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# Church Membership

## Acts 2:41-47

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### Introduction

- A story from nursery ministry with 2 1/2 yr. olds on 9/14/13 Weekend in the Word.

Kelly Hines drops her son off to Lois Mascotti and me. I took one look at her son, little Cameron, and could not believe my eyes. It's been probably a year or so since I looked closely at him. He came to the nursery ready to play. We soon were on the carpet with trucks and blocks and other assorted things. We were having fun. But my mind could not come off a certain thought. Cameron looked just like his dad. That nose – unmistakably a Hines. Those cheeks - undeniably a part of Cameron's family. This little boy had characteristics that verified him as a member of the Hines family. And then I pondered the Hines family – six of these guys. Even though one turns around and there's another Hines each one of these precious children is a newly created undeniable, identifiable member of their family.

Now why are we talking about Cameron? This is the imagery I want you to have in your mind as we introduce the topic for this morning – church membership.

Here's a question for you. Is church membership in the Bible? If we asked for a show of hands I think we would see that some say yes, some say no and many say who cares? But I think a better question to our first one would be something like this. How do you know if the Bible teaches on church membership? How would you go about finding out whether or not the Bible teaches on this topic? Would you look in an exhaustive concordance for church membership? Would you hope the subject index of your Bibles has this entry? In other words, What would you be looking for in the Bible to determine whether churches are to have church membership or not?

Back to our original question: is church membership in the Bible? The answer (as I will argue for today) is if you are looking for the right thing church membership is everywhere in the Bible. If you understand that church membership is more like members of a family rather than members of a club who pay dues to service providers then you will not only see it in the Bible but you will see both the importance and privilege of it in the Bible. Each of you will be called to renew your love for your church family through church membership or you will be called to stop viewing the local church as a service provider and team up in the mission of the church through becoming a member of the church.

Open your Bibles to Acts 2v41-47. From this passage I'm contending this morning that:

**The gospel creates undeniable, identifiable church members  
who devote themselves to this newly created life.**

Take a listen as I read our text for this morning; Acts 2v41-47.

*41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* (ESV Acts 2:41-47)

The structure of this summary passage is simple (see pattern in Acts 4:32-37; 5:12-16).

- We have in v41,47 the beginning and the end of the paragraph. There is a parallel thought to observe – “there were added that day” (41) and “the Lord added to their number day by day” (47). This similar thought functions as a frame for the picture we see in v42-46
- V42-46 is an expansion of the topic found in the first and last verses of the paragraph. The writer of the book of Acts, Dr. Luke, records in these verses the beginning of the church. This paragraph functions in the narrative to highlight the fact that God through His Spirit and gospel creates new communities and not simply dealing with individuals in isolation.

So I tried to capture this structure and its purpose in a picture that you see on the screen. This slide is static. It doesn't move. There is no animation. This is all you will get today. But as you listen to this passage and look at this picture I pray that you will sense God's voice communicating church membership over your life – where you ought to be and the attitude and activities you ought to see.

We will start with the topic found in v41, 47... The picture frame.

## **The Picture Frame**

**v41,47**

Verse 41 starts with the little word SO telling us that what we are looking at today is a summary of Acts 2. It is a portrait of the first Christian church.

Acts 2 is a fascinating chapter. It is a non-repeatable moment in salvation history. It recounts the coming of the Spirit as a fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. The Passover of Egypt and Jewish festival of Pentecost (fiftieth) point to the Messiah and the redemption He accomplished. This is none other than Jesus Christ's life and death and resurrection. All the covenants, all the types, all the prophecies trace to Jesus Christ.

He came as God's only son. He lived approximately 30 years without sin. He went to the cross as a substitute for the sins of all who believe on him. He came out of the grave three

days later to start a new stage in God's glorious story of salvation; the inauguration of the new creation.

In chapter two we see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1-13) and we hear the apostle Peter's interpretation of this event (14-40). Peter's sermon is the proclamation of the gospel; what God has done for His people in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Gospel created**

**v41**

And so when we get to our summary paragraph in v41 we notice what the gospel created. It created a new community of believers in Jesus. These were individuals who received the gospel. They were cut to the heart (37). Their conscience was awakened by the Holy Spirit using this Holy Word and they were deeply troubled. Their open heart soon saw the hope of the gospel. These particular people received the word. Now notice what happens.

Look down at the verse (41) and observe carefully. The people who cut to the heart repented of their sins and were baptized by water. At that point they were added to the specific 120 members already converted to Christ as seen in 1:14-15. This is the beginning of the local church. The gospel created church members of Christ and each other.

### **Church members**

**v47**

If v41 does not convince you that the gospel creates specific noticeable, identifiable, undeniable church members who can be counted and counted on notice v47.

It reads, "and the Lord added to their number those who were being saved". That is to say, everyone who received the gospel, who was cut to the heart, who asked what to do, who repented of their sins, who were baptized as believers; these marked out ones were added to the number = the number; the specific identifiable people who were followers of Jesus and partners of each other.

That beloved is our frame for our picture this morning. The Gospel creates undeniable, identifiable church members...

As we pick up the summary passage in v42 we see what these church members look like. We observe in v42-46 that they devote themselves to this new life the gospel creates. And this is the new life to which now we turn our attention.

### **The picture**

**v42-46**

In these verses (42-46) we see a lot of activity and an attitude. In this gospel created church there are learning and living together that is conspicuous and lively.

