

Shepherd an Unnumbered Flock?

Church Membership

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We're in Romans 16. This is a very peculiar chapter because, to be honest, no one goes here really for proof texting. This is one of those things where you say, "Yada yada, etc. etc., amen, next book." But there are some interesting clues here to our study so we are in Romans 16 and I wonder if we could just have some readers, if I could have someone read verses 1 through 2.

Now typically when you get to a long name, you hear some people say, "Alright skip," and you go to the next. No, we've got to read the names. Just go phonetically, try to pronounce it, and no one is going to sit in here and poke fun if you can't pronounce the names.

So who will read verses 1 and 2, please? All right, Deborah. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."

All right, so we have the sister named Phoebe, you might notice that word "servant" there, I don't want to make you nervous but that word "servant" is the word "deacon" in the Greek, and all of a sudden those who believe in sister deacons, they usually go to this passage. I don't want you hearing that for the first time when you have a discussion with someone about whether our church should have female deacons, okay? There are some pretty well-known, godly, conservative people that have female deacons in their church and I just don't think that that's the biblical way to go. I'm sure I have the agreement of the majority of our church, given by the fact that we are 12 for 12 with males on the deacons. But there are more things to be mad about but I don't want you hearing for the first time from someone else that there is an idea of a female who is called a deacon in the New Testament. There are things to discuss but that's not why we are in Romans 16 so we will keep reading.

Who will read verses 3 through 5, please? "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ."

All right, first of all, that town Epaenetus is from Achaia, that's actually a province in Corinth, or I should say on the Macedonian Peninsula. Some have said and I am probably agreeing that this is your first convert. Notice "the firstfruits," that he might very well be the first European convert to Christ right here and he is mentioned, by the way, in the closing of a letter. And what is Paul doing? He's asking them to greet, now who is carrying the letter? Who is probably carrying this letter? Who is probably the mailman?

("Titus.") Hmm, maybe so. It looks like you have a penman, you might notice verse 22, "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord." What, I thought Paul wrote Romans? Paul, they are definitely his words but it appears that there is a penman named Tertius who wrote down what Paul said. Isn't that something?

("It doesn't mean that he carried it to them?") No, it doesn't mean he carried it.

(unintelligible) The whole book, the whole letter called the epistle to the Romans. Yeah, I think you're right. You would probably pronounce that Phoebe but you're probably right there.

So this Phoebe is probably the carrier of the letter and what is at the end of this letter and that's why Paul is saying, "Hey, you need to receive her. Receive her in a way that is worthy of the saints in whatever business she has need of you, for indeed she has been a helper of many." Then he says, "Greet the following people," so that means these following people are in what church? Now remember, they are supposed to greet certain people for Paul so where are these people living?

("They are in Rome.") Yeah, they are in Rome. Okay, so greet this person and that person and these people and those people. So clearly these people regularly worship in Rome with this church body otherwise what's the point of saying it, right?

All right, so someone please read verses 6 through 7. "Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."

That Junia as Matt read, that's a female. We can't lie about that. That's a female noun in the Greek and you might notice that she is of note among the apostles. So all of a sudden there are people out there, why am I telling you this? Because I don't want you to hear it for the first time from someone besides your pastor. There are people out there that say, "There is even a female apostle." But it doesn't say that she is first of the apostles as one of the apostles, it says that she is known among the apostles, okay? So we just want to be real honest about what we're reading here. So more people that are regulars in the church of Rome, okay? More people.

("It also says that they believed in Christ before he did.") Yeah, who were in Christ before me. Yep, they have been serving the Lord for a good long while. So there are apostles before Paul and Paul readily admits that, doesn't he? So Paul says, "I wasn't the

first apostle," as a matter of fact in 1 Corinthians 15, the very next book, he says in chapter 15 that he went and saw the apostles after Christ appeared to him, or I should say that Christ appeared to the apostles and in Galatians 2 he talked about the apostles who were already in existence.

So verses 8 through 11. Who will read those, please? "Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord."

Interesting, I have a neighbor from Romania whose name is Narcis. I talked to him yesterday and they go to the Romanian Christian church in town. I think they're going to come to a sunrise service. So more people that are in the Roman church.

All right, who wants to take a stab at verses 12 through 15? "Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord," probably twins, keep going, "Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus," that's not the guy on Fat Albert with the hat pulled over his eyes, "chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."

So does anyone remember the only other time there is a Rufus mentioned in the Bible? No, there is no book named after the show, "Fat Albert," we're not talking about that.

(unintelligible) Just when you think you're the wittiest guy, let you down through the rufus.

