



Must I be a Member of a  
Local Church?

# Must I be a Member of a Local Church?

- When one is baptized, the Lord adds him to the church universal; however, the scriptures teach that one must serve the Lord as a faithful, active member of a local assembly of Christians.
  - Acts 2:47 - “...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

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- Gal. 3:26-27 - “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
- Luke 17:20-21 - “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’”

# Christians And Local Churches

- Identifying with a local church
  - Acts 9:26-28 - “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. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.”

# Christians And Local Churches

- There are 33 distinct local churches mentioned in the New Testament.
  - Phil. 1:1 - “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”
  - Acts 16:15, 33 - In the beginning, it consisted of Lydia and the Philippian jailor and their households
- These 33 local churches consisted of Christians in a geographic area that gathered together as local churches.

# Christians And Local Churches

- Scriptures speak of the church gathered together, as well as not assembled together.
  - Acts 14:27 - “Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”
  - 1Cor. 11:18, 20 - “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.”
  - 1Cor. 14:28 - “But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.”

# Christians And Local Churches

- The Divinely mandated activities of the church cannot be conducted by individual Christians who elect to do so apart from the other disciples who constitute the local church
  - Assemble for edification - Heb. 10:25 - “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”
  - Assemble to commune with the Lord - 1Cor. 11:18-34 (6 times uses some form of “when you come together”)
  - Practice discipline - 1Cor. 5:4-5 - “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ...”
  - Appoint elders - Acts 14:23-27

