

Lesson 19

GOD'S CALLED-OUT ASSEMBLY THE CHURCH

Membership in the Local Church (The Local Body of Believers)

PART 1--WHY SHOULD I BE A MEMBER? WHY IS MEMBERSHIP IMPORTANT?

When does a person become a member of the Church? When does a person become a member of the body of Christ? The answer to this is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13--"For by one Spirit are (were) we all baptized (placed) into _____." This verse teaches that the moment you were saved God baptized you into the body of Christ and made you a part of His Church.

Answer TRUE or FALSE:

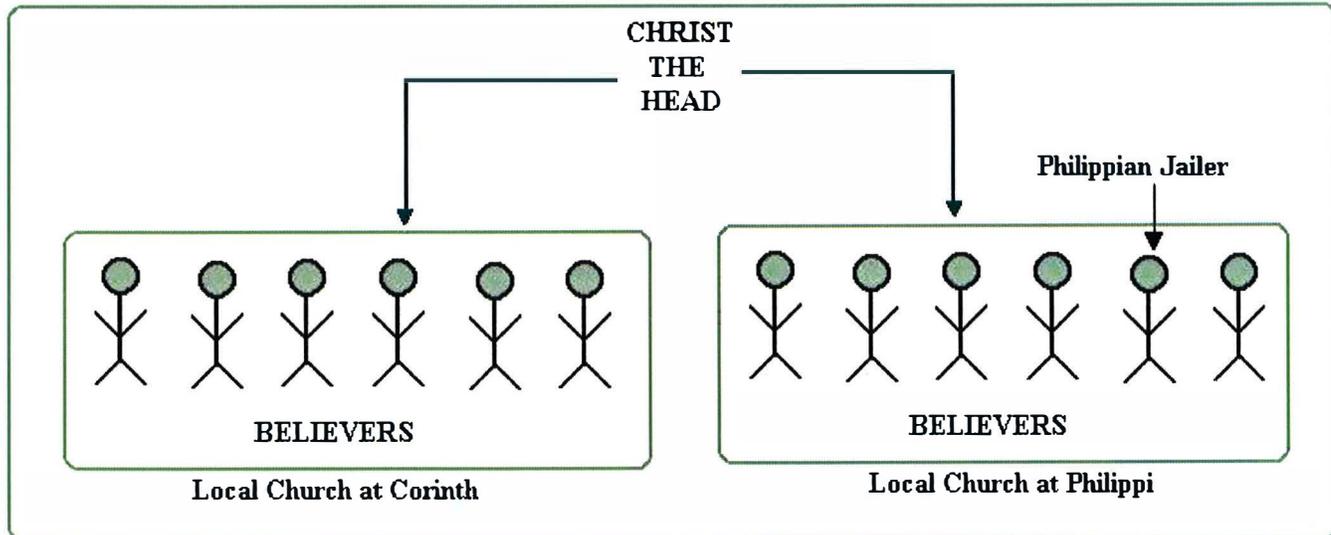
_____	There are some believers (saved people) who are not part of the body of Christ.
_____	Unsaved people are not part of Christ's body but every saved person is.
_____	Every saved person is a member of the body of Christ.
_____	I know that I am a member of the body of Christ because I have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and I know that I am saved (Acts 16:31).

We need to understand that there is a difference between the universal Church (the universal body of Christ) and the local church (the local body of Christ in a given city or area). The universal Church is made up of **all believers** no matter where they live. The local Church is made up of those believers who faithfully assemble together in a certain locality, such as...

- The church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- The church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1)
- The church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1)
- Can you think of others?

The Philippian jailer was saved (see Acts 16:27-31). The moment he was saved he became a

member of the universal Church. He also became a functioning member of the local church which was at Philippi because this is where he lived and this was where he met together with other believers. He was not a member of the church at Corinth. He was a member of the church at Philippi. In the following chart, every believer in the large box is a member of the universal Church, even though they are not all members of the same local church.



