

Accountability? How?

Church Membership

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Hebrews 13. We're talking about the idea of church membership or at least the idea of church membership. Hebrews 13. We're going to look at particularly on the front page of your paper. We're under number 3, and Hebrews is an interesting book, for one thing, it's actually not meant to be a letter more than it is a sermon. We know that because of verse 22 of chapter 13, "I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words." So it's intended to be a script or a written sermon more than it is a letter and that is why it's one big argument for Jesus being basically the greatest High Priest ever, that ever will be.

I've hear some well-meaning people that I think need to read the book all at one time to fix themselves. They say that Hebrews is just about Jesus being better and it starts out with Jesus being better than angels, being better and being better but the reality is the entire book is about him being a high priest and a great High Priest with better covenants. All that being said, you don't need to know all of that to get to chapter 13 and see two verses that look an awful lot alike. Verse 7, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow." This is the same kind of thing Brother Walter was teaching us in Philippians, those things which you have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, Philippians 4:9, do. Right? So Paul says whatever you see in me, do it.

Now that's pretty bold and here the writer of Hebrews says when you see those who have the rule over you and, by the way, that is a shepherding term. I don't know if anyone knows exactly what a rod was used for. It was used for a number of things, everything from beating off wolves as a shepherd to breaking the legs of your sheep when they would run off. If they had a high unusual propensity to run off, you would break their legs, a shepherd would. But a rod was also used to keep a good count. You would hold the rod over the door of your sheep, the sheepfold, and as sheep would pass under it, you had a good straight line there to count them as they passed under it. So here, those who have the rule over you are those who are keeping a good count of you.

"Remember those who have a good count over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." Then in verse 17, it sounds a whole lot like verse 7. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for

they watch out for your souls," look here, "as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." So hopefully, if I was talking to a mult-church audience tonight, I would say hopefully you have a pastor that feels accountable for your well-being, your spiritual well-being. And since I know your pastor, I feel confident that though he may not be a good one, he's at least concerned for your well-being in the soul.

Now consider under number 3, Hebrews 13:17. As Christians we are to submit ourselves to the authority over us, you can say. If there is no local church membership, then who do we know to obey? Also, if there is no local body of believers, for whom is the pastor responsible? Okay, so let's break this down in a couple of different... If you don't belong to a church, how do you fulfill this verse? Now there is a difference and we don't want to sound cultic and so help me, brothers and sisters, I want everyone to know every day of my life the Holy Spirit pulls the reins back on your pastor because I want to control everything. I don't know, maybe everyone feels that from time to time but I do not want to get to the point where I feel like I have to control everything and every day the Holy Spirit seems to say, "Ah, you don't have to do that. You don't have to control that. No, you don't have to control that. No, you don't have to control that." And over and over and over again, I'm convicted and convinced by the Holy Spirit that there are some things I don't have to have control of. But clearly in these two verses, I have to be real selective about what I give back as it comes to the well-being of your soul.

So if this is true and if we're talking about those whose faith you're supposed to follow in verse 7 who have spoken the word of God to you, if we're not talking about the shepherd and a flock, what in the world are we talking about? So if you're supposed to obey the person who rules over you and watches for your soul, verse 7 and verse 17, how do you do that without belonging to that pastor, that shepherd? That is what the word means, by the way. Pastor, strangely enough if you put in the word "pastoring" in MS Word, Microsoft Word, it autocorrects to pasturing, p-a-s-t-u-r-i-n-g, because the words are so similar that there's precious little difference between them. But pastor means to shepherd. It comes from the Greek word "to feed." So when we say the pastor is a shepherd, that's literally true. It's a fact. That is what it means. A pastor means a feeder of sheep or a shepherd.

So if that's true, and it is, then how does a sheep know to follow a shepherd if they don't belong to the fold or belong to the flock? So this strange idea that you don't have to commit to a local church is bunk if you really want to be able to live by the spirit of verse 7 and verse 17. Moreover, it works the other way too. How is a pastor supposed to know who he's accountable for? It says in verse 17 that we must give an account. Well, how do we do that if you haven't made a commitment to the church and you don't consider me your pastor enough to even say, "Well, this is my church and here's how this is my church. I'm making this public commitment to the church that they know I'm one of them. I can count on them, they can count on me. And this man is my shepherd." Because this kind of willy-nilly stuff where I show up when I want to and if I feel like I'm accountable to you, then I am. And if I don't, then I won't come back. It's certainly not within the spirit of this passage.