All right, so you all remember Simon of Cyrene, probably the black man that helped Jesus carry his cross. Do you remember that? And it says in the book of Mark that he had two sons: Alexander and Rufus, and there are a lot of reasons when you think who is Mark written to, does anyone remember? We haven't really talked about it during the Sunday morning service but Matthew has written to the Hebrews living in Judea, Luke has written to the Gentiles, Mark is typically known as the words of Peter written by Mark to the Christians at Rome. So when you're like, "Why does Matthew not mention Rufus and Alexander? Why does Luke not mention Rufus and Alexander? Why does John not mention Rufus and Alexander? And all four of them mention Simon of Cyrene? Why?" Well, because Mark was writing to the Romans and Rufus grew up and became a believer in the Roman church. That's one idea.

Okay, so what I'm trying to get you to do is to do more than read the black ink on the page. Why if you're reading the book of Mark, who cares who Simon of Cyrene's sons are unless you are supposed to care who they are, right? Unless you are a recipient of the Gospel of Mark. Then this makes some pretty good sense. So here's this Rufus character and a lot of them think...

Keep reading, brother. Finish your reading. "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the

brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you."

All right, so here we are on the top of the page for tonight's notes. 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, we are looking at the first blank to fill in, the amount of knowledge Paul has of these Christians is a clear example that these people are members of a blank body. You should be thinking what? Specific body that served there and have served for a length of time that has made them an honorable mention, made them of honorable mention. Brothers and sisters. If you would have told them, "Eh, you don't really have to commit to a particular body," well, then there is no telling if they would have ever gotten these greetings. Do you see how that works? Specific body.

Yes sir. ("Back up to Priscilla and Aquila.") Okay. ("Romans was written in the mid 50s, somewhere in my mind Priscilla and Aquila were Christian Jews and the Jews got driven out of Rome, the city of Rome. It seemed like they ended up in Corinth at some point. Before or did they go to Corinth and go back to Rome? Do you remember? They didn't stay in Rome. I mean, they may have returned to Rome. That's the part I don't know.") Well, I think that the first time we run into Aquila and Priscilla is when they bump into Apollos in, like you said, Corinth or near Corinth. Here's the reading from Acts 18, "A certain Jew named Apollos born in Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately of the things of the Lord though he knew only of the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him," so Aquila and Priscilla are in Ephesus as of Acts 18 and, forgive me, I said that was the first time we find them, actually the first time we meet them is as you pointed out, in Corinth in chapter 18 of Acts. "After these things, Paul departed from Athens, went to Corinth and he found a certain Jew named Aquila born in Pontius who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla," because, as you pointed out, "Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome and he came to them." I think that's dated 51 A.D., isn't it?

("They went back to Rome.") Yes, maybe after the new emperor. Does anyone know when Claudius cashed in his chips? Died, bought the farm, kicked the bucket, and other colorful syllogisms? I don't and it looks like based on the timeline that we have, it looks like that Aquila and Priscilla did indeed return to Rome.

So the point that I want you to see by coming here is that Paul had a measure of predictability about who would still be at the church when he wrote his letter to the church.

("Still another seven years or so before he shows up in Rome.") Yeah, it seems like. ("Actually getting to Rome.") 62 I think is right. I think Acts 28 happens around 61-62 if memory serves me. Yeah, we are at seven years and to some degree, and he gets there

Acts 28. The big voyage is Acts 27 when he takes off for Caesarea Philippi on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and travels and lands in Rome after being shipwrecked in Acts 28. So, yeah, I don't think I have, I don't think I know anything beyond that but what we do know from this passage is that Paul had a certain amount of assurance that people he knew were in Rome before he wrote the letter would be in that church after the letter got there. There was no frivolity of, "Well, if you don't get along at church, move on down to Harmony Baptist down the road." One church in that city and even if they met in separate locations, that church was under the leadership of pastoral oversight. So I'll show you that in a minute.

Yes, ma'am. ("That was one of my questions. You are calling it one church but they are saying they met in different homes. So what made them one church?") All right, let's take a look at Acts 20 for an answer. Look at Acts 20. If they are meeting in different locations, how can we call them a singular church? It's a surprise. Really, that's stalling. I'm looking for the verse. So Acts 20, we'll look at verse 17 and we have Paul on his third missionary journey.

Now brothers and sisters, don't feel like you are way behind if you don't know what in the world the preacher is talking about or Walter or whoever in your class says. You know, second trip, third trip, yada yada yada. That stuff can really, you're like, "I don't have any idea which mission trip he is on. Okay, will you spare me of this?" So don't get overwhelmed with that. The reality is that we are on our third trip which begins in chapter 18.

