

Session 6: Church Membership

2018 Fall Bible Conference

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Say the text concerning the matter of the ultimate aim of church life is, indeed, Ephesians 3:21, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen." The endgame of the life and ministry of the church is to manifest the excellencies and the perfections of the Triune living God, to do so in our worship, to do so in our personal relationships, to do so in our ministry to our fellow mortals, to put on display the perfections of the Triune living God.

One other matter, well, two other matters. First, thank you for your cordiality and reception over these days of Deborah and I, as well as the word of God, your entering into this twofold labor that goes on on either side of this workbench, my labor of preaching, your labor of hearing. Thank you for what you have invested in terms of your effort, your time, your resources to be here.

Yesterday, I muffed a quotation that comes from Luke 19:10. That quotation was connected to the language of John 4 at verse 23, "for such people the Lord seeks to be His worshipers." The proper quotation of Luke 19:10, the account of Zacchaeus, "For the Son of Man has come to seek," there's the verb, "and to save that which was lost." Going back to the John 4 passage, the reality that the Father seeks these true worshipers who worship in spirit and truth, should elevate our assessment of the worship we offer to him in the assembled church.

Now in our final time together this late afternoon on the Lord's Day, I refer you to the fifth chapter of the book of Acts. In Acts 5, Luke narrates a double excommunication carried out by God himself. Much progress had been experienced in the Jerusalem church during the time after Pentecost. The summary found in chapter 2, verses 43 to 47, points to a prospering, unified, peaceful church and thus in a fallen world where we must live out church life, it should be no surprise that opposition would arise endeavoring to thwart that progress.

First, it came from the outside. After Peter's healing of the blind beggar, chapter 3, verses 1 to 11, and after his second sermon, chapter 3, verses 12 through 26, opposition did arise from without. Acts 4 narrates the arrest and the trial of Peter and John. The sequel to the arrest, trial and decision of the court included the church's first recorded post-Pentecost prayer meeting in chapter 3, verses 23 through 31. Then following that at the end of

chapter 4, Luke gives a second summary of the church's life. The church's unity and witness continued to flourish and, again, we should not be surprised that opposition again arises, but this time from a different quarter. Opposition then arose from within the ranks of the church. In the context of the generous example of Barnabas, there arose the internal threat of deceit and hypocrisy by Ananias and Sapphira. These two wanted others to think of them as Barnabas-like members of the Jerusalem church and they were willing to deliberately create false impressions and deceitful misrepresentations of themselves to try to gain that kind of reputation. They acted out a lie hoping others would think that their show of generosity was genuine. Well, their conspiracy was dramatically answered. Verses 5 and 9 through 10 detail that double excommunication.

Now the aftermath of that event is described this way in Acts 5 at verse 11, "And great fear came upon the whole church," and that's the first time in Acts that the term "church" occurs, and in this case, in reference with the church in Jerusalem. "Great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things." Closely connected to this episode and with a church that is now purged, at least for the moment, of hypocrisy, is a description that follows beginning at verse 12 of more progress, "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people," that is, the people of Jerusalem, the observing surrounding populous, "and they," the reference is to the whole church now, "they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico." That was their meeting place, the meeting place of the whole church. Verse 13, "But none of the rest," that is, the outsiders, "none of the rest dared to associate with them," with the whole church, "however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number."

Now go back to verse 13, if you would, "none of the rest." You've got the rest, you've got the whole church meeting on Solomon's portico, "none of the rest dared," the idea of daring is to put away fear, to take a stand, none of the rest would do this, "none of the rest dared to associate with them," that is, the whole church. Now what is translated "to associate," to put it simply, means "to cleave, to cleave to like glue; to weld together; to be attached to; to unite with; to join," as the Authorized translates, "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them." The verb signifies much more than in a casual relationship.

Now this is evident from how it's used in some other notable places such as Matthew 19:5, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and," here's our verb, "cleave to his wife." Is that casual? A resounding, no. It's anything but. It's the closest union among mortals. Cleave to his wife, well, that's the same term used in Acts 5:13, "But none of the rest dared," and we could translate, "to cleave with them."