↑The Universal Church Made Up Of All True Believers↑

Every believer belongs to the universal body of Christ. It is also important for the believer to belong to the local body of Christ (the local church). When a person is saved he (or she) should **join together** with the other believers in his locality (assuming there is a good church there). In Acts 2:41-42 we read about people who believed in Christ the day the Church first began (the day of Pentecost). These people believed God's Word ("gladly received" God's message) and were baptized. Then they continued to do these four things (see **Acts 2:42**):

1. **THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE.**

This

means they continued in the *teaching* (doctrine) of the apostles. The believers would gather together often to be *taught* by the Apostles. Do people come together in your local church to be taught?

2. **THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN FELLOWSHIP.**

The word *fellowship* means "a sharing in common." Believers gather together often because **they share many things in common**. They share a common LIFE and they share a common

LORD. They share the same Holy Spirit and they read from the same Bible. See Ephesians 4:4-6 to see seven things that all believers share in common. Do the people in your local church share a **common life** and a **common Lord**?

3. **THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN BREAKING OF BREAD.**

These believers gathered together often to remember the Lord's death by observing Communion (as we studied in the last chapter). Do people come together in your local church for this reason and for this purpose?

4. **THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN PRAYERS.**

These believers gathered together to pray. They met often for "prayer meetings." Do people come together in your local church for the purpose of prayer?

The people described in Acts 2:41-42 became part of the local church that was in Jerusalem. Later in Acts we read that people had to decide whether or not to join with these Jerusalem believers: "and of the rest durst (dared) no man _____ himself to them" (Acts 5:13). These people did not want to join themselves to this local assembly. These people were unbelievers and they did not want to be a part of this church. They did not have eternal life and they did not share in common with these believers. But as people **believed** (Acts 5:14) they were **added** to Christ's body, and they became a part of the local church in Jerusalem as well.

Do **you** want to become a part of the church that is in Middletown (or a good church in your given locality)? Do you want to stay away from the believers in your area or do you want to join with them in worship and Christ-centered fellowship?

The early churches had some kind of a record of membership. We know that a careful record was kept of the number of believers (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4). Also special records and rolls were kept (see 1 Timothy 5:9--"taken into the number" or "put on the list").

Why should a person become a member of a local church? Why is this important? Someone might say, "I'm a believer in Christ and I am already a member of the body of Christ. Why then do I need to become a member of the local church? Why is local church membership needed if believers are already members of the body of Christ?"

There are at least three important reasons why a believer should be a member of a local church:

1. Membership in a local church means IDENTIFICATION.

By becoming a member of a church you are **identifying** with a group of believers and you are becoming part of the team! If you were to go to a ballgame, you would notice a difference

between those who are mere spectators and onlookers and those who are really members of the team. A member of the team is proud to be on the team: "I am a member of the Boston Red Sox! I wear the Red Sox uniform. I'm proud to be a member of this team!"

A member of a local church must be a believer. He must be saved. Unsaved people should never be allowed to become members of local churches. Therefore, when a person becomes a member of a local church he is identifying himself as a true believer. He is saying, "I want everyone to know that I am saved and that I belong to Christ. Because I am saved I want to be an active and involved member of this local church."

A good Bible-believing church usually has a statement of faith or a doctrinal statement. The purpose of such a statement is to let people know exactly what the church believes and to pinpoint the truth of God so that other real believers can agree with it and say "AMEN!" to it. Believers stand for what the statement says and the statement stands for what God says. Believers need to say "AMEN!" to what God has said. Thus the believers publicly bear witness together with other believers in the local assembly.

The doctrinal statement tells what the church believes about salvation, the Bible, Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin and other important doctrines that are taught in the Bible. When a person becomes a member he is identifying with the church and what the church believes. He is saying, "I want everyone to know that I believe what this church believes, and this church believes what God says in the Bible. I believe the Bible and I believe in exactly what God has said. What God has said on certain key issues is reflected in this doctrinal statement which is based on the Bible."

2. Membership in a local church means COMMITMENT.

Sadly, we are living in a day when very few people are committed to much of anything. Students may not be committed to their studies. Many citizens are not committed to their country and they do very little to make their country better (and sometimes do very much to make their country worse). Working people are not committed to doing a good job at their work. Many only care about making money and they often do a very poor job. Many would rather loaf than work hard. Real commitment is a rare thing today.