So in verse 17, he is on his way back to Jerusalem and he stops off not in Ephesus, verse 13, "Then we went," Luke included, "ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board." So Paul is traveling by land and there is a ship traveling the coast to meet him at his next stop. Paul is visiting saints along the way on hard terra firma, and he has people, including Luke, who are on a ship to meet him at a port.

So verse 14, "when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Chios." Now, I'm not super educated. I'm hurrying through the pronunciation before anyone can help me with it. That's what's happening here, okay? Just hurrying through the words. That's how all good Bible name pronounces do it, hurry through it.

"The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium." Isn't that slick? "The next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus." So he is not landing in Ephesus. Ephesus is in present-day Turkey, okay, and Paul is not interested in stopping in Ephesus, "so that he would not have to spend time in Asia," which the New Testament Asia is Turkey, right? "For he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost." So here we are, we have met up in Miletus, "he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to

you, and taught you publicly and," here we go, "from house to house." That's a very good hint that if the way he taught the church and its presiding elders was to do so publicly and house to house, that bigger churches met in separate houses, each house having one or two or more elders.

All right, now I have fussed with other Baptist preachers about this. Why am I willing to say that the major way that he disciplined this church in Ephesus was house to house? Well, for one thing we don't have a whole lot of New Testament proof that they owned 500 seat auditoriums. Okay, that's the first thing. The second thing is that when you read the book of Revelation, you find that the church, the letters to these churches, are written to singular pastors, "The messenger of the church at Smyrna. The messenger of the church at Sardis. The messenger of the church..." Now they are called angels in English but angel is not an English word, it's a Greek word transliterated. Okay, what does that mean? That means that in Greek it is spelled a-n-g-e-l-o-s. So angelos, right? Well, the English form of that is angel. It's not an English word. Angel is not an English word, it is a Greek word that we have Anglicized. So it says that the book of Revelation was written to seven angels of seven churches but the word angels is otherwise or angelos in the Greek is otherwise translated messenger. So the book of Revelation was written to the seven messengers to the seven churches.

So apparently at least 30, 40 years later when Revelation was written, each church had one main messenger. Here we have several elders. Now what changed between Paul and John? Well, Diocletian changed. That's the Emperor during the late 80s. That's after Nero and churches were scattered and perhaps shrinking although growing in other locations. But here in the infancy stage of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20, within years of their founding, they are meeting apparently in houses.

Acts 20:20 says that Paul met them and disciplined them from house to house. If our properties are seized by the government, how do we remain Sandy Ridge Baptist Church? House to house. We have to have several groups and then church discipline is easy, real easy. Like if we have a section of the church meeting at Rolf's house, we just have to identify an elder that will oversee the discipleship of that house part of Sandy Ridge Baptist Church and church discipline is super easy. Rolf gets up and says, "You should probably leave." Then he tells the other elders in the other houses because it is in his home. It was super easy. You know, "You're not welcome in our church anymore." Well, why? "Well, whatever reason." And it was simple. "You can't come and meet with us anymore." Then at the next elders meeting, Rolf would say, "I want you brothers to know that until Brother So-and-so makes things right with our church at my house, he's not welcome in the church which meets in separate houses." So what do we have in Hickory? Why do we have about 100 Baptist churches and if you get disciplined out of a church or you get angry at the preacher, you have all kinds of choices? Well, in this situation you don't have all kind of choices, your choice is reconcile with the church that meets in several places.

Yes sir. (unitelligible "We were back in Cuba and back before we left, the guy that was the missions director was a preacher too. His church that he left to become the missions

director, we went to that church that night. There were 28 home churches in that one church. The reason is in Cuba you cannot have more than 15 people in one church. If you go over that, you have to register with the government so they had 28 home churches in this one church, like what we have.") Excellent illustration. Thank you. Excellent. Yep.

So how do you control transfer of membership between Baptist churches in a single city? They all become the same church that meets in separate locations and there is one list and all the pastors of their separate houses within the church discuss, "All right, who is the believer that needs to be restored?" And that believer has to go back to where they caused trouble and restore themselves or be restored or reconciled with the church or they can't attend any of the churches in the church. Now again, we don't have to have that here because if you get upset, you can plant another church, right? I know we haven't experienced that here but it does happen.

Let's look at 1 Peter 5. That's one way to plant churches. 1 Peter 5. And so we know when that person that you're talking to they find a reason to not be a Christian and their reason is, "Well, look at all the factions in Christianity," agree with them. Hey, I got it. That's a good reason they don't want to have any part to do with us. I get that. That's a problem. That was not the plan of God. Read your New Testament.

