

## LVIX. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

### *What Does the Bible Say?*

#### “What Does the Bible Say about Church Membership?”

#### I Corinthians 12

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In this study we will be looking at a couple of passages and I'll be referring to a lot of passages on this matter of membership and the church. There is a pastor's inquiries class we have here at Briarwood for those considering membership here. Attending the class doesn't commit you to membership for it is for inquirers also but the question we would ask, is why would we go to it? Is it a matter of tradition or a matter of a Biblically informed practice that would be consistent with God's Word? So let's start but looking at Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:7–16 says [7] *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. [8] Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”*

[9] *(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Ephesians 2:18–22 says [18] *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Now let's look at I Corinthians where Paul has just spoken about each given spiritual gifts. I Corinthians 12:12–19 says [12] *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. [14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

Now let's look at I Corinthians 14:26–40 which says [26] *What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. [27] If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. [28] But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. [29] Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. [30] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, [32] and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. [33] For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*

*As in all the churches of the saints, [34] the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. [35] If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

*[36] Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? [37] If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. [38] If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. [39] So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. [40] But all things should be done decently and in order.*

Let me quickly address what is probably running through your mind when this passage says 'for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church' that has a very specific dynamic and it is referring to the fact that everybody comes together – men and women have a word, a psalm, a prophecy meaning in that context that would be similar to what we would call a testimony, where something is upon their heart. Then there would be a period of time in which there was an evaluation of prophecies and testimonies. It was at that point of evaluation that the woman was to keep silent and her husband was to act as the representative of the family in that process of evaluating the prophecies that were taking place. It is clear it is not demanding uniform silence because it says that men and women both have prophecies, psalms and testimonies etc. It is speaking in terms of a specific moment as to how it is to be handled.

In series of passages that have just been read I want you to see something very specific but I want to ask you if you have heard someone say something like this; 'Oh I believe in Jesus and Christianity, it's just I'm not into the church thing' or 'why do we have to be a member of church and why is that necessary? Is that necessary?' I want to share my heart on this and I may get controversial but every time I hear someone say something like that it translates into 'I am not going to be accountable or submissive but I am going to be independent.' So I want to give you three 'I's' that are prevalent in evangelical, temporary Christianity in order to address this issue. I find it interesting these three words begin with 'I' just like the letter in the middle of 'sin' is 'I' for 'I' is very prevalent in this matter.

The first 'I' is individualism. Here we get into the individualistic accounts where I have an individualistic relationship with Christ and that's all that I need. My Christianity is private. Where does this come from? It has its appeal based on the fact that no one becomes a Christian based upon a group plan. To get into the Kingdom of God you have to make a personal commitment to Christ. It is not through a group plan. The gate is narrow and only one fits through at a time. That is a given fact where salvation is a personal commitment to Christ but when you are saved individually you are not saved for individualism, where the Christian life is simply about the individual. On the contrary, the Bible is very clear that we are saved to become a part of the body of Christ.

In the passages that were read the phrase 'body of Christ' was used a number of times. Whenever you see the phrase 'the body of Christ' it does not refer to the local church for that refers to the church universal. There is One body but obviously there is more than one body if you are talking about local churches. There is one body and we are members of it. God has placed us in the body and gifted us as He wills. Sound familiar? How do you get membership in the church universal, the body of Christ? It is by conversion for when God saves you then you become a member of the church universal. You are given the Holy Spirit with a particular gift that is a part of the body of Christ and necessary within the body of Christ. It is not like Briarwood is a body of Christ. When the Bible talks about the body of Christ it is a definite article, not plural, but *the* body of Christ one.

Not everyone has the same gift so that the body of Christ is not a 500 pound eye. Even though you may be jealous of someone else's gift and think because you don't have their gift then you're not a part of the body of Christ, you are wrong. If you are saved you are a part of the body of Christ. My hand is connected to my arm whether it wants to be a hand or an eye, it's still connected to my arm. Every single part is necessary in the body of Christ for there are no unnecessary parts.

You will also notice that this body of Christ meets in local assemblies. In I Corinthians 14 it said 'when you come together' so here are those who are part of the church universal that become a functioning part of the *ekklesia* (the church) which is the word that is used most of the time in Scripture. It is those who have been called out of their sin and darkness that are called together. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the habit of some (Hebrews 10:25). In I Corinthians 11 which talks of taking the Lord's Supper it mentions three times 'when you come together,' 'when you assemble.' There is the church local which on the Lord's Day and at appointed times meets together which we call the church gathered and then there is the local church after it meets and gathers for worship, encouragement and equipping then scatters for mission in this world. So there is a church gathered and a church scattered but there is a local church that is not the body of Christ but is a manifestation of the body of Christ in that community.