It is one thing to visit a church or to attend the services at a church, but it is another thing to be **committed to that church**. When a person becomes a member of a local church he is saying, "I am a part of this church and therefore I am committed to it. As a church member I have certain responsibilities that I must faithfully carry out!"

Suppose there is a piece of paper on the floor somewhere in the church building. A person who is not a member might walk right by this paper and not see a need to pick it up. A member should never do this. The member should be committed and should say, "I'm a member of this church and I am responsible to do everything I can to make it a better place. I did not throw this paper on the floor but I will do my part and pick it up and throw it away."

Tom and Sam are friends. Often Tom visits and spends time at Sam's house. While he is there he sometimes helps Sam with chores. But Tom is not a member this household. He is just a friend and a visitor. It is different with Sam because Sam belongs to this home. Sam needs to be committed to this home because he is a **family member**. Sam has certain chores and responsibilities that he must carry out so that the home will be what it ought to be. The same is true in the church. There are many people who visit the church and who attend the church and

who are friends of the church. They may even help the church in different ways, such as volunteering for church clean-up or church workdays. But these people are not committed in the same way that church members ought to be.

Here's another illustration: Think of a man and a woman who decide to live together even though they are not married. This is sinful and wrong (see Hebrews 13:4), and yet it is something that people do. In this kind of "living together" relationship there is no real commitment. If things do not work out well, then it is very easy to walk away and find somewhere else to live. Marriage is quite different. Marriage is a commitment made publicly before God and before many witnesses. If things do not work out well for two married people, they cannot easily walk away from each other. They remain married unless certain legal action is taken (such as a divorce). So it is in the church. Some people come to church without any commitment. They can walk away and leave the church any time they wish. This is not true for a member. The member has made a public commitment before God and before many witnesses. If a member decides to leave the church (for the wrong kind of reasons) then the church must take some kind of definite action. The church member should be committed to the church and the church should be committed to that member.

We need to remember that people come to church for different reasons. The doors of the church are not locked. They are open to all that want to come in. Some come in who are curious. Some come in who are interested. Some come in who are seeking. Many who come in are not even saved. Some come through the church doors even though they do not really want to come. Perhaps they come because their parents bring them. A young man might attend church because he has an interest in a young lady who attends, or a young lady may be interested in a young man. These are just some of the reasons why people come. This should help us to realize that many of those who come through the doors are not committed to the Lord and to the local church (**His** local church). When a person becomes a member of the local church he is saying this: "I want everyone to know that I attend this church because I believe what this church teaches. I am saved and I want to grow in the Lord (2 Peter. 3:18; 1 Peter 2:2) and be **all** that God wants me to be. I'm not just a curious spectator. I'm not just a visitor. **I'm an official member! I'm one of the players on the team!**

3. Membership in a local church means SERVICE.

A healthy member is a serving member. Some people come to church because of what they can **GET** (good teaching, the blessing of being with Christians, etc.). But a committed member comes to church not only to **GET** but to **GIVE** (not just to be ministered to but also to minister; not just to be served but to serve).

At the Middletown Bible Church there are certain things that people are not allowed to do unless they are members. These would include such things as being a leader (Elder, Deacon), teaching in a class, singing in the choir, ushering, taking up the offering, etc. If a believer refuses to be a member of the local church then something is wrong. Why would a person refuse to be a member of a local church? **Refusal** says something. What does it say and why? Are there any valid reasons for **not** becoming a member of a good local church? A true believer **BELONGS** to the family of God. A saved person needs to be identified with other saved people. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we _____ the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

What would happen if the church were to allow anyone to teach a Sunday School class? What if an unsaved person were allowed to teach your Sunday School class? Would this be good? Why not? Would this person be able to teach a good lesson on **how to be saved**? What if anyone were

allowed to sing in the choir? Would this cause any problems? What if a person were seen in the choir on Sunday morning and at the bar on Friday night? Would this be a good testimony? What if a choir member said to an unsaved person, "Yes, I sing in the choir in this church because I enjoy music, but I certainly do not agree with many of the things that this church teaches." Would this be good? Suppose the church allowed a man to usher on Sunday morning who swears and curses at work on Monday morning. Would this be the thing to do? Why not?

