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## Congregationalism | Misconceptions

### Congregationalism Allows Unqualified Voices Undue Influence

- “In Congregationalism, the authority and responsibility for protecting the bride of Christ and carrying out the mission of the church is largely placed in the hands of new believers, weak believers, immature believers and untrained believers.”
- In summary, the New Testament seems to suggest that 1) the whole church is given the keys to the Kingdom 2) that elders have an additional kind of authority within the local church to administer the household of God and bind consciences according to the word of God and 3) that gathered churches—members and elders—have the ability and responsibility to authoritatively exercise the Keys by publicly declaring on behalf of Heaven biblical confessions (“what”) and biblical confessors (“who”), declarations that will align with the final judgment in the absence repentance and/or apostasy.
- Therefore, we should shy away from church polities that tend to **functionally** take the exercise of the Keys out of the hands of the congregation and place them into the hands of the “professionals” within it (“elder-rule” and Orthodox Apostolic “successionism”) or into the hands of those outside of the congregation altogether (Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic). All such polities seem to **functionally** fire local congregations from their God-given responsibility to exercise the keys.

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## When Do Our Bible Studies and Small Groups Become Churches?

- We have two (minimum) or three (much better) people
- We all identify with Christ (*who*) and articulate our confession (*what*)
- We evaluate and affirm each other's professions of faith and life
- We commit to and share a mutual understanding that we:
  - Will meet together regularly in the name of Christ for Gospel exhortation and encouragement as a bona fide outpost of the Kingdom of God on Earth
  - Have a responsibility to maintain personal holiness and orthodoxy and ensure others do the same in order to continue as a part of the Outpost.
  - As elements and context permit, will observe the ordinances—baptism and the Lord's Supper—both in obedience to Christ, but also as visible, key-wielding expressions of the church, baptism binding one to the many and the Lord's Supper binding the many to one.

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## What's the Difference Between Members and Non-Members, Even If They Are Well-Known?

- Non-members don't exercise the Keys—they have no **authoritative responsibility** to evaluate the teaching of the church for Gospel faithfulness (Gal. 1), no **authoritative responsibility** to protect the holiness of the church, no role in regulating membership, no role in installing elders and deacons, and no role in contributing a vote in church discipline.
- Non-members aren't **actually** accountable to the church body (i.e., they could leave at any time with no consequences—they aren't "eligible" for church discipline)
- Non-members have not had their profession of faith and their life publicly validated by our Key-wielding congregation—they are citizens of a far country, but with no passport or an expired one.
- Practically, in terms of pastoral care, when time and resources are mutually exclusive, members will be preferred over non-members.

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## What's the Difference Between Members and Non-Members, Even If They Are Well-Known?

- Practically, non-members are unable to serve in roles that require membership (i.e., music ministry, teach in a men's/women's ministry, work in nursery or children's SS)
- Practically, our church's benevolence policy (i.e., financial aid) is significantly more limited toward non-members.

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

- The core argument: Biblical exhortations and expectations that require an organized, corporate body to fulfill entail that Christians should be a part of such a body in order to fulfill them.

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., Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 11:17-18)
  - This can't refer the universal church, which cannot gather. It must refer to gathering with **local churches**.
  - Believers are frequently identified by their association with such **local gatherings** in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:14).

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## Church Membership—A Minimalist Account

- Are ***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).