You see, it's two ways. How does the shepherd know who he's responsible for and which shepherd are the sheep responsible to if there is no official committed body or number that's supposed to be counted? Does that make sense? It works this way with deacons too. What, are we supposed to just give every visitor to a deacon to care for? What happens if they decide not to come and we take them off the deacon's list after a month and then they decide to come? Do we add them back? And then if they don't come for a straight month, do we take them back off? And we put it on deacons to not only know members but non-members? "Let's just scrap membership." Okay, so you don't want deacons? "Yeah, we do." Well, how is the deacon supposed to work with sheep? "Ah, just kind of look around, help the best he can, sort of." No, come on, folks. We see that it's hard to be accountable for people when there is no group that is settled or official to be accountable to or that is known.

Alright, so end of that sentence: since the believer is to submit to an elder and the elder is responsible for certain souls, the believer must be a part of a local body. Any thoughts on that?

Now, you see, this is an answer to the people that say, "Well, show me the word 'membership' in the New Testament." I can't but there are some real implications to these verses. And we haven't even touched on democratic church bodies. We vote, right? And we have to have a way to determine who is voting.

Alright, well, why don't we look at 1 Timothy 5 if no one has a comment or question. Let's look at 1 Timothy 5.

("Does every family at this church or in most churches have a deacon that is, not responsible but...") Yes, thank you. Yes, you should have a deacon assigned to you.

We're in 1 Timothy 5 if there are no other questions. 1 Timothy 5 and let's take a look at verse 17. Now I think, Brother Walter, didn't you teach us about a year ago 1 Timothy? ("Yeah.")

So here we are in verse 17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor." Alright, so "elders" comes from a particular word, presbuteros if memory serves me, or is it episcopos? Hang on a second. Do you remember, Walter? I can't remember. Hang on one moment. What's that, brother? Okay, presbuteros, elders. So bishop is episcopos, elders is presbuteros, and elder is actually the position of one in charge and he has two functions: oversight or bishop, feeder or shepherd or pastor. So the elder has two functions: oversight and feeding. So we have the elder and he has two functions: pastoring and oversight, and we find here he uses the generic term for the leader, "Let the elders." And we see back in chapter 3, verse 1, we actually have the word "bishop" being used if you have a King James or New King James or something like that.

So, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." The implication there is that there are some elders

whose job is not to labor in the word and doctrine. There are some elders whose job in the body of Christ is to simply provide oversight and wisdom, not necessarily to do the preaching or the teaching in the church, although we're told that they should at least be apt to teach in chapter 3; they should be people that are able and willing to teach but the particular people that are supposed to be accounted worthy of double honor are those, again to our notes, we see the elders who do well?

(unintelligible) What is it? Rule well deserve double honor. If that be the case, how can a believer know if an elder is worthy of double honor if they have not submitted to his pastoral oversight? So you have to rule well to be considered worthy of double honor, well then, how do you know a person is ruling well if you aren't submitted to their rulership? Again, you have to be very careful. A lot of pastors abuse this. Maybe you've been in a situation where some pastors assume they can tell you how to do everything and run everything and it's very dangerous.

I just finished reading a book this week about the FLDS. You might remember 1984 two men killed their sister-in-law and her baby in Utah and they felt like they were doing the will of God. It was called blood atonement. The Fundamental Latter Day Saints believe in polygamy and blood atonement and I don't know if you remember that or not but this is a book called "Under the Banner of Heaven." I finished reading it this week and, you know, all bets are off when a man stands in front of a crowd and says, "I heard from God." Right? "God told me." And just when you think, "Ah, we're Baptists. We don't believe that." Oh my goodness. I guess we've been running in different circles because I've heard a ton of Baptist preachers say crazy things like, "God told me." Okay? And that is nigh unto cultic. I mean, how do you top that? Brother Rolf, God told me you're supposed to donate your car to such-and-such over here. Well, I mean, my goodness, I really put you in a spot there if you don't feel led. How do you top the pastor's revelation?