There are some things which non-members can share in that help out the church and which are good for them to do. They can help with church clean-up because they helped to dirty up the church (non-members track in dirt as well as members!). They can help with the baby nursery because non-members have babies too. They can share in good stewardship in their giving because they use the building, the lights, and the heat just like the others who attend. , so there is no reason why they should not help to pay for what they use. Only adult members are allowed to vote at business meetings. What problems might a church have if non-members were allowed to vote?

Do you want to be *identified* with your local church? Are you proud to be a member of it? Do you agree with what your church teaches and believes? Are you *committed* to your local church? Do you want to be involved in a responsible way? Do you want to be a part of the team? Do you want to serve the Lord in any way that *He* would want you to serve?

PART 2--WHAT MUST I DO TO BECOME A MEMBER?

[Please note: The following paragraphs describes the membership procedure of the Middletown Bible Church. Other local assemblies use different procedures and we certainly respect that. The main goal of our procedure is to give spiritual help to people before they become members. the goal and desire is that they might understand what it means to be saved and how they can grow and be a healthy believer in Christ.]

Here at the Middletown Bible Church a person does not need to wait until he (or she) is an adult to be a member. It is possible for a person to be a Junior member. There is a procedure that a person must follow to become a member of the church. This procedure may seem like a great deal of work, but it is meant for your profit and help, so that you might understand what is involved in being a *healthy* and growing believer in the local church. Here are the steps that should be followed:

(Note: the teacher should have the sheet entitled
INSTRUCTIONS FOR THOSE DESIRING MEMBERSHIP)

1. There is a 12 page set of worksheets entitled **Basic Doctrines of the Bible**. This set of worksheets should be done. Your teacher can give you some examples of the kind of questions that are asked on these worksheets.
2. Read the paper called **Membership in the Local Assembly of Believers--Being A Healthy Believer** and also look over the Church Constitution.
3. Fill out the **Application For Membership** (your Teacher can show you what this looks like.)
4. On a piece of paper write on this subject:

I KNOW I AM SAVED BECAUSE.....

5. On another piece of paper write on this subject:

I BELIEVE I SHOULD JOIN THIS LOCAL CHURCH BECAUSE.....

6. You are now ready to meet with the Pastor, the Assistant or one of the Elders. This person will help you and answer any questions that you might have. He will also talk to you about membership and will ask you some questions. He will meet with you at least one time and perhaps more than one time.
7. You will meet with the church leadership (the Pastor, the Elders and perhaps some of the deacons also). One of the questions they will ask you is this: HOW DO YOU **KNOW** THAT YOU ARE SAVED?
8. On the night your membership is voted upon you will give a testimony before the church. In this testimony there are two things that should be shared: 1) HOW YOU KNOW YOU ARE SAVED; 2) WHY YOU WANT TO BE A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH.
9. The church will then vote on your membership. If everyone votes "YES" then you immediately become a member of the Middletown Bible Church.
10. You will receive the "right hand of fellowship" from the Pastor, usually at the next Communion service.

PART 3--HOW CAN I BE A HEALTHY MEMBER OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

(Note: The teacher should see the paper entitled **Membership in the Local Assembly of Believers--Being A Healthy Believer.**)

The following things should be true in the life of a *healthy* believer. As you look over this list you can *test yourself*.

1. He should **know** that he is saved (1 John 5:13), and not just think, hope or feel that he is saved.
2. He should gladly **confess** the Lord before others (Matthew 10:32) and not be ashamed to tell others about Christ.
3. He should be baptized in obedience to Christ's command.
4. He should stay spiritually healthy by daily Bible reading and daily prayer (1 Peter 2:2 and Hebrews 4:16). God talks to us through His Word and we talk to God through prayer.
5. He should know why he is in *this* church and not some other church. What is the difference between this church and some of the other churches in town (such as Baptist, Catholic, Congregational, etc.)?

