

Why Join a Church?

By Leon King

Some professed believers in Jesus Christ believe it is not necessary or scriptural to formally join a specific church. Does the Scripture support this view? I shall try to show from the Scriptures alone, that believers ought to join a church. It is not my purpose in this paper to add the views of others, though doubtless I could find support for this position among other Bible believers.

1. The Church is a called-out assembly.

Our English word "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia." According to *Strong's Concordance*, the word ekklesia is a compound of "ek" and a derivative of "kaleo." "Ek" means "out of or from." "Kaleo" means "to call or bid." Putting the two definitions together, we come up with "called out of." The Greek word "ekklesia" is translated as "church" one hundred fifteen times in the New Testament. It is translated as "assembly" three times. We can say, therefore from the teaching of scripture and use of words therein, that a church is a "called out assembly." By far, the greatest number of times the word "church(es)" appears in the New Testament, it speaks of a particular church at a particular location – a local church.

2. Jesus Christ built and is building his Church.

First use of the word "church" in the New Testament is found in Matthew 16:18, where we read: *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* According to *Zondervan's Analytical Greek Lexicon*, the verb "will build" comes from a Greek word which is singular, future, active, indicative. Since the verb does not reflect the aorist tense (a one-

time action at a particular point in time), we think we could read the phrase "I will build my church," as "I will be building my church." Jesus built his church upon himself and continues to do so.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. – Ephesians 2:19-22.

The foregoing passage from Ephesians 2 adds strength to the idea of Jesus continually building His church.

3. The first Church – the Church at Jerusalem – had a "number of names."

As the church waited for the power of the Holy Ghost according to the Lord's promise, they were gathered in a upper room in Jerusalem. The apostles along with the women are specifically mentioned.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) 16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. – Acts 1:15,16.

We know the eleven remaining apostles were there along with the women. The foregoing passage indicates the "number of names were about an hundred and twenty." This strongly suggests a church roll or something like a church roll. They knew who the persons were that were

included in the one hundred and twenty. This was the number of the called out, baptized disciples who composed the church at Jerusalem waiting for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

4. The pattern at Pentecost shows that believers are added to the Church.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. – Acts 2:40-42.

Those who gladly received the message preached by the Apostle Peter at Pentecost were baptized – and added to the church composed of the one hundred and twenty names. Now the church is composed of three thousand one hundred and twenty names. This is the pattern. People hear the word – receive it gladly, are baptized, and added to the Lord's church. Believing and baptism do not put them in the church, but qualifies them both spiritually and ceremonially for church membership.

5. The term “whole church” is applied to Local New Testament Churches only.

The whole church often gathers together. In other words, the called out assembly assembles as the following verses show:

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: -- Acts 15:22 .

Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. -- Romans 16:23.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? -- 1 Corinthians 14:23.

How could anyone know that the whole church came together unless there was a method of accounting for those who were the called out, baptized disciples who customarily gathered together? In these passages, it is clear that the term "whole church" applies to local churches only.

6. The Local Church is the body of Christ.

Personally, I do not like to use the term "local church." I think it is creates confusion. Why not think of the church for what it is? It is an assembly of baptized, called-out people. Who would deny that such an assembly has agreed together to continue in the Apostles' doctrine, prayers, and breaking of bread? Such is the church – and the church is the body of Christ.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. --1 Corinthians 12:27.

These words are directed to the church of God which was at Corinth. Paul said, "*Now ye are the body of Christ,*" How uncomplicated it is! You – the church of God which is at Corinth – you are the body of Christ and members in particular. This passage teaches us that all of the members with their individual gifts composed the body of Christ – the church at Corinth. It is the same with any of the Lord's churches. All of the

members (whether two, three, or ten thousand) compose the body of Christ – the church in any particular locale whether Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, or Philadelphia.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: -- Ephesians 4:11-12.