So it's very dangerous. We want to make sure that we don't have a pastor that feels like he can flex his muscles and rule everything, but typically, brothers and sisters, we don't struggle with that in our American churchianity, we struggle with pastors that don't want anyone thinking anything ill of them.

So here we have this requirement that you should have an elder who knows how to rule things a little bit, make some administrative decisions. Well again, if you're not under his oversight, how do you know if he's worthy of double honor? I won't beat that dead horse.

We talked about Acts 2 last week. We're still in 1 Timothy 5. 1 Timothy 5 is incredibly, this is so good, folks. 1 Timothy 5 is incredibly helpful for us when we realize that it really is God's, how do we say? Social Security plan.

Why don't we take turns reading verse 3 through 16 and who will read? We'll begin reading one verse at a time and we'll need someone to start with verse 3, and we don't have to go in any particular order of reading, we just need to read all the verses. So if someone please begin with verse 3 and read a couple of verses, maybe one or two verses, and then someone else will pick up.

"Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." Alright, so we are supposed to show piety at home, to repay parents. Apparently that is an expectation of Christians, alright? Honor widows who are truly widows, verse 3, and be ready to take care of your parents at home.

("Is that what piety means, take care of?") Show piety at home. Well, piety is typically when we say someone is pious, we mean that they're incredibly devoted and sober towards their beliefs. So if you're really sober toward your belief and you're a slave to the Gospel, it drives you to be gracious to people and we hear that the great commandment is to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and who? Your neighbor as yourself. So my first neighbor should be my wife and it should work out from there. Somewhere in there should be my parents as some of my first neighbors, right? So if you're really driven by the Gospel of grace, then you shouldn't have to be pushed, prodded, kicked, threatened, to care for your parents, alright? So I don't think that this means that you have to do it in the structure called your house, when it says "show piety at home first." I think it's saying that, hey, take care of your own acreage before you start mowing someone else's sort of thing. Take care of the neighbors at your house first, right?

Alright, so verse 6, please, 5 and 6, please. Let's find out who a real widow is when Paul says, "Let's honor widows." "Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." So we don't support widows just because they're widows, we honor widows, particular kinds of widows.

("Alone. No kids.") Right. Right. And she's not a soap opera addict. She's not just doing this all day.

("She's praying.") She's doing some godly work.

Verse 6, please, "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own," in the context, his own what? His own widow, his own family, sure. His own widow, "and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Worse than an unbeliever if you don't care for your loved ones in the context, particularly who? Widows indeed. Yup, real widows.

Verse 9, please. "Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man." Alright, so you're not supposed to support a widow unless she's a widow. We're not just looking for little old ladies to support. She has got to be a particular kind of honorable woman who really has been married and proved to be a good wife. By the way, she has to be 60.

("Under 60.") No, 60. What's the implication there?

(unintelligible) What's a second implication? So Rolf brings a good point but I want to take it after Sue speaks. Go ahead.

("A woman younger than 60 could remarry.") Right, and that's precisely what Rolf...very good, thank you. So we're all thinking alike here is that if she's not 60, she might be able to get married again and I would say that maybe even a little older nowadays and you might be able to get married again. But I won't say anything more about that because I don't want you to feel awkward so I won't do that, whoever we're talking about.

So anyway, the fact is we've got people who are not 60 yet and Scripture says that they can be married again maybe. That's kind of the implication, right? Are y'all with me? Okay.

So, "well reported for good works." A good reputation, right? Okay, "if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." Brothers and sisters, that's a list. This is not someone who got saved last week that we feel sorry for, right? We're not talking about somebody that got saved at a revival meeting last spring. No. Doesn't qualify. This is a list that tells us what?

("A life story.") Yeah, a life full of consistent Christianity, sacrificial consistent Christianity.

So let's talk again about verse 9. "Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into," what does it say? "The number." So there's a list. Okay, so here we are. If we don't have a thing called membership, what in the world "list" are we talking about here? So there's a list and then there's a list within the list of widows that we care for.