The term is used in 1 Corinthians 6 at verse 16, "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot," joins is how it's translated there, "is one body with her." And in verse 17, "but the one who joins himself to the Lord." Is that a casual, occasional, informal relation? Anything but. "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him."

Again noting Acts 5 at verse 13, "none of the rest dared to associate with," to cleave with, to join with. It signifies a gluing or cementing or welding together of things. The rest would not do this with the church. There were those of the populace in Jerusalem aware of the signs and wonders taking place, perhaps they occasionally came to Solomon's portico where the church met and heard the preaching of Peter, but having heard of these things, that is, about Ananias and Sapphire, they were not going to lock hearts, they were not going to lock arms with a church, they were not going to be glued in an accountable, committed, identifiable, unified relation with the whole church. They were going to stay their distance because they were rightly convinced church life is serious business.

Now I refer to Acts 5:13 and specifically to what Peter Masters calls the glue verb to raise some questions that at least the text suggests. Did the local churches during the time of the apostles have a definite identifiable membership or not? Did believers join, unite with, attach themselves to a local church so as to be recognizable, accountable members? Or did local churches consist of a group of people who for a time in our lingo of the day, visited, attended occasionally but at length moved on, migrating to another church they came to prefer? Was there an official formal membership that could be named and counted and when needed acted upon in corrective discipline, those who had been received into the church on certain terms, or was the local church a group of casually gathered people, people who frequently attended but had no committed accountable relation? Was there an organized membership or not?

These are front-burner questions in our generation. In our generation of what, to use the words of Mark Dever, in our generation of commitment-phobia, Lone Rangerism, whereby the church is treated as if it is a retail store, the consumer enters upon his desire or perceived need, gets what he wants and walks out the door with not committed relation at all. He is a consumer out shopping at the church market and if he's not pleased, he simply goes to another church store to see if he can find the commodity he's looking for there. What seems to be desired is a church at my convenience, on my terms, it's all about my needs, crass individualism, and after all, church membership is not found in the New Testament, so it may be said. "I'm a member of the church universal and that's the only thing that is important." Brethren, my assertion is that the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament clearly points in another direction, it points to the reality of church membership, that is, of organized, identifiable, accountable members who have been converted, who have professed their faith in Christ by way of baptism, and in the language of our confessions, do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving themselves up to the Lord and to one another, and what I want to do in the balance of our time is take you through 10 lines of biblical thought that I'm persuaded lead absolutely to that conclusion, and I'll try to move quickly with 6:30 as the goal line.

Number 1 of the 10 lines of thought. It is the analogous relation of the old covenant nation of Israel and the new covenant church, the Israel of God, as Paul calls it. Old covenant Israel was a distinct, identifiable, organized theocracy. It was not a roaming nomadic mass of people. There was a specific mode of entry, descent from Abraham. There was an identifying mark, circumcision. There was appointed leadership. There was

an appointed priesthood. The tribes were numbered. A census was taken, Numbers 1. Another was taken, Numbers 26. The tribes' camps were around the tent of meeting and they were designated, Numbers 2. The tribes set out in order upon the sons of Israel journeying from the wilderness of Sinai when the cloud was lifted over the tabernacle, Numbers 10-11. Each tribe was appointed its designated territorial inheritance in Canaan. Old covenant Israel was not an informal, indefinite, vague multitude. It was an organized nation with a specific citizenry over against the foreigner, the alien and the Canaanite. Galatians 6:16, the church is now according to Paul, "the Israel of God." The church is now in the language of Philippians 3:3, the true circumcision. Peter writes, "To those scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God for God's own possession." Taking those descriptors of the old covenant theocracy and plainly applying them to the churches of Asia Minor. The point is this: as the old covenant nation of Israel was a distinct, identifiable, organized entity, so is the church. There is definition. There is distinction to its citizenry. There is Christ-gifted leadership. The church is an organized entity with a specific citizenry and leadership and mode of entry, spiritual birth.