6. He should understand what it means to be a member of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12, see Lesson 17 in this set of notes).
7. He should be faithful in his attendance--Sunday School, morning worship, Evening Service, Prayer Meeting and all other regular services (see Hebrews 10:25).
8. He should understand the meaning of and joyfully participate in the Communion service (see Lesson 18, this set of notes).
9. He should be a cheerful and willing GIVER (2 Cor. 8:5). A person does not need to have thousands of dollars in order to give. A person may only have 25 cents. Every believer should want to do what he can even though it may not seem like very much. God does not look at the amount; He looks at the heart.
10. He should live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. It is not enough to live like a believer only on Sunday morning. The Lord wants us to serve Him every hour of every day, shining for Him wherever we are (Philippians 2:15) because we are **saints**. (Every believer is **set apart and separated** unto the Lord!).

ARE YOU A HEALTHY BELIEVER? HOW WELL DID YOU DO ON THESE TEN POINTS?

PART 4--CHURCH DISCIPLINE

What should happen to a person who is not a healthy member? What should happen to a person who is a member of the local church and who then falls into serious and obvious sin? For example, suppose Mr. G. is a church member and suppose that the people of the church learn that every Friday Mr. G. goes to a bar and sometimes gets drunk.

What should be done about this? Should the other church members pretend that they do not know anything about his drinking habits? Should Mr. G. be allowed to continue singing in the choir and teaching a Sunday School class? Is it a good testimony to have a man singing like a Christian on Sunday morning and drinking like an unsaved person on Friday night?

A good parent cannot allow his child to continue doing what is wrong. In the same way, a good church cannot allow its member to continue doing what is wrong. Something must be done to help this person and to protect the testimony of the church. Only an unloving parent would allow a child to continue doing what is wrong. Only an unloving church would allow a member to continue in sin.

The Lord Jesus has told us what should be done. The answer is found in Matthew 18:15-20.

1) The First Step (Matthew 18:15).

If you see Mr. G. going into the bar or if you see him drunk one night, you are responsible **to go to him** and "tell him his _____." Tell him that what he is doing is not pleasing to the Lord and that he needs to confess his sin to the Lord (1 John 1:9) and to the others who know

about it. Hopefully Mr. G. will listen to you and will do the right thing. If he does not listen to you, then you must go to step number two.

2) The Second Step (Matthew 18:16)

This time you should see Mr. G. with one or two other persons. Again Mr. G. is given an opportunity to fix those things that are wrong in his life. Church discipline is not meant to hurt a person; it is meant to help a person. Hopefully Mr. G. will listen and will do what the two or three believing brothers tell him to do; if he does not, then you must follow step number three.

3) The Third Step (Matthew 18:17)

Now the matter must be brought before the church. Again Mr. G. has an opportunity to confess his sin and fix what is wrong. If he refuses to do this, then he must be put out of the church and not be allowed to fellowship with believers. He must be treated as an unsaved person. ***If a person refuses to act as a saved person should act, then he must be treated as an unsaved person.***

Think of a cancer in the body. If the cancer can be treated, this is fine. But if the cancer refuses to respond to treatment, then you must **cut it out** before it ruins and destroys the whole body.

4) A Future Step (2 Corinthians 2:7-8)

If in the future Mr. G. should ever repent and turn back to the Lord and confess his sins, then the church should receive him back and seek to help him in every possible way. God has forgiven him and the church needs to forgive him also.

It is important for every believer to stay healthy. When a believer (a member of the body) gets sick, the other members need to do the right thing to help the sick member. Otherwise the disease will spread. Another example of church discipline is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 where Paul is writing to the Corinthians believers because they failed to discipline a man who had fallen into serious sin.

One has said, **"Churches are so imperfect. I don't know any church without problems. I just don't feel comfortable being part of one."**

Churches are imperfect. Once this advice was given: "If you find a perfect church, don't join it, or you will ruin it!" Churches are imperfect because we are all sinners. But thankfully we are sinners saved by grace and God sees us perfect and complete in His beloved Son and He calls us "saints"! As we look to the living God and to His infallible Word, He can enable us to be the believers he wants us to be. Does the Lord want us to be a part of a group of believers? See Hebrews 10:25.

Keep in mind that it is important to find a church that is Bible believing and Christ exalting, desiring only His glory and honor. We do not want a place where we go to just perform a ritual or carry out religious duties. We want a place where we can worship the true and only God and learn His Word so that we may live according to its holy principles.

Some Take The High Road