(unintelligible.) Well, in denominations on one hand, that's a good point. Denominations are man-made but in many regards, how should we say this, orthodoxy follows heresy. What I mean by that is when someone introduces a teaching that is not true in the Scriptures, the hearts....

[beeping.] Yeah, everyone gets that. You have a strange system when they can take every one of your phones captive, huh? Isn't that wild? Some of you people without smart phones are so blessed. You guys are on a seven second delay like the radio.

1 Peter 5, take a look at verse 1. Oh yeah, I was going to say denominations on one hand are man-made but on the other hand, they at least could be a testimony of the fact that people desire purity. It could be. It's a testimony that there have been times when people desired purity and wanted to be marked as such. But you can see how God planned it.

So 1 Peter 5, "The elders who are among you," we've got some ground to cover here, so, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder." So Peter says, "I'm an elder." Listen to what he says. Now, he's also an apostle, "and a witness of the sufferings of Christ." So we often say that Peter, this is good, this is really good. You'll be interested in what you learn reading the Bible. We often say that only John was at the cross. Maybe John was the only apostle at the cross but Peter was somewhere because he, look here at verse 1, "beheld the sufferings of Christ."

("He saw Christ's suffering when he came out from being in Caiaphas' courthouse.") That's true. ("So he saw that kind of suffering.") Yeah, it's hard to imagine that he is referring to a trial at the high priest's house when the Gospel is a much bigger deal. So

you might be right, Dot. You might be right. It might just be a reference to the high priest's house. ("Any suffering.") Yeah, well we know he was in the priest's courtyard.

And he was a partaker, we are talking about Christ, "a partaker of the glory that will be revealed." Now look, he has a command now to who? The elders among his readers. Do you see that? Look at verse 2, "Shepherd," or feed, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers," overseers typically translated as bishops, here it's overseers, "not by compulsion." So in this verse, in these two verses you have three words being used interchangeably. You've got to see this. This will shoot a lot of denominations in the kneecaps. Peter is talking to elders telling them to pastor, shepherd, feed, and have oversight. So in two verses you have three terms being used interchangeably: elder, pastor and bishop. Overseers is usually translated as bishop. "So our bishops said our pastor could do what?" No, pfft. In the Bible bishop is used interchangeably with elder right here, interchangeably with pastor. Now pastor here is used in the verb form, shepherd the flock, pastor the flock, feed the flock. So pastor, elder and overseer are all used interchangeably here or, better yet, pastoring and being a bishop are seen as functions of the office of elder. In any case, when you feel like maybe I should just go and get a clerical robe and then you can call me Bishop Bill. But in any case, it's used interchangeably. I'm going to pause this and tell you a joke.

So those are interchangeable terms: bishop, elder, pastor. You know, you turn on the TV on certain channels, I mean, they call themselves all kinds of things. So anyway, just going from that.

Verse 3, "not as being lords over those entrusted to you." All right, so look here, this is very important. There are a certain group of people that are entrusted to the elder, they are entrusted to the elder who is supposed to pastor, they are entrusted to the elder who is supposed to pastor who is supposed to oversee or be a bishop. There are a certain group of people entrusted to them not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.

"Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you," verse 3, "but being examples to the flock." Now brothers and sisters, if there is no numerical or quantifiable flock called a membership, then how do we know who the pastor is accountable for? You see, if you have people that just, "Hey, pastor, you just be accountable to whoever regularly shows up." Well, when does that relationship end? "Well, when we stop coming regularly." Well, how regular? When will I cease to be a good shepherd? When I only visit you after every third missed Sunday? When I only visit you every second stay in the hospital? You see, that is why we have to have a definable flock and we have decided to call it a membership list.

So next blank. If I'm not a member, that means I'm not under the numbered flock of an under-shepherd or pastor to be looked after. That's poor English. You never end a sentence with a preposition, do you? This means that I will miss out on the feeding of the flock as well as the careful watching of that shepherd. Again, can I show you a proof text that says, "Thou shalt have a membership?" No, but this is incredibly difficult. Think

about how many different people come through our doors every month. I'll bet you 700. I'll bet you on the way out the door today I shook hands with 100 non-members. Am I responsible for all of them? "If they regularly come." How regular? Do you see what I'm saying? There has to be a prioritizing. Are the deacons responsible for the people that come sometimes? Well, no. No. We have a number of deacons based on the number of members.

("The responsibility is dictated by membership.") Yeah, this whole thing called accountability. Remember, I said it this morning and I said it last Sunday night, we don't have a problem signing a homeowners association, we don't have any problems signing loans, we sign everything but to sign up a commitment that I want to be a member, count me in, oh boy, that's too much accountability. I can do that.