The text has one verb and four nouns. This means that what is behind all this learning and partnering and sharing and praying is a passion. They were devoted to these activities. This word "devoted themselves to" means:

- To occupy oneself diligently with something
- To pay persistent attention to
- To hold fast to something
- To continually to be in something

This idea of devotion may be likened to a wedding I recently attended... (tell story)

This devotion or heart-felt commitment is seen in the 120 core members of the church in 1:14. It is again seen in the resolve of the apostles to occupy themselves with prayer and the ministry of the word (6:4). Let us not miss the obvious. The newly church members have the same intensity as the core team leaders and their apostles. That stuck me as amazing.

Notice with me what the church members were passionate about.

### **Learning together**

Starting in v42 we see their passion was for apostolic teaching. They could not get enough of the apostles' teaching. Day by day they would go to the Temple together to listen to their new leaders expound the Old Testament and hear of the glories of Jesus and their new identity.

If we would read on in the book of Acts, we would notice that there were informal times of learning. The apostle Paul, for example, taught the precious scriptures in public And from house to house (cf. 20:20). These new members of the local church prized the Word. They longed to hear it and then study it for themselves (see 17:11). The Word was not boring. Oh, it was difficult at times to understand (see 2Pet.3:16). But these new church members had a hunger. They occupied themselves diligently and held fast to the apostles' teaching.

We do not have apostles today. They have been dead for some time. But they left the deposit of truth (Jude 3). We have the Bible complete today. It is in your hand. It is on your lap. It is to be in your heart. Church members' hearts are awakened by the Spirit and Word and have a devotion to the Bible that translates into life change. These types of churches are not merely Bible teaching churches. They are known as Bible learning; Bible believing churches.

This is the first characteristic of a member of this new family / of this local church. People are devoted to learning the Scriptures.

### **Partnering together**

The second characteristic we see in v42 is a devotion to the fellowship. This commitment is not merely to fellowship. The text calls it The Fellowship. This characteristic has more to do with partnership in the common mission. The fellowship was the church who was on mission. These new members devoted themselves to this mission with all passion and commitment.

We see this type of fellowship all through the book of Acts. We see a snapshot of it clearly in the book of Philippians where the apostle described the church members as having a "partnership in the gospel". Same word as here. Same idea as there. Each member of the church was called into the mission of the church.

Here at CC, we've summarized the Bible's teaching on the mission of the church like this: By God's grace and with His word we aim to cultivate in the hearts of God's people a passion for the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ magnified in love for him, manifested in love for one another and multiplied in love for the lost.

This is a portrait of church membership. We open our Bibles and look for local church membership and this is what we see.

The second of the four characteristics of church members is snapshotted here as people created by the gospel and now have a passion for partnering up with the local church in its biblical mission.

### **Sharing together**

As we move along to notice characteristics of church members we come to the phrase “breaking of bread”. As I read some commentators, the idea here is communion. It is a time when the true church gathers together to worship the risen reigning Christ through one of the ordinances of the local church; The Lord’s Supper.

Though this is true and true members gather regularly to “break bread” in communion, it does not appear that this phrase is restricted to that ordinance. As we read on we see that Luke is describing these newly created church members not merely by talking about what they do in a church service. He is talking about daily living and ordinary experiences. That is, in v46 the “broke bread” in their homes and received their food together with gladness and generosity. This is a description of simply eating together. These members enjoyed eating together. They were devoted and committed and into the experience of just having lunch together.

Furthermore, this sharing together cost them something. In v45 they shared their possessions with each other. They did not believe they were owners of anything. They saw themselves as stewards of what God gave them. If someone in their church was in need, it was a passion for the members to supply what was lacking.

The portrait of the local church before our eyes: a gospel created identifiable church membership who were passionate about living together – they learned the Bible together. They partnered in the mission together. They shared their lives together.

And lastly we see they prayed together.

### **Praying together**

They called upon the Lord together. They thanked the Lord together. They sang to the Lord together. They confessed to the Lord together. And they did these types of these according to 3:1 in a regular fashion.

The last characteristic of church members according to this passage is they pray together.

## **Reflect and Respond**

Before us this morning we have a portrait of the local church. It is framed by the gospel which creates communities who are identifiable in both how they become members (i.e. repentance and be baptism) and how they live out this membership (devoted themselves to learning, partnering, sharing and praying together).

Left here, we may conclude this was a nice history lesson. But the Bible does not let us leave the Word in a certain culture at a certain time. The gospel transcends time and culture.

It creates what it says century by century leading up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Bible is living. The Bible is active. Is it exposing you? Is it cutting you? Is it instructing you? Is it inviting you? This message is released this morning to make plain that church membership, if we know what we are looking for, is found in the Bible. Its aim is to persuade you of both the validity of church membership and the vitality of church membership.

Allow me to close with two reflections and their suitable responses.

## **Reflection #1**

*The gospel creates identifiable church members.*

## **Response #1**

Are you a member of this local church? Are you born again? Have you been baptized as a believer in Jesus into him and his people? The Bible doesn't know anything about individual Christians wandering around the world. Nor does it know anything about joining a church as if it is a club or something. No. The Bible makes clear that we submit to the leaders of the church and one another in the church. Is church membership for you? Are you a member currently? Do you need to renew your devotion to this body? Are you not a member of any church? Have you heard God speak today about the nature and importance of church membership? What's keeping you from submitting to God and His church through membership?

## **Reflection #2**

*Church members are devoted to this newly created life.*

## **Response #2**

What is your level of passion for the Lord Jesus Christ? How is this seen in local church setting? To learn and partner and share and pray with other church members expresses devotion to the king. Are you experiencing this devotion? What helps do you need from your leaders with respect to your passion? Of the four characteristics which one is the strongest? Are you helping others in this area out of your passion for this area? Which one is the weakest? Who helps you in your weakness? How are you going to see progress in this area?

(recap the thesis and charge the people with its grace and truth)