Secondly, the meaning and majority usages of the very word "church." The term "church," as has already been noted in a previous message, simply means "called out ones," and was used of a body of citizens called out and gathered together; a called out assembly of citizens of a given civil jurisdiction. It's used that way three times in Acts 19. In Acts 19:23-41, there was a riot in Ephesus because Paul had proven bad for the idol-making business. Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions, were dragged along by the rioting crowd and at verse 32 the assembly, the ekklesia, the church was in confusion. Verse 39, "it shall be settled in the lawful," ekklesia, "assembly." Verse 41, "he," the town clerk, "dismissed the assembly." Who constituted the assembly? The citizens of Ephesus. A civil jurisdiction. Members possessing rights and privileges, not anyone who happened to be on vacation in Ephesus; not anyone who happened to be transiting Ephesus, visiting Ephesus, just passing through.

The term "church" is used in Acts 19 as well as Acts 7:38 where it is rendered the congregation or assembly in the wilderness. It is used in the vast majority of cases, as has already been noted in a previous message, for local churches, the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, the church in Cenchrea, "Greet the church that is in their house," to the church of God in Corinth, "Have it also read to the church of the Laodiceans," the elders of the church to pray over him, "I wrote something to the church." The meaning of the word along with its most frequent use to designate a local visible body of believers signifies analogous to its usage in Acts 19, a definite, particular, identifiable entity, not an amorphous, jelly-like, vague, poorly defined blob whereby you do not know who's a citizen, who's a part of the called out assembly or not, whereby it cannot be distinguished or identified. It is not some indistinguishable, migrating, loose-knit, come and go, ever changing group. That defies the very sense of the word.

Thirdly by way of lines of thought, the metaphors used to describe the church, do they convey a definite identifiable entity or a loose-knit, hard to distinguish entity, an entity about which it's hard to determine who's a part of it and who's not? Think of the metaphor

of body. I read from 1 Corinthians 12 at verses 12 to 27, actually excerpting from that section. Verse 12, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." Verse 14, "the body is not one member, but many." Foot, hand, ear, eye. Verse 20, "But now there are many members, but one body." There should be no division in the body but that the members should have the same care for one another now. "Now you are Christ's body and individually members of it." Who is he addressing? The church in Corinth.

Now consider the metaphor "body." It is not an entity composed of loosely, haphazardly, indistinguishable, non-functioning parts. That's madness. Rather it consists of identifiable, inter-dependent members each constituent member a functioning part of the whole. You know when something is or is not a part of your body and as much time as I have spent in front of this pulpit, I still know it's not a part of my body. The church knows the same about its body, who's a member, who's not.

There is the metaphor "household." Galatians 6:10, "Those who are of the household of faith." Ephesians 2:19, "You are of God's household." 1 Timothy 3:15, "The household of God which is the church of the living God." Consider the metaphor. Household is a specific, identifiable, family unit. Father, mother, children, you can name who's in your household. You can count who is in your household. You know who is a member and who is not a member and within a household there is organization, there are standards, there is a division of labor, there is inter-dependent functioning, so it is with the household of God, the church of the living God.

Those are salient characteristics of this repeated metaphor used to describe who you are and there is the metaphor "flock." Acts 2:38, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus," reading from verse 17, "and called to him the elders of the church." And at verse 28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Plainly the equivalency between the metaphor "flock" and the church. A flock is not a random collection of sheep. A flock consists of definite sheep and shepherds know their flock. John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd and I know My own." Sheep belong to specific flocks with specific shepherds. 1 Peter 5:2, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, proving to be examples," verse 3, "to the flock."

Well, I'd ask you: how can a man who is a shepherd of a flock of God, how can he shepherd that flock without knowing who the sheep are who constitute the flock? No more than the baseline of the metaphor, a literal shepherd would know which sheep that he is to guide. You've got to know your sheep. They're identifiable. These metaphors convey definition, specificity, clear-cut identification relative to the local church. They point to what is called membership, those added to, joined to, welded to, attached to, glued to, received into, a local church.

Then there is this line of biblical thought, the selection of office-bearers. I refer you to Acts 6:1-7, a passage which provides an early view of the developing church some five or six years after Pentecost, and in the language of Curtis Vaughan, "Just as the sin of

Ananias and Sapphira's came within a period of great spiritual revival, so the murmuring in the present passage took place within another such period." Now to sum up the narrative here, verse 1, you see identified the problems. Verse 2, you see the judgment of the apostles regarding resolving the problem. And now verse 3, the solution, "select from among you," second person plural imperative, you all select from among you, brethren, "seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." Verse 4, the apostles resolve to stay with their prioritized labors, a "prayer and to the ministry of the word," and now verse 5, the solution that they have set forth and set before the church is implemented and, "The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose," third person plural, they chose "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch."