So anyway, 1 Corinthians 5 is our next passage. This is one I preached on in August and I am aware of the time. Keeping us moving. Keeping us moving. We have basically three passages to look at at speeds of up to 35 miles per hour and five minutes per passage, we'll make it through this, 6 or 7 minutes a passage. Next we are going to talk about Hosea who has a wife with a fantastic name, Gomer. Not that Gomer, a different Gomer. 1 Corinthians 5. Even back in Andy Griffith's day, they knew a male Gomer couldn't be a wife. We haven't figured that out. Anyway, there are 54 gender choices on Facebook. There are like 54 gender choices on Facebook. Well, they keep getting creative.

1 Corinthians 5. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you." I can't believe it. I'm not even there. It is told to me that in your church in Corinth, there are people doing marital things without being married.

"And such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles," you guys are creative about how you are in moral, "that a man has his father's wife!" They don't even do that at the brothels.

"And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." Now this letter if you will remember from chapter 1, is not to a pastor, it's to a church, the church of God which is at Corinth, right?

Verse 3, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged." Oh my goodness, Paul, don't you know you're not supposed to judge? No. No one quoted that to Paul.

I have already judged and I'm not even there, I'm judging, "(as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," in other words, on behalf of Jesus, as if you are Jesus, "when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He says do this in the name of the Lord. Now how do you do something in the name of the Lord? When Tommy becomes the president of some country in Europe and I decide because of his gracious invitation to be one of his ambassadors to some tribe in Antarctica, I will be

going in his name, that means I will be speaking on behalf of President Tommy, right? So when he says in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ deliver someone to the destruction of their body to Satan, I hope he knows what he's talking about.

Verse 6, "Your glorying is not good." You boast about having this scoundrel in your church and you say crazy things like, "We're just affirming."

"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore," look what he says, don't you know a little yeast gets in the whole lump of dough, therefore, verse 7, "purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover."

All right, so if that's not strong enough, if purge out the leaven is not strong enough, look at verse 9, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." Verse 11, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral." Now brothers and sisters, he's not writing to Uncle Rick, he's not writing to Suzy, he's not writing to Debbie, he's not writing to Pastor Bill, he's writing to the entirety of the body. "Get rid of him. Yeah, I know he likes to worship with you. Too bad. He's not allowed to and you take action before I get there. Don't even eat supper with him." Isn't that what your Bible says?

So if we don't all agree on this and, by the way, our church covenant says we agree on this. It says you'll support the discipline of the church. So when we take a voting action, that's the only way we know how to do something corporately is to go around and get a head nod from everyone and our constitution says it takes a simple majority, so when we get a church body to take action, that actually requires a particular group of people taking action. As much as I love the non-members that come with us every week, that come here every week, that visit us every week, they don't get the privilege of deciding who can come and who can't come. The members of the church own the church building and the church property and the members of the church according to our constitution own the membership. "I'm gonna take my letter with me." You don't own a letter. The Bible says that the church membership owns the membership and so purge out the leaven. It's on the church to do that. So how do we do that if we don't have a quantifiable identifiable person doing it or a group of persons doing it? You see, we have to have membership. Do you see how that works?

Questions? Comments? Yes, Brother Jack. (unintelligible) You want me to expand on a kiss? (unintelligible "A holy kiss. I know at the time that meant something. The equivalent of now would that be...how would you flesh that out?") Ah, well, when I was in Iraq, I had men hold my hand. I can't tell you how uncomfortable that made me. When we would go to meetings with town elders, the elders would meet us at our vehicle, I'd get out of my vehicle muddied up face, weapon right here, making sure there was no sudden moves towards the guy who I was supposed to be protecting because I was just a little sergeant at the time and I was protecting a guy whose name was Chaplain Horton, a Mormon chaplain, and I was supposed to make sure he didn't get lost or shot and every time we went to a meeting, I'm trying to make sure that this guy who doesn't have a gun

that I'm supposed to be protecting is in immediate access to me. The elders of a village will come up and meet us in our vehicles and they all want to escort you to the place of meeting and I'm trying to make sure I'm close to him and that I can see every threat and meanwhile I've got two dudes that want to hold my hand, as if I'm not supposed to see that as a threat.

Huh? ("Was that their....") Totally cultural. You saw friends holding hands all the time. ("But it wasn't to keep your hands away from the gun?") No. No, just totally cultural.