The apostles were members of the church at Jerusalem. There were prophets in the church at Jerusalem as well as evangelists. There are no more apostles such as the twelve or as the Apostle Paul. I see evangelists in the same way as missionaries. A missionary is a pastor who is working in another location to establish a church out of baptized believers. Today, we have objective scriptural criteria with which to choose Pastors/Teachers. All of these together were in the church for one basic reason – for the edifying of the body of Christ – the building up of the Lord’s church which is His body. The pattern – people heard the word, gladly received it, were baptized, and added to the church which is the body of Christ. That is what we saw for then and ought to be what we see now. The body is where we find our edification – where we are fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies – every relationship in the body.

7. The Lord adds to the Church such as are being saved.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. – Acts 2:46,47.

This is crystal clear. The Lord adds to the church such as should be saved. The Lord places members in the body.

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. – 1 Corinthians 12:18.

The Lord adds to the church such as are being saved. The Lord sets members in the body as it pleases him. The body is the church. The church of Corinth, like all of the Lord's churches, is the body of Christ. If this be true – and it is, then it follows that the Holy Spirit will lead the disciple to one of the Lord's true churches for membership. I believe that every disciple is led to scriptural baptism, thence to the Lord's churches.

8. Church discipline demands a membership roll.

Sadly, there are times in the church when there is a need for discipline. One of the members grievously sins and the church, for the Lord's sake, must take action. Such was the case in Corinth of the man who took his own father's wife and committed fornication.

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 ¶ Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even

Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 ¶ I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. – 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

"Taken away from among you;" "To deliver such an one to Satan;" "Purge out therefore the old leaven;" "without;" "within;" "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." What can all of these things mean? When the church is gathered together (a phrase worth considerable deliberation), they are to pray that he be taken away – they are to deliver him to Satan – he must not remain within, but put without – he is to be put away from among themselves. All these instructions demand church membership. How can the church discipline a person over which they have no jurisdiction? How can they discipline one who is without? Obviously, without means outside of the church.

9. Pastoral duties demand that a pastor know which of the sheep are in the flock of his charge.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise,

speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. – Acts 20:28-30.

To the elders at Ephesus, Paul spoke these words. The Holy Ghost had called them to their work and set them over the flock. The metaphor “flock” is indicative of a flock of sheep. Sheep are kept in flocks. There are shepherds over every individual flock. Pastors, elders, or Bishops are given jurisdiction over individual flocks.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. – 1 Peter 5:1-4.

These elders are shepherds, but not the chief shepherd. They may be called “under shepherds.” It is foolish to believe that a man can pastor a flock – or take the oversight of a congregation - without knowing exactly for whom he is responsible.

10. A final word.

As Pastor of the Hidden Hills Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, I will never ask people who visit with us to join this church. This is not say that I am opposed to those who the Lord leads to us – I am very happy to see them do the bidding of the Lord. It appears manifestly true to me that scripture addresses the churches in such a manner that it assumes there are unbelievers in the midst of it. For example, we are commanded, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Consequently, the church roll on earth below probably doesn't correspond with the names written in heaven. Notwithstanding, God is a God of order and directs that all things be done decently and in order. Church rolls are certainly a means of keeping order.

I am against "membership drives" and innovations of men to bolster the size of the congregation. I do not know what church the Lord wants individuals in. I am persuaded of this fact: God's word shows that early believers joined churches. It is in these churches that baptized believers exercise their gifts. It is in these churches where they grow up in Christ under the leadership and teaching of Godly pastors. It is in these churches where they learn to encourage, suffer long, forbear, forgive and patiently endure with exceeding joy.

I exhort that you find the true New Testament Church where the Lord leads you – and join up! Remember, the Holy Spirit of God will not lead you to a church which is unscriptural or unsound – which is not founded and existing on God's word. The Holy Spirit, your teacher, comforter, and guide, will lead you to a church which is a follower of a long line of sound churches since the days of the personal ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Support the saints and glorify the Lord in His church which is the body of Christ!