So what do we have here? We have a corporate congregational selection. The question that I ask you: who did the selection? Who did the selecting? Who did the assessment? Who discerned the qualifications, anyone who showed up? Anyone who had visited for a few Sabbaths? No, those who were glued together, those who knew these men and could assess these men. They in the language of verse 5, chose these seven. The critically important exercise of assessing deacons, 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and elders, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, demands a clear-cut membership to assess and examine and then choose. On the return leg of the first missionary journey, we read this in Acts 14:23, "And when they," Paul and Barnabas, "had appointed elders for them in every church." The NAS renders the verb "had appointed," the verb simply literally means "to stretch out the hand."

Quoting John Owen, "Appointing, ordaining, creating elders by election or the common suffrage of the disciples. They were chosen by the people. To lift up or stretch forth the hands or hand, to choose, elect, and this was usually done with making bare the hand and arm with lifting up." Our confessors, chapter 26, the way appointed of Christ for the calling of any person fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit unto the office of bishop or elder in the church is that he be chosen there unto by the common suffrage of the church itself. That is demonstrated by example in Acts 14:23 by the literal rendering "to stretch out the hand." Granted, the apostles appointed but the mode of appointment was the common suffrage of the church.

Now thinking about that and I might add of a deacon that he be chosen by like the suffrage, is the common suffrage inclusive of anyone who shows up at a church meeting? Inclusive of those out church shopping or church hopping? No. The common suffrage is exercised by the constituent members of a church who have determined that a man is qualified for office and they are going to place themselves under his leadership.

The fifth line of reasoning, the duties of elders. 1 Thessalonians 5:12, "We request of you, brethren," now the brethren are going back to the opening of 1 Thessalonians, the church of the Thessalonians. "We request of you," plural, "brethren," plural, "that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction." I focus upon the second of those two descriptions of the elders' duty, "have charge over you." The idea of presiding over, governing, superintending; the

idea of doing that in a certain realm or jurisdiction of constituents. The idea that these men know the boundaries of their domain, here it's the brethren of the Thessalonian church. I assert there must be definition in a church for that to take place.

1 Timothy 3:5, "But if a man does not know how to manage his own household well, how will he take care of the church of God?" The household a father manages, and the church an overseer takes care of are definite, specific. The members of each are known and clearly distinguished. How does the elder take care of without a definitely identified assembly of people?

Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." We could ask the question: for whom shall the leaders give an account? Anyone who visits? Anyone who shows up to hear a few sermons? For there to be accountable watch care, there must be a distinguishable group of people who have subordinated themselves voluntarily to their leadership. How can it be any other?

1 Peter 5:2, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight." And in verse 3, "nor yet is lording it over those allotted to your charge." That's very revealing language. It's the sense of assigning in this case, the shepherd-elder, assigning a portion, assigning one a share. The NAS, allotted. That's the language of definition, specificity, particularism. If somebody assigns you a share, you know what's your share and what's not. The elder must know who they are allotted to his charge, who constitutes the flock so as to carry out his shepherding responsibilities.

In James 5 at verse 14, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him." We could ask: which elders, which church? The church that meets down the street that your children went to vacation Bible school 10 years ago? The church someone visited a few months ago? That makes no sense. No, it's the elders of the church to which the sick one is glued to, joined to, accountable to.

Then sixthly as to a line of thinking, there is the matter of corrective church discipline and in our litigious age, I would offer ever more you should know who is in your church before you take this action. In Matthew 18:15-17 wherein "church" appears for the second time, Jesus sets forth the incremental steps of corrective church discipline. If the private encounter of verse 15 is met with impenitence as well as the semi-private encounter of verse 16, then, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer." Now who is to be told of the offense of the impenitent man or woman? Who is to be told is a given visible body of believers who have subscribed to certain standards and a framework of corrective discipline and will respond properly to the offender. These things necessitate an organized accountable membership. We do not tell anyone who happens to visit.

