a religious body in error, the elders have no course open but to begin disciplinary procedure.

- James Dennison

**Sermon Notes**

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Sermon Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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