You come to America, since you're asking for the American parallel, you know, just imagine how strange you would feel if when you pull up in the church parking lot next week and I meet you at your car and put out my hand and we walk together swinging hands all the way to the church building. So when we were five, it would have been semi-cute, although I would have stopped my five year old boy from doing it, and the reality is because of the connotations, we don't allow it and I don't think that we have too many churches being accused, brother, of being careful when it comes to morals. When's the last time you've ever heard a pastor slandered because he was too moral?

So when we have those kinds of misunderstandings and I know of...the list, I'm afraid, is way too long of immoral pastors that I've known and sometimes it ended, if I might say, in two cases it ended in suicide. They were immoral, they didn't know how to come clean, they had gone too far, they ended their lives, one in a cornfield, one in his office. And in my opinion, one of them was my hero, to be honest with you. You know, I thought if there is a way to do things, he nailed it and I need to do exactly what he did and then I got a phone call that things weren't exactly as they appeared, right?

So when I know that there are great threats to purity and morality in the church, I'm willing in a gracious attitude to offend slightly a sister in Christ who doesn't understand but I'm not going to sit alone with her in an office on the same side of the desk, right? I'll close the door as long as I'm behind the desk and anyone walking through can look in the window and see we are clearly in opposite sides of the desk. That's one example.

Another example is unless it's raining and I would be considered an absolute jerk, I probably won't let a lady who I'm not married to who is close to my age, hear all those qualifiers? Sit up front with me in my car and drive around town. I think that's a poor idea. I think that if we take this without considering the cultural ramifications and I go around and start kissing on everyone's wife, that might be thought of as something that is outside the bounds.

(unintelligible "How would we express that?") I'd express the holy kiss by time and a sincere look in the eyes. Time spent and a sincere look in the eyes.

But let's get back to our topic for tonight. I like the question but let's finish in Acts 6. So we'll go there, Acts 6, and I want you to notice this passage that's well known for deaconhood. We're almost done. Acts 6. I wonder who will read verses 1 through 4, please? "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there

arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." We are in chapter 6, verse 2 now please. I'm just trying to catch everyone up. Go ahead. "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'"

All right, so where were these deacons that are going to be...by the way, the blanks for the one in 1 Corinthians is discipline. As a member I can have an active role in the discipline of the church. Now we're down to the second one, Acts. That is strange. How did I put that? Strange. Oh, okay. Acts 6.

Now out of the verses that she just read, these are typically what we call deacons and in verse 5 and 6 we have the seven men who are named. Now, can someone please remind me where these deacons came from? Besides their mothers. I'm looking for something a little more definitive.

("From the body.") Yeah, I heard someone say from the church. What verse did you get that from?

(unintelligible) Let's look within the passage and let's see if we can find where they came from.

(unintelligible) Say that again. ("From among you.") What verse are you looking at? ("Verse 3.") Verse 3, "brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation." Now think through this. If they're going to pick people from among them, that means the "among them," the "them," are a well known group of people otherwise how is a multitude of disciples going to pick people if those people were not regularly known as being among them?

(unintelligible) Sure, but my point in this study is to remind ourselves that there was an identifiable quantifiable group of people that everyone knew was part of the "us," or part of in this case, the "them."

("They were regulars.") Regulars, yep. So the deacons were supposed to come from among the regulars and they had to be identifiable. I'm certain that no one would have said, "Eh, it's like your second week with us, how about you?"

So what do we have? We have some things in place. We have, first, church membership. Then we have a rule in our constitution that says that you have to be a member for one year before you can be elected to a position. Anyone can get to the constitution. It's on the website so it's a 20 page pdf, "Constitution and Bylaws." It's on the website, just click on "Policy" and it's right there.

So those are things. Can we find a verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt be on the church roll for one year before thou art elected as a deacon"? No. It is something we're doing to make sure that we're meeting the biblical minimum, someone being elected from among them. Well, you can't be irregular and be confirmed as a person who is full of faith and the Holy Spirit and good report, right?

So I will be better fitted for official trusts of responsibility. Why should I be a member? Because I will be better fitted for official trusts of responsibility. This is a particular group of people, an identifiable group of people. That's Acts 6:1-7.

But then to run it into the end zone here, we'll look at Ephesians 4. I'm really excited about the Hosea thing. I've been studying it for six weeks. It will be my second time teaching the book and I'm excited about it and I hope you will be too. There is a lot of great stuff in it and it will be even neater when you see how it relates to the Gospel of Mark.

So Ephesians 4 and you'll be seeing in verse 11, "He," now we've got to find out who the "He" is. We'll look for the antecedent of "He." Well, there's a "He" in verse 10 as well, and then we look back in verse 9 there is a "He," but we don't know who it's talking about there.