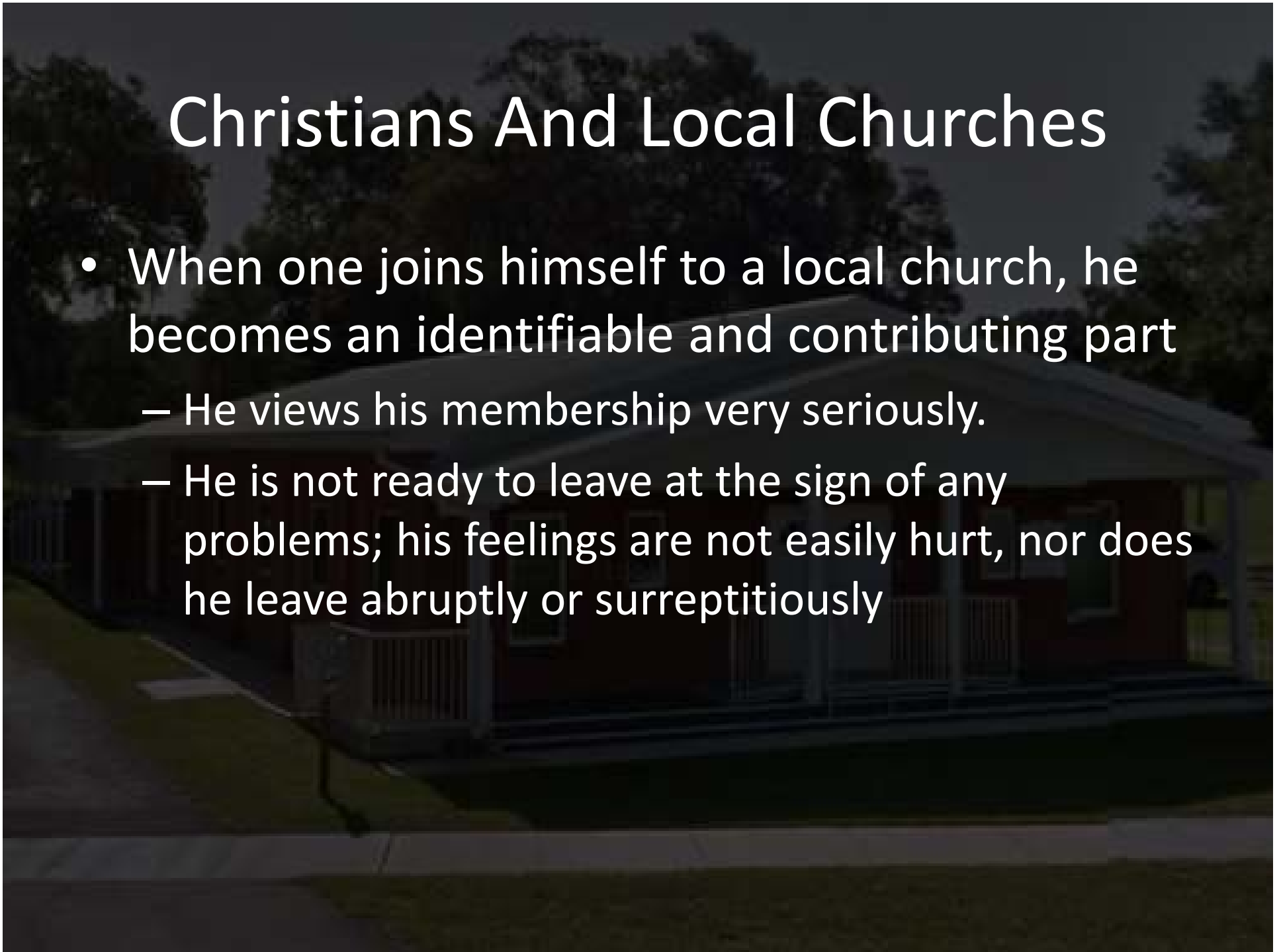
# Christians And Local Churches

- Saul desired to join himself to the church at Jerusalem - Acts 9:26-28
  - Join - Greek kollao - “Descriptive of close and intimate relationships; to glue or cement together, generally, to unite, to join firmly” (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W. E. Vine)
  - Kollao is indicative of the importance of membership in a local church; it connotes firmness and immovability in a relationship



# Christians And Local Churches

- When one joins himself to a local church, he becomes an identifiable and contributing part
  - He views his membership very seriously.
  - He is not ready to leave at the sign of any problems; his feelings are not easily hurt, nor does he leave abruptly or surreptitiously



# Christians And Local Churches

- At first, the church in Jerusalem did not accept Saul
  - Acts 9:1 - “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest”
- They were well within their rights and responsibilities
  - Membership in a local church is a blessing and privilege, not a right or an entitlement

# Christians And Local Churches

- Fellowship is and always will be a conditional matter
  - Eph. 5:10-11 - “Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”
  - 2John 9-11 - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

# Christians And Local Churches

- The purpose of New Testament mentions of letters of commendation:
  - 2Cor. 3:1 - “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”
  - Acts 18:27 - “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace”

# Christians And Local Churches

- “Against the usefulness of such letters in general Paul here says nothing. Such letters of commendation deserve notice as an important element in the early church. A Christian traveling with such a letter from any church was certain to find a hearty welcome at any other. They guaranteed at once his soundness in the faith and his personal character, and served to give a reality of the brotherly love existing between those in Christ” *(David Lipscomb, A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, pg. 47).*

# Christians And Local Churches

- Unconditional fellowship is not only unscriptural, it also unnecessarily risks endorsing divisive and unfaithful people.
- Notice the twofold responsibility:
  - It is the responsibility of the Christian to join himself to a local church
  - And, it is the duty of elders and the local church to determine whether they are in fellowship with the Christian

# Membership Is Inherent In The Command To Assemble

- Heb. 10:23-25 - Notice the language, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”
- The writer is addresses specific people (ourselves, a group of persons that constitute a collectivity united by identity and purpose), and a specific act (assembling, the practice of coming together for a Divinely mandated purpose).
- This assembling is not presented as optional nor without serious consequence if ignored - Heb. 10:26-31

# Membership Mandates Active Participation In A Local Church

- Local churches have Divinely assigned works - 1Tim. 5:16, 3:15; Eph. 4:16
- Each member is to contribute to the work of the church; his time, energy, and resources cannot be given by proxy.
- One cannot fulfill this responsibility as a member at large, randomly meeting from place to place.



# Membership Requires Subjection To The Elders

- The most common reason some elect to be members at large: they maintain an independent spirit at un-Christ-like levels
  - They want to attend and participate according to their own standards and do not wish to be informed or directed by another
  - They want to avoid the limits imposed by commitment to a local church
- Elders are part of God's safeguard for individual Christians as well as for local churches.
  - 1Tim. 3:4-5, 5:17; 1Peter 5:2; Heb. 13:7, 17

# Must I be a Member of a Local Church?

- One cannot be a faithful Christian without being a faithful member of a faithful local church.
- Pure, Biblical Christianity demands that one be an active member of a sound local church.