Then there is 1 Corinthians 5. The church was tolerating a scandalous sinner in view who was guilty of sexual immorality, verse 1. "He should have been removed from your

midst," verse 2. And at verse 4, "when you are assembled," and then Paul gives instructions. I take them up at verse 9, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within," in the NAS in italics to apply the inferred sense, "within the church. But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

Now to quickly look back, this is what we have. Verse 12 you have outsiders, and then you have those who are within. There must be the cognition of who's in these two groups. Verse 13 again, you have "those who are outside" and then "yourselves." The leaders of the church in Corinth had to have the capacity to understand who was who. Then you have the command, verse 13, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." Was Paul simply telling them not to let the offender attend church?

In chapter 14, verse 24 and 25, it is evident that they allowed unbelievers to attend. This offending professor was being removed from their membership. This was not a visiting unbeliever. How could he be removed, that is, the offending professor? How could he be removed if there was not consent to be accountable? How can one be excluded if he is not first included? A floater, a church drifter, a perpetual visitor, an occasional attender, they can just walk away. Analogously, you cannot fire someone who doesn't work for you. You can't impeach an official of another country. I assert, brethren, that church discipline requires an accountable covenanted membership, anything other renders it impossible. It neutralizes these very instructions.

Now seventhly, it's the list of widows, 1 Timothy 5, who are to be supported by the church. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, we have revealed a dimension of the benevolence of the church. Let "A widow be put on the list only if," and then certain criteria are set forth. Note the language, "put on the list." It could be translated "enrolled; registered; put on the list." It signifies those classed together in distinction from those not listed. For a widow to be put on the list meant that she would be supported materially, benevolently by the local church.

What we have here in connection with widows speaks of organization, method, and a list of names within a local church and we could ask: to what extent is a local church responsible benevolently for widows? For all widows who occasionally visit? Widows who are simply familiar with your church or who unilaterally claim your church as their own? No, for Timothy to whom this instruction is given, it was the widows in the Ephesian church. There were names, there was a method, there was criteria, and there was a list. That speaks of organization. That speaks of order. That speaks of distinction, not some confused mass.

Eighthly, we have the rebuke, the rebuke of and instructions for the observance of the Lord's Table by the church of God which is at Corinth. One of the several problems

reported to Paul related to the manner in which the Corinthians observed the Lord's Table. Quoting now from chapter 11 at verse 17, "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it." Now I pause to add the comment, they must have known when they had come together as a church, they must have known who constituted coming together as a church. Then in verse 33, "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Now if they did not know who to wait upon, how long would they wait? They've got to wait for one another, for the church to assemble. What do you deduce from that? They knew who they were waiting for. Coming together as a church, division among you, wait for one another combine to infer an awareness among the Corinthians of who constituted their visible local church. There were people with faces and names. They knew when they had gathered and they knew who to wait for.

Ninthly, somewhat general heading, various other references to the church. Acts 14:27, "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report," that's Paul and Barnabas, reporting in Antioch on the first journey. I assert they must have known when the church gathered together to know when to begin their report.

Acts 15:22-31, the report of the Jerusalem council. Verse 22, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. So," verse 30, "when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the church together, they delivered the letter." How did they know when to deliver the letter? Well, it's when the church gathers together.

Romans 16:5, "greet the church that is in their house." I think it's confident to deduce that Prisca and Aquila knew exactly who constituted the church that met in the meeting place of their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19, "Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." Colossians 4:15, "Greet Nympha and the church that is in her house." Colossians 4:16, "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans." Then backing up to 1 Corinthians 11 at verse 23, "If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?" You've got distinct groups.

Charles Hodge comments and I quote of that text, "shows that the church at Corinth was a distinct assembly, not including others who might chance to be present in their meeting. Had the church been a loose or unorganized assembly, these visitors who came in would have formed a part of it, but the distinction between them and the church is marked and clear. Moreover, the phrase 'if the whole church be come together' manifestly implies that there was a definite number of persons who were expected to convene and who, when convened, constituted the entire body. This would not be true of an unorganized assembly."

