

Bedford Bulletin

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BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE
F A I T H
1 Corinthians 3:9-11

Appointed for the Defense of the Gospel (Part 12)

Identifying the Church through the Inspired Scriptures – Part 3 of 3

This is the last article in the 3-part series on “Identifying the Church through the Inspired Scriptures”. In this issue we’ll address the conditions for membership in the church. A question comes to mind as I ponder this, and that is; “What are the conditions required for an individual to be a member in the local church?”

First a reminder that there is a difference, already discussed, between the “universal church” and the “local church”. One is added to the universal church, the body of Christ by the same act, and at the same time, that one’s soul is saved. In the act of obedience to the command of Christ—one is baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27), and then is added to the universal church/body of Christ (Acts 2:47). It is common in many cases, that a person who is converted in a local area is usually automatically considered a member of a local church. But this has a tendency to blur the distinction between the universal church, and the local church. The danger is that some people might not be informed that joining a local work comes with responsibility.

It is important for brethren to teach new converts that joining the local church is an agreement to (1) work together with a group of saints, (2) to submit to common oversight, and (3) to pool one’s resources to do a collective work. The authority for this teaching is clearly found in the scripture. “*And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple*” (Acts 9:26, Emphasis mine). Another example is when Phoebe moved to Rome as we read “*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 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*” (Rom. 16:1-2). You see that Paul “*commended her*” to the saints there in Rome. There are two aspects then concerning membership in the local church. (1) One becomes a member of the local church when he expresses his or her desire to be a member and (2) The local church must be willing to accept him or her based on its judgment that the person has obeyed the gospel to be saved, and is living a life of moral purity, loyal to the commandments of the Lord.



“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’”

Mistakes that many make: Most churches in the world of denominations will enforce an allegiance

to a creed book as a condition for membership. Some will require that one tell his or her “better felt than told”, or personal testimony experience. When this is done, they are requiring more than what is required by the scripture or less than what is required. Remember that anything other than what the Bible requires for church membership, whether it be more or less than what the scripture teaches, is outside of the authority of the scripture, therefore, it is sin. I’ll point out three here; “*Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar*” (Prov. 30:6), and “*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these*

Knowing & Doing God's Will

Proverbs 11:14

things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18), and "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). Whether the context is the Old Law, or the Book of Revelation the connecting theme is the same, "Don't change what God said or commanded".

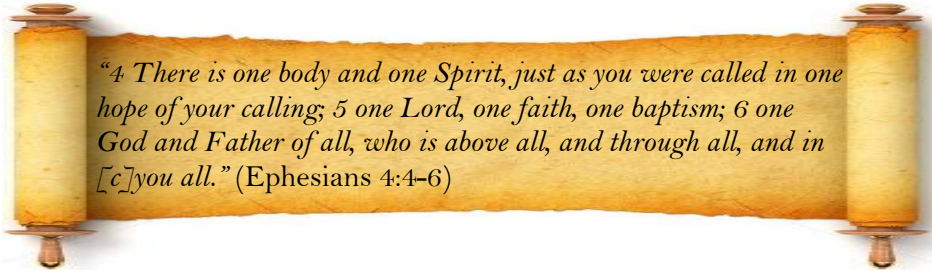
Paul said, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17) and "And if anyone does not obey our word in this [a]epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2Thess. 3:14). The fact is we have a pattern to follow as Paul told the church at Philippi, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3:17).

It is common for many denominations to allow people to become members, even though they are actively living in some form of moral sin such as adultery, or drunkenness. But sadly there are also some in the Lord's church who will receive into its fellowship such and allows them to maintain fellowship even though they are living immoral lives. This is very serious because they are no longer a part of the fellowship that Christ identifies with. Paul rebukes the church at Corinth because they allowed immorality to defile the church and instructs them to rightly judge immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-11).

It is important that new members also learn just what the mission of the church is. Paul speaks of the church this way saying, "but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). You see, "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" implies members of the Lord's church have great responsibility in conveying the truth to the world. God designed the church (Eph. 3:16-11), established it on earth (Matt. 16:18), and gave it a work to do. This work is a divine work because the church is a divine institution. This work is the greatest work because the church is the greatest institution. This work is a glorious work because the church is a glorious institution.

The mission of the church can be divided into the following three categories: (1) evangelism: Mankind is lost in sin (Rom. 3:23). The gospel is the only power to save (Rom. 1:16), therefore God wants the gospel preached (Mark. 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:21) and has given the responsibility to the church only. The church's marching orders; Jesus said to go preach the gospel to every creature. (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). In the parable of the sower, Jesus showed that the church is the sowing agency (Matt. 13:3-9). The church is to "hold fast the words of life" (Phil. 2:16). (2) Edification "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32, see Eph. 4:11-12). The church must be committed to spiritual growth so that its members can teach others (Heb. 5:12), have love, knowledge and discernment (Phil. 1:9), growing faith and an abounding love toward each other (2 Thess. 1:3) and can resist the Devil in all of his devices (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5: 9; 2 Cor. 2:11). The third and final thought is the case for benevolence for its own members (Acts 6:1-6; 11:27-30). These are the only works God has given to the church. When churches become involved in building hospitals, colleges, orphan homes, old folks homes, family counseling programs, entertainment activities (Valentine's Day party, New Year's Eve celebration, July 4th fireworks display, etc.), aerobics, CPR training, and such like programs, it has departed from the mission God gave his church to perform, and is no longer like the Lord's church as revealed in the Scriptures.

There are other things that could be said about the Lord's church, but these should help one to find the church that Jesus established in the community in which you live.



"4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in [c]you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Remember that God has established and built only one church and that you need to be a member of it in order to be saved. May God bless your quest to find the Lord's church or to start the Lord's church in your community.

As always, in Love

Dave Scarpino

Times of Our Services

Sunday Morning Bible Study	9:00 AM
Sunday Morning Worship	9:50 AM
Sunday Evening Worship	6:00 PM
Wednesday Evening Bible Study	7:30 PM

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Hear the gospel	John 6:45; Romans 10:17
Believe the gospel	John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6
Repent of sins	Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30
Confess Christ	Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10
Be baptized	Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38
Remain faithful unto and until death	Revelation 2:10; Matthew 10:22