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## The NT Case for Church Membership— A Minimalist Account

- The minimalist argument: Biblical exhortations and expectations that require an organized, corporate body to fulfill imply that Christians should be a part of such a body in order to fulfill them.
- The function of membership on a minimalist account: to clarify who “counts” as belonging to a particular local church and therefore, who carries the responsibilities and privileges thereof.

At core, the New Testament paints a clear picture that Christians:

- Are to regularly gather with a group of believers in the name of Christ for Gospel exhortation and encouragement (e.g., Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; 11:17-18; Heb. 10:25g)
  - This can’t refer the universal church, which cannot gather. It must refer to gathering with **local churches**.
  - On multiple occasions, believers are identified by their association with such **local gatherings** in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:14).

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- Are to be ***known and accountable*** to such a regular gathering and are ***perceived by others as belonging to the regular gathering*** (e.g., 2 Thess. 3:14-15; Matt. 18:15-17; Cor 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 1:20; 3 Jn. 5-6; 1 Thess. 5:12)
- Are to be ***under the authority*** of church leaders and submit to that authority
  - Elders are called to shepherd the flock among them—but that can't refer to the whole world, which would make shepherding an impossible task. It must refer to local flocks (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).
  - Christians cannot possibly submit to every elder in the world—the expectation is that one submits to local church elders (Heb. 13:17).
- Are to be the potential object of redemptive church discipline (1 Cor 5:3-5; 2 Cor 2:5-7)
  - It is difficult to understand how someone could be put “out” of the church if there is no such thing as being “in” (1 Cor 5:12-13).