(unintelligible) Go ahead. ("This is one of those situational Scripture things and I don't mean that it doesn't work in other cases, I mean you have to think about the times in which these people lived. If you've got barely enough food to eat yourself for your family, then you are to take care of someone else, it's a big deal because your livelihood is going to be stretched. So we live in abundance in America so most of us could take care of someone else without putting us in the poorhouse or without us starving to death type situation. So Paul is saying there are some qualifications because of the situation which most of those people lived in. They were generally not well fed, they would probably be lower middle class people that we're talking about. There were rich people in the early church but on the whole, daily life, a lot of those people were struggling so you had to have some kind of qualification for if you were going to help somebody with what little you had, Paul has given them at least guidelines of the person that you are trying to help.") Yes. ("So that was a help to them, I believe. I feel guilty driving by one of the bums and they've got their little handmade sign, and we probably should because we have a lot of abundance. There should be some qualifications of how we spend our resources and this is what Paul I think is doing because they in that time, they were mostly poor people.") Yes, certainly, and I would just like to echo that by saying I don't think for a

minute that if we were going to care for widows, that that means this is a static list. As Walter was saying, this is a particular letter, a particular setting, and they had limited resources as a church and so they had to set up minimums. And since you can't support all the ladies who are widows over 50, then you had to have particular standards of 60 and above. Am I saying that God's word doesn't mean what God's word says? I am but I'm also reminding us, I am saying that God's word is God's word, but I am also saying that this is a letter, a real letter written from a real person to a real person who pastored, we find out in the beginning of the book, in Macedonia, I believe, and he had limited resources in his church. So there are minimums.

("Isn't there one other thing...women were not very valuable in most cases in this society and read in different places in Scripture where a woman's husband dies, if someone does not step up, isn't she on her own?") Well, that is precisely the story of Ruth. ("Well, that's what I was thinking about.") Yeah, Ruth has nothing. I should say Naomi has nothing. Her husband dies and then her sons die. ("Nobody. Not a man in sight.") Yes. So when she goes back to Bethlehem, she really needs a Boaz but she's too old for Boaz and so she takes Ruth, her daughter-in-law, really not even her daughter-in-law anymore, her widowed daughter-in-law, and sends her out to get food so that they can live. I mean, remember, they were thinking eat. They're not talking about electricity, right? We're talking about eating. So this has application.

("God put all that together.") God put it all together but please notice at the end of the passage in verse 16, "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." So let's first of all list a few things I'm not saying. Everyone, I'm not saying them, there may have been others that did, I am not saying if you're 60 years old. I am not saying that if you're a widow that you don't have a right to a pension. I'm not saying there shouldn't be government help. I'm not saying any of that. I am saying that some of that which simply wasn't in existence then and the idea was we make sure as Christians that we are doing whatever we need to do to make sure that our widows are cared for with these stipulations. Think through this. If you're Pastor Timothy and you're some of his bishops and deacons, think about how hard it was to go through this list and decide who gets to be on the widow's list.

There is this thing called accountability. They actually had to look at a few of these ladies and say, "Not 60. We've got to start at 60. We have limited resources. She's 58 but she's not a widow. She was never married. 56, 61, but we can't accuse of her having lodged strangers." And some would have been tempted at that point to say, "Well, that's awful judgmental." Too bad. There was an accountability in the body of Christ that was just downright earth shattering.

Now how earth shattering was this accountability? Take a look at verse 19, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses." Look here, verse 20, "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear." So if there is sin, sinfulness, they are supposed to be rebuked before all. Now come back with me. Let's get to the context of this passage. Are we talking about all the people

that live in that city? What are we talking about? All that are under the elder, yeah? All that are in this number we've been talking about all along. You see, this is pointless if there's not a designated or specified or quantifiable group of people. It's pointless. You can't have business like this if, "Ah, she hasn't been here like eight months. Well, you know, I mean, she's a widow and you know. One time she was washing feet, I guess. I don't know." There has to be a level of accountability. Do you see how that works?

So in this blank, in this passage, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, in this passage there are specific requirements to be met if the church is to support a widow financially. How would the church support specific widows if they do not have a prioritized list that would stem from the members of a local body of believers? It's about doing things in order.

When I was in the military once upon a time, they had this thing called the Order of Merit list, OML. Yeah, no kidding and they called it an Order of Merit list and they said if you want to go to a particular school, fill out this form and we'll stick you on the OML. You're like, "Oh, right." So you filled out a form, you get put on a list. Order of Merit, and what decided how much merit you had were a number of things. If I wanted to go to Rangers School, for example, I had to prove that I had a job that could benefit from me being a Ranger. If I was a pencil pusher, a paper processor, I didn't need to go. I was down at the bottom of the list. My merit was way down there. If my health was good, I might be able to last through Rangers School, I'd go up. But if I was having a hard time squeaking out the minimum number of push-ups, hm, you're down there. You're not going any time soon. Everyone has to be dead before you go to Rangers School, you know? I mean, just a number of things that decide where you belong on that list.