(unintelligible) Yeah, sure. But who is the "He" pointing back to is what I'm trying to see. Right and what verse do you look to see that? ("11.") Is he identified in verse 11 as Jesus? ("Well, I just figured that because of the capital.") All right, so for our information in the Greek language it was either all caps or all lower case. So when our translators capitalized something, it is a translator's choice.

("Okay, the verse right before it says, 'He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.') All right, so we're definitely... ("Still not Jesus.") Sure, yep, and it is explicit in verse 7, "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

So we have this Christ's gift. Now what is he giving? Well, we have him giving in verse 11, our verse, "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Why? "For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body." Remember Ephesians 1 tells us in verses 22 and 23, that the body is what? Someone take a look there. Verse 22 is what? The body is what?

(unintelligible) Sure, but we take it with verse 22. ("And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church...") Which... ("is his body.") So what's another word for the body? ("The church.") Do you all see that?

("No.") Okay, we're in chapter 1, verses 22 and 23. Yeah, remember I said look back at chapter 1, verse 22 and 23. "He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body." So we go back to chapter 4 and we look

back at verse 12 and why are apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers given in verse 11? Why? "For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," or the edifying of the church, Ephesians 1:22 says.

All right, so all of a sudden we realize, next blank, 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 what or growth of the church according to this verse? The edifying or the building up. Edifying. So that word edify, right, is related to what word that helps us remind ourselves of building? Edify?

(unintelligible) What it's related to, a particular word, an English word when we say, "Look at that amazing," we're looking at a building, "edifice." Yeah. So we know that edifying is a construction term and it has the idea of a building. So we're building up the body, edifying of the body.

So apparently I am going to be edified and do some edifying or I'm going to be edified being a part of a body that has been gifted with particular people. What people has the body been gifted with to help them be built up or edified? Verse 11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. We are stronger and more built up as a church because of gifts from Christ and these gifts are: the apostle, the prophet, the pastor, the evangelist. Okay, so anyway, y'all get that, verse 11.

Now verses 15 and 16, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--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." How do we get real growth in the body? Let's get it off the page. How do we get real growth? How do we know when we will definitely have growth?

(unintelligible) Say it again, please. Yep, verse 16, middle of the verse, "by which every part does its share." Okay? So next blank, as a member, I will help the body work properly.

("So when 20% of the people do 80% of the work...") That would not be a healthy functioning body. That's like a guy, an old Three Stooges movie I saw, "The Three Stooges Meet Hercules," a real edifying movie. They travel back in time. I promise it wasn't yesterday, it was many years ago. This guy who travels back in time, rose on one side of the boat and what happens? He has an arm that's gigantic and one that's the size of mine, right? And so that's what happens when you have one part of the body doing more than its share, the body looks just a tad strange and the church looks weird when you have 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. It looks like, "Wow, what a healthy body," and the reality is, no, the people who are doing all the work are getting tired.

You know how it works when you've injured your foot, what do you start doing? Putting weight on the other foot. Yeah, then what ends up happening? What starts hurting?

(unintelligible) Then what? Your hip, your back, everything is misaligned because you're overcompensating and the body eventually becomes very unhealthy.

Please notice that we don't have a promise if everyone gives. A lot of people salve their conscience by putting cash in the plate but the reality is you're just compensating, you're just limping now, right? So we need everyone doing their share to include, not the exclusion of, but to include giving.

So verse 25, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we," here it is again, that body talk, "we are members of one another." I'll have the added blessing, next blank, of being held accountable for my actions. In this context, we're talking about speaking truth. You're not allowed to be a liar and be a functioning part of a body. That's pretty clear in the context, speak every man truth with his neighbor because we are members one of another.

So there is a wonderful thing called voluntary accountability. It's not co-dependence, it's inter-dependence. Co-dependence means that there's an unhealthy leechism or needism and inter-dependence means I'm choosing to need you, that I'm choosing to subordinate myself to the needing of you. Now, I know we're all complete in Christ and that's where we get these tv watching church-goers because, "I don't need the body. I have Jesus." Ain't you special? The New Testament says that we need the body to be built up and the gifts given to the body. Do you see that?

Any comments or questions? (unintelligible) Well, the church covenant is very clear on the responsibilities of the member and I would say that the majority of our starting point class is about the church covenant. I go through there. Now we had five in starting point today and all five presented this morning for membership. I would say that's a good stat. But we went through that church covenant and I said if this is something you don't want to live by, do not be a liar. Do not join this church. It says we will support this and this and this and this and this. And do you know what? I'm going to tell you, I'm going to chalk it up to forgetfulness and busyness, most people have no recollection of agreeing to a church covenant 50 years ago when they joined a church, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, 1 year ago. "I agreed to not drink?" It's in the church covenant, brothers and sisters. Not gossiping? In the church covenant. Promising to give? In the church covenant, right?

