

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ loved the church

-with such a love that He gave Himself for the church; He died on the cross for the church

-there is no greater love than that with which Christ loves the church

Although He died for the church, on the first day of the week He rose again, and so He is the firstborn from the dead

In all things Jesus Christ has the preeminence

He is the head of the body, the church

We who believe in Him, who are His disciples, are members of His body

He, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, loves us as a man loves His own body

-He nourishes the church

-He cherishes the church

Today I speak to you about church membership. All our thoughts of church membership should be grounded on Jesus Christ: Christ loving the church, giving Himself for the church, being the head of the church, nourishing and cherishing the church.

So, I speak to you about church membership, but never losing sight of how that church membership is foremost membership in Jesus Christ.

TEXT

Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

BODY

Consider church membership

-first in the ideal, in concept

-then in practice, in application

- I. Church Membership in the Ideal or in Concept
 - A. The church, the congregation, the *ecclesia*, is like a body
 - B. Colossians 1:18 - Jesus Christ is the head of the body
 - C. His disciples are the members of His body - Romans 12:4-5 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.
 1. we are members of the body of Christ
 2. we are members of one another

So, there is church membership in the ideal, or in concept

II. Church Membership in Practice or in Application

- A. In some of the accounts of the churches in the New Testament scriptures, we find that a church's operations necessarily require a reckoning of who is and who isn't a member of the church
 1. the churches are recorded as having acted according to what the apostles instructed them to do
 2. some of these actions, commanded by the apostles, and taken by the churches, necessarily required a reckoning of who was and who wasn't a member of the congregation
 3. so, we learn from these accounts about true, church membership in practice
 4. we'll consult the scriptures to see these things in two of the early churches
- B. Acts 6:1-7 - The first church in Jerusalem
 1. responsibility - Acts 6:1
 - a) the church was delivering food daily to destitute widows
 - b) not to think it was all destitute widows; there was a reckoning of what widows were the disciples of Jesus Christ
 - c) a church is not responsible to care for all poor widows; but is responsible to care for the poor widows *in the church*
 2. decision making - Acts 6:3, 5
 - a) verse 3 the apostles told the church to choose - "brethren, look ye out"
 - b) verse 5 the church chose - "they chose"
 - c) We don't think that just anyone and everyone in Jerusalem was supposed to participate in this decision; there had to be a reckoning of who was and who wasn't among the brethren
 3. qualification for office - Acts 6:3
 - a) the apostles said to choose "among you"
 - b) We don't think the church might choose just anyone to be in office as a deacon; there had to be a reckoning of who was and wasn't among the brethren
 - c) note: at the time, there was only one congregation in the world, so officers would necessarily be chosen only from that congregation; but the scriptures show us that a man might be called from another congregation to serve as an officer
 - (1) as Barnabas called for Saul to come to Antioch, Acts 11:20-27
 - (2) but still a congregation would choose as an officer only a man who was a member of his congregation, and who would become a member of the congregation in which he was being made an officer

C. 1 & 2 Corinthians - The church in Corinth - 1 Cor 5:4-5, 12-13; 2 Cor 2:6-8

1. responsibility - 1 Corinthians 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?
 - a) the church is not responsible to judge the conduct of those who are outside the church
 - b) but the church is responsible to judge the conduct of those who are inside the church
 - c) this requires a reckoning of who is inside the church, and who is outside it
2. decision making
 - a) 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
 - b) 2 Corinthians 2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many.
 - c) the many who were gathered with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ were not those who did not profess faith in Christ, but those who did profess faith in Christ; so there was a reckoning of who was and who wasn't a member of the church
 - d) note: we observe here that the decision to expel someone from the membership, and the decision to receive someone back into the membership are seated in the congregation, as directed by the apostles; that is why, although
 - (1) I take the lead in directing the process, and teaching the principles upon which it is based
 - (2) it is the decision of the congregation whether or not to receive a person as a member, whether or not to expel a person from the membership, and whether or not to receive him back again

D. Summary

1. responsibility
2. decision making
3. qualification for office

- E. If a congregation, in order to do what the apostles have instructed, must make a reckoning of who is and who isn't a member, then they must have some way to make that reckoning, to determine who is and who isn't to be considered a member
1. if a person professes faith in Christ and is baptized in the presence of the church, he is then considered a member on that basis - Acts 2:41-42 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
 2. if a person has professed faith in Christ and been baptized in one congregation, then comes to another congregation, and wants to be considered a member, he may simply make a statement, and the congregation may determine to accept or not accept him on the basis of that statement
 3. it may be helpful to have someone else who knows him to testify to it for the church
 - a) Acts 9:26-28 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

It is on this biblical doctrine that we, in this congregation, base our thoughts and practice of church membership. And so, this afternoon . . .

4. 1 Corinthians 12:25-27 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Alex - Call to Worship and Opening Prayer - Ephesians 1:15-23

Roel - Scripture Reading - Ephesians 5:25-30

Jeremiah - Congregational Prayer

Benediction - Colossians 3:15

Ava - Prelude "I Am Not My Own"

Angie - Trinity 500 "He Leadeth Me" - Andrew lead

(in key of C, please; see attached sheet)

Journey - Trinity 89 "Come, Thou Almighty King"

Bella - Trinity 441 "Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ" - Alvin lead

Colossians 1:15-18 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And

He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.