It is a part of life and the problem in our snowflake sort of world is that we don't want to think for a moment that there is a thing called merit. Sorry, Charlie. Here in this 1 Timothy 5, there is a thing called merit and you're supposed to take care of widows that have lived a long life of Christianity. By the way, 60 is incredibly, it seems arbitrary but 60 not a lot of people lived into their 70s and 80s and 90s back in the first century. The idea was that this was a short term solution and so maybe...by the way, can I just say this? I don't want anyone in the room to die, okay? So now that that's out of the way, the reason that Social Security keeps getting bumped up and up and up is because back when it started, at age 60 people were living to 65 or 70. It was a five year, six year plan. Now people are living to be 90. It wasn't designed to support people for 30 years. And then we decided to kill 55 million taxpayers in the wombs of their mothers. So you kill the salary base and you lengthen the lives of the people that are needing the Social Security and you have a two class disaster.

("Somewhere I read that there was an interchange between two women, I don't think this was a secular book, I think it was ???. But there was a conversation between two women and they were both, one was seeking counsel from the other one and she says, 'I'm poor. I have no money. I have nothing. I'm down to the end.' And this lady says, 'Well, why don't you go down to the synagogue and ask to live there?' Was there such a thing as the synagogue being a place where these destitute people could go?") There's a hint to it with Anna the prophetess in Luke 2. She lived there. There is a hint to it that Samuel was a

special guest at the synagogue, particularly not the synagogue, of course, you know, first of all, Anna wasn't at the synagogue, she was at the temple. Second of all, Samuel wasn't at the synagogue, he was at the tabernacle with Eli. So there are a few hints to that but I'm not aware of anything. That doesn't mean there isn't, Sister, it means that my knowledge of Hebrew history doesn't encapsulate that answer.

Any others? Anyone else have some insight to what Sue was saying? Okay.

("I have an insight. We've got two extremes that we learn from this. There are people that were probably not obligated to help but there is the other end of the spectrum, there are people who we are obligated to help and if we don't help, we're what?") Worse than infidels. ("Worse than unbelievers. Sometimes it's easy to say, 'Well, you know, we'll do it a little bit,' and forget there are obligations to widows that, in some cases, we're all guilty of neglecting in a sense. Sometimes we just forget about them and we don't know who they are and they don't show up at church because they can't. Out of sight, out of mind. What I'm saying is yes, let's be concerned about there are some qualifications of people that we probably should be helping, already helping and we're not and that's probably the group that we need to concentrate on. That area, keeping up with the widows who do meet the qualifications because the consequences of that are severe.") Yeah, thank you. And in the context of our discussion as to whether or not church membership is biblical, don't forget we have to have that OML, that Order of Merit. We have to have a triage.

How do we help people? Well, brothers and sisters, we had 315 today. That's pretty wild considering we had 417 last week, right? Then the Sunday before that we had 398 and the Sunday before that we had 257 because someone heard it was going to snow or something crazy like that. So anyway, it was this kind of thing. So on a given Sunday, 100 people will come through the door that are not members and do you know that I often say to every one of them, "Please fill out a connection card. Please," if they're male, "text me and we'll go out to lunch. I need to know who you are." I'm tired of asking the same people their names. It's aggravating to me because they could help it.

So am I supposed to care for them as much as I care for you? Seriously. I don't need the VBS answer, I need the real common sense answer. When I say care for them, I'm not talking about for them as souls, do I want them to go to heaven, do I want them to feel like they're.... I'm talking about something much more practical to the everyday usage here. How am I supposed to care equally for 600 people when 380 have made a commitment? I can't.