And then finally, I offer to you as another line of reasoning the one-another directives and prohibitions of the New Testament which there are 30. There are 25 positive directives and 5 prohibitions and I pause to explain this interesting pronoun translated consistently "one another." One another signifies a plurality of people and we know that because every time it occurs, it's in the plural. It signifies a plurality of people of the same kind. We know that because the New Testament readers use another term to describe others who are different. A plurality of people of the same kind with mutual duties. Technically, one another is what's called a reciprocal pronoun. I have a duty to you and likewise you to me, mutual duties.

Now the baseline for the "one another" directives and prohibitions is our shared common life in Jesus Christ as is expressed in Romans 12:5, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Ephesians 4:25, "we are members of one another." The primary, the first, the immediate sphere of application of the "one another" passages is your own assembly of "one anothers," the people with whom you are bound in accountable, committed, brotherly relations and with whom you gather for the worship of God and strive together for the faith of the Gospel.

This is evident, not speculative, evident by the elementary observation that the "one another" directives and prohibitions in context are addressed to local churches. The exception to that that comes to mind is, "live in peace with one another." Our Lord said that in Matthew 9:50. But the vast majority of the "one another" directives are addressed to churches, to visible, organized churches wherein people have real relationships which if they are to be sustained over the long haul in a sound healthy condition, there must of necessity be the application of the "one another" directives and prohibitions. Do they apply to what we call the universal church, the whole number of the elect? Well, sure they do as we have dealings with brethren beyond our own local assemblies. These "one another" directives and prohibitions apply but that's not the real test, the real test, the pressing relevance of these directives and prohibitions concerns those in our churches. They are addressed to churches, those we see and meet with and speak to and pray with and work with regularly. The urgency of application is within local households of God wherein we are involved in close regular relationships characterized by a variety of needs and trials and discouragements and weaknesses and differences and offenses of various sorts.

And the million dollar question is how do we respond to that? It's easy to maintain casual occasional relationships with other Christians that maybe we just see at family conferences. That really doesn't prove much of anything. But when you meet together week in and week out and you're praying together and you're fellowshiping with one another and you're worshipping together and you're rubbing shoulders with your brethren, with your "one anothers," that's the acid test. Much more challenging. To carry out the "one another" directives in the context of those to whom they were addressed in the New Testament, that is, those with whom you rub shoulders regularly in visible, local, organized churches, the primacy, the urgency, the immediacy of application, to put it simply, is right here amongst you brethren sitting in the chairs. You can look around and

these are the brethren with whom, to whom, the "one another" directives and prohibitions are primarily applicable, how you get along with one another in a local church.

Brethren, I assert that an identifiable, distinctive, organized, accountable membership is necessary to the ministry of a local church, to the pastoral functions carried on in a local church, to the corrective discipline of a local church, to the member-to-member relationships within a local church, and it is no service, no benefit, no real benefit to allow perpetual visitors to linger in unaccountable, uncommitted, casual relationships. We're doing them no good. Believers in the New Testament are called to be glued to local churches, accountable to the same, to specific local churches, not wandering about nomadically.

Among the applications to this truth, I hold ours at Ballston Lake in my hand, a part of our constitution. I would be almost absolutely certain you have the same where you worked out and put in writing what the biblical qualifications for membership are. We have in Section I as part of our constitution, those qualifications: professing repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ; demonstrating the fruits of regeneration; professing saving union with Christ in baptism; expressing substantial agreement with our church's statement of faith; and willingness to submit to the government and discipline of our church. Those people are eligible for membership. Then a section on our methodology of receiving those members and section on what I consider the irreducible minimum members' duties in a church if the church is to function and minister in this world. The point is not that you do it like us, the point is you do it, that as a local church you've thought through these matters and I have to, I'm just about absolutely certain you have.

It is a blessing of grace to be a member of Christ's church and that being so, may we give ourselves afresh to consistent churchmanship, adding moral weight to what it means to be a member of Christ's church, giving integrity to church membership by our own consistency, giving credibility to what it means to be a member in this church, and credibility to its message. May we be men and women renewed in our consistency of churchmanship and the particulars that involves, a blessing to be glued to the church of Jesus Christ. May that blessing move us to be faithful and consistent in Christ's church.

Let us pray.