So Brother Matt, usually what people do, churches sometimes go to what they would call a yearly covenant renewal where they make every church member sign the covenant every year. Do I think we're there yet? No. Nope, I think we're still kind of in a mood where everyone is enjoying things. I kind of told a school administrator in my days, I said, "You know, I need you to recruit more soccer players. I'm so tired of us getting this basketball players and baseball players. I need soccer players. You want me to coach soccer, get some more soccer players." And he says, "Well, I don't know how to get soccer players." It's real simple: you say, "I'm sorry, we're not taking anymore enrollees unless you can play soccer." He said, "Well, I can't do that." I said, "You sure can do that. All you need is a line at the door. If you get enough people in the line, you can say

anything you want to." Right? "I want a person that plays the clarinet." Well, I can't tell everyone they can't join unless they can play the clarinet, play chess, stand on their head, gargle peanut butter and balance BB's on their forehead. Yes you can if you have enough people at the door wanting their spot and you have someone in line that meets that criteria.

So what I'm saying is if you build building after building after building, you can never get to that point because the only thing you're concerned about is filling the increased amount of chairs, right? And your increased budget because everyone knows the cheapest thing you'll ever do is build the building. You're making a commitment to also pay the salary of someone to clean the extra square footage, you're paying the extra utility bill, you're paying all kinds of things and then you're also feeling pressure to dip your sails on hard issues because you want to fill the extra seats. So if we're always wanting to have a big kingdom here on the corner, we'll never get to the point where we have a church that's disciplined, we will only have a crowd. So at some point we have to decide who we are and say, "Here's our limit and at this limit, we're going to start sending missionaries out and we're going to have a highly disciplined church membership." Then you can say something like, "Every year you'll sign the covenant. If you're not willing to do it, your membership is resigned." And then you can say, "If you're not living according to this covenant, we will have meetings with the elders, with the pastors, with the deacons, whatever." So I think at this point we're still trying to define who we are and how much we want to grow and then we can start saying, "Hey, we are really tired of 20% of the people doing 80% of the work." But right now, that's how I see it.

Any other comments on that? What do you think, Matt? Do you have a good idea?

(unintelligible "I appreciate your presence and support and giving financially...")
(unintelligible) Well, we're already all involved in those situations. Everyone in here is. If you live in a place that you have to keep your grass trimmed or the city will come and cite you. We all live in those situations already. If you don't live according to a particular standard, you lose your certifications. I lose my religious endorsement with the chaplaincy. You lose your ability to own a home if you don't... We all live according to rules already. What we have done is we become so desperate for people in our pews that we've lowered the standards to now we'll just take anybody who has any mindset and we'll have customers, even. "We're here for you, what would you like? You want a youth program? Yes, right this way. You want a children's program? Please, come with me. You want clean nurseries? Come with me. Anything we can do to help you." And as soon as we reduce the consumer mentality, we'll have an equal pull on the plow and it just takes just a little bit of time.

Rick, I can hear you thinking. Why reason you these things in your heart? I'm just kidding. I need to quit.

(unintelligible "What have you got for me? What have you got for Christ?") Yeah, that's right. That's right.

Well, I think these are good discussions and you realize that these are not discussions that are held in every church. The opportunity exists for pride and we have to be careful, but the Lord is bringing us a mighty long way. We're having conversations we don't always have, we haven't always had, and I'm putting my "we" here with y'all. We haven't always had these conversations at Sandy Ridge Baptist Church and we're getting so healthy, so strong as a body, we need more people to do as Ephesians 4 says, to do their part and we need to decide are we going to support ministries or are we going to get rid of them. You see, that's the issue that has me concerned is that at some point in our church, we've decided we'll do this, we'll do this, we'll do this, we'll do this. It's a new thing, everyone is excited, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, let's do it, do it, do it," and then after years, the enthusiasm drains and when you have a few people doing the work and it wears them plum out and then we don't know when the sun has set on a particular ministry, but it doesn't change the fact they don't want to be known as a quitter and we don't want to pull the curtain on a ministry. So these are great things to talk about and I suspect that the conversation will continue.

Let's pray.

Lord, thanks for the opportunity to be a church. Thank you for allowing....

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.

(Romans 16:1-16) 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 specific 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 flock 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 discipline 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 discipline 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 official trusts of responsibility (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 edification or growth of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12).

As a member I will help the body work properly (Ephesians 4:15-16). I will have the added blessing of being held accountable for my actions (Ephesians 4:25).