("The thing that's missing is the word 'communication.' If they will not communicate with you...") Well, what we have decided as a church is since we're too big to have church in your living room, you see, this is how we would handle membership in the first century if we're having church in Steve's living room, if we didn't want somebody to come, guess what Steve would do? "I'm sorry, you can't come in here." Right? That's pretty simple. That was church membership. Who is in your church membership? The people meeting in Steve's house on Friday night. Can anyone come? No, we're full. But maybe I can

work it out for you to visit us once. Now we don't have that. Now we're too big for that. Remember, if there are 15 of us meeting in a living room and I say, "Hey, we need to decide, folks, if we're going to have a meal next Sunday. We need to decide if we're going to support this missionary. We need to decide if we're going to get new walls for Steve." Then it's simple. I see all 15 of you four out of five Sundays. You all can help me make this decision. We would call a vote, right? But since we don't have that management, we have to have something a little different. We have decided that the first level of communication is you decide to join this church. That's what we've decided. We have to have a way to prioritize care. We have to. We can't care for people who might come. We can't put them up here with members.

Brother Brent? ("In our church, do we have a list of widows that meet this criteria and it's something we keep up with and who we support?") I can tell you that we have a list of widows and I can tell you that myself and Brother Walter and Tammy have reviewed it the best that we can and as far as we know, we are meeting it only in the following ways: first of all in our constitution, we have a benevolence fund and benevolence team. It's comprised, the benevolence team is comprised of at least one deacon, maybe two. Walter, I can't remember the most up-to-date version of it. But Claude Harmon is the deacon in charge of that team and try to make it as streamlined and easy as possible, we have given out from the general fund hundreds and probably thousands of dollars since I've been here. It doesn't mean that, "Wow, the church has really got it together." It just means that that's all I know since I've been here.

I can also tell you that we have several groups of people that are concerned about our widows. The Carolina Faith ?? does work at a lot of our widows' homes. The youth are painting the apartment walls of a particular member that hasn't been here since 2010. So we have about 12 people I would say are shut-ins and that's not what you asked, you asked about widows, but I'm just thinking how are we caring for them, is there a strategy and right now, thank the Lord, because of, the best I can tell, we're dealing with one hurting widow and Walter is working with her right now because he's her deacon. To the best of my knowledge, we're doing a pretty solid job on that. So basically the pastor and the deacons try to make sure that that happens because we don't want to embarrass the widow. That's a good question. Thank you.

Any others? Alright, let's take a look at Romans 16. So again, the reality is that we have a church membership not because we have a proof text that says, "Thou shalt have a church membership," we have a church membership because...I know what you're thinking. You want me to land the plane because it's almost half-time, don't you? I'm like, "What's all the commotion over there?" And it dawned on me, "Like, can you just end seven minutes early once?" There is nothing in the Bible that says, "I must go a full hour." But if we start with Romans 16, it will most certainly take us beyond the hour and so we will pick up with Romans 16 next week and my prayer is that we will be done with this study next Sunday night.

(unintelligible) Yeah, I think it would take us past the hour if I started Romans 16. That's what I'm telling myself.

So you should be coming away from this building, from this room, with two realities: one, we have to have a way to prioritize the way we do business and the way we care for people; and two, there is no absolute, "Thou shalt have a church membership," but what we learned last week is that that number that God saved at Pentecost was added to a number that was called the church, right? So it looks as though they had a list of people that belonged.

Yes, sir? ("Daily.") Daily. Yeah, Yeah. So anyway, that's another hour.

Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to study the word clearly. We know that there are some parts of Scripture that we scratch our heads and wonder exactly how timeless they are, we know that, but we thank you for giving us special insight to the book that you wrote. You're so kind to us. A generous, generous God, that's what you are, to give us not only the word of God but the writer to help us understand what was meant. And I pray that you would help us to continue to be humble servants of the Lord who try to understand your word. Thank you, Lord, for each widow that you have given our church. None of them asked for it. None of them asked to be widows and certainly wasn't intended on being a major topic tonight but here we are in the middle of Scripture and we've found ourselves talking about how to properly care for widows and how your New Testament authors wanted them to be cared for. Thank you, Lord, for the interest in the room to care for widows. I pray that you would help us be unusual as a church, a church that not only knows its membership but cares for its membership, one for another. Please help us to prioritize rightly in this age where churches are struggling to even keep their doors open. We are not. In an age when we have churches struggling to feel the word is relevant usually, cool, we're doing our best, O God, just to be faithful to your word and to keep clean facilities and to be interested in world missions and to care for our members. Just real fundamental stuff. Bless us as we do that, please. Help us to be people that are accused of loving each other. We thank you for those who are traveling out from us today, that you bring them back safely. We thank you ahead of time for bringing them back safely. Now, O Lord, keep us safe on the way home. We know accidents can happen in a matter of a mile so please keep us safe and we will thank you for hearing our prayer. In the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Biblical Perspective on Church Membership



1. What is the church?

The church is “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into a public place, an assembly”¹ Acts 19 provides the only times (of the 118) where this Greek word is mentioned in a context other than “religious,” and we see it is either a mob (19:32) or a lawful, governing, local body (19:39, 41). One begins to really see what the disciples would have expected when they heard this word used by the Lord (Matthew 16:18).

I Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 1:22-23 tell us that the church is the Body of Christ and is made up of individual members. Revelation 21:1-9 and Ephesians 5:21-32 show us the “great mystery” is that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it as his Bride.

Ephesians 1:10 provides a “called out assembly” understanding in that all believers are “assembled” in Christ—even now—in Heaven (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6)

2. What is church membership?

A church is when the local body of Christ recognizes a person as a believer.² In Acts 2:37-47 there are several characteristics that are demonstrated by those who are in the same church. First a person must repent and be baptized. Second, an individual must affirm the same core doctrines of the Bible. Third, the believer will fellowship, both in and out of the church with other believers, as well as pray for them.

3. Is church membership biblical?

(Hebrews 13:17) As Christians we are to submit ourselves to the ruler over us. If there is no local church membership then who do we know to obey?³ Also, if there is no local body of believers for whom is the pastor responsible?⁴ Since the believer is to submit to an elder, and the elder is responsible for certain souls, the believer must be a part of a local church body.

(I Timothy 5:17) We see that the elders who rule well deserve double honor. If that be the case, how can a believer know if an elder is “worthy of double honor” is they have not “submitted” to his pastoral oversight.

(Acts 2:37-41) We see that there is a numerical record of those who have believed on Christ. The church at Jerusalem was keeping a record of growth.

(1 Timothy 5:3-16) There are specific requirements to be met if the church is to support a widows financially. How would the church support specific widows if they did not have a prioritized list that would stem from the members of a local body of believers?

¹Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *ekklēsia* (Strong's 1577)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2012. 23 Oct 2012. <
[http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?
Strong=G1577&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1577&t=KJV) >

²Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus (Crossway, Wheaton Illinois, 2012), 29.

³Is Church Membership Biblical; Matt Chandler, www.9marks.org/journal/church-membership-biblical

⁴Ibid.

Turning over to Romans 16:1-16 the reader will see there is a distinct body of believers in Rome that are in churches that Paul knows. The amount of knowledge Paul has of these Christians is a clear example that these people are members of a s_____ body that serve there, and have served for a length of time that has made them of honorable mention.

1 Peter 5.1-5. If I am not a member that means I am not under the numbered F_____ of an under-shepherd or pastor to be looked after. This means I will miss out on the feeding of that flock as well as the careful watching of that shepherd. The under-shepherd will have to give an account to the Great Shepherd for the flock he has been given the oversight of; he needs to know who his sheep are. How can a shepherd know when one of his sheep is missing if he does not know which sheep do not belong to him?

4. Why should I be a member?

As a member I can have an active role in the d_____ of the church by the ability to vote in a congregational form of government. I will be able to be known as a member of that church (1 Corinthians 5:7). Looking at 1 Corinthians 5.1-12 the reader can see sin in the church which Paul deals with. The membership of the church is subject to D_____ from the church. A “brother” cannot be put *out*, if there is not a specific *in* to which he belongs.

I will be better fitted for S_____ (Acts 6:1-7).

Being a member places more credibility upon a person who has a desire to work in a particular ministry making me an active part in the E_____ or growth of the church (Ephesians 4.11-12).

As a member I will help the B_____ work properly (Ephesians 4.15-16). I will have the added blessing of being held

A_____ for my actions (Ephesians 4.25).

The church will look after the needs of W_____ (1 Timothy 5.1-3).

5. What are the biblical requirements for church membership?

Acts 2.4-47. Those who were added to the church had first “received his word” and then were “baptized.” The Lord “added” to the church daily those who were “saved.” A person must profess Christ as their Savior through baptism to be entered into the membership of the church.