How do you get to be a member of that church? Different churches will have different processes but the fundamental issue is that you must personally make that commitment. If you don't then there are many Scriptures that will make no sense and I am going to refer to some of those for you in this study. So if there is not a local church that manifests the body of Christ that gathers for worship, equipping and discipleship and scatters for mission and message, then the Bible will make no sense as well as commands and exhortations of our Lord will make no sense. So when the Bible speaks of church it may be speaking of the church universal or the church local. Local churches also have a relationship in a church called a regional church which in our denomination is a presbytery. Then the presbyteries have a relationship in a national church but in this study we will focus on the local church, itself.

Now, why would I say that you are responsible in terms of what local church you are a part of and no one can make that commitment for you? As a pastor, I'm not allowed to go through a neighborhood and tell someone they are member of our church. I'm not allow to assume my role as pastor in someone's life until that someone recognizes me as their pastor, these are their elders and these are their people. The local church is not a home gathering of friends. Can we have home gatherings? Yes but unbelievers have a lot of gatherings and get together with friends, groups, clubs and everything.

Believers practice friendship and it's called fellowship but that goes even beyond friendship. And I have fellowship with people that I probably wouldn't be friends with in life. This is God's family, God's church that is manifested locally and when I become a part of it I am called to love those people that I may not have chosen to be my friend. This is so profound that the community looks and sees a people who are not a people but something has made them the people of God and my how they love one another. It is a clear local manifestation of these people who have become members one of another in a community as a local church and they are bound together by covenant oaths and vows to the Lord with one another.

If that's not true then the Bible just doesn't make sense, becomes irrational and illogical because implicit throughout the Scripture is this call to membership. You don't become a member of the church universal by your initiation but by a sovereign God who saves you and adds you into the body of Christ. Then He calls you to assemble with local churches with a commitment that is manifested with a statement of being members of one another in the body of Christ.

So how many times do you think Jesus speaks directly and explicitly about the church and the Gospel when He teaches and preaches? He actually says it two times. You probably think then it must not be very important but then I would ask you if you thought the inspiration of Scripture was important. *Theópneustos* which means God breathed is only found one time in the Bible but it's described multiple times in the Bible. So we don't attach importance to something by how many times it's mentioned/written although that is an interesting study. What is interesting to note is the two times Jesus mentions it – in Matthew 16 and 18.

Matthew 16:13–19 says [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* There is one institution in this world that is indestructible and that is the church of Jesus Christ.

There was a man I had the privilege to mentor who went to Chicago to plant a church inside what is called The Loop. In the 1970s that was a treacherous place to go plant a church. I told him 'You obviously didn't do your demographic work and went right where they needed you. You didn't go to where the church growth people would tell you to go.' He said to me 'As I read the Bible Jesus said He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it but I don't think The Loop is the gates of hell but you can sure smell the smoke from there.' He went and planted a church there and God really blessed his ministry from which I was grateful to watch and to be a beneficiary to seeing how it was done in and through his life.

So according to Matthew 16:18 there is something that is called Christ's church. It is triumphant throughout the ages and one day it will be gathered together and up to be with Him in a new heavens and a new earth. Until then it is meeting in local places and gathering together for Him and indwelt by Him because of what we see in Matthew 18. Now let's look at what Jesus says in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:15–17 says [15] *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he*

*does not listen, take one or two others along with you (Gal. 5 & 6), that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church.** And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”*

Galatians 5 and 6 tell us that those ‘two or three witnesses’ ought to be spiritual people, mature people in the Lord to be coming with you for such a task to restore a brother. In Matthew 18:17 when we are to tell it to the church it assumes a local church, not the church universal. This does not mean you stand up in front of the local church on a Sunday morning worship service and announce this to the whole congregation. It means as we see further in Scripture that it is to be brought before the elders of the church. Then according to Scripture they have a clear, distinct process that they are to engage in so that person can be restored. Here you have a real live manifestation of a church and the assumption that you are engaged in it. There are real people including leaders that you can go to walk through an issue like that with you that are helping you to mature and grow in the faith. So we see from Matthew 16 Jesus telling us of the indestructible nature of His church and the local reality of His church even to handle something so difficult as a brother or sister who is caught and ensnared in their sins.

So what would this look like and why is this so important? I want to give you ten reasons why membership is so important but first here are three reasons why we don’t become members. The first is individualism. The second reason why is because of ignorance. There is just Biblical illiteracy concerning the local church and membership. A third reason why is a spirit of independence that constantly creeps up and tries to reign in each one of us – a self-reliance. I do not believe in self-reliance for I am a walking co-dependent. I am a walking interdependent. I am dependent on Christ and interdependent with the body of Christ. I cannot live my Christian life alone. I need Him, the power of the Holy Spirit, and His people with the gifts He has given to them. I cannot even lead by myself and that’s why God has put a plurality of leadership in His local church – the elders (plural) of the church (singular). So we want to say ‘no’ to individualism, ignorance and independency. Notice the “I” words here.

In the 1990s do you know what the number one song played at funerals was? It was the song ‘I Did It My Way.’ I have watched Christians cry when they listen to it. That song is so silly, nonsensical and irrational. I haven’t heard it in a funeral service I’ve officiated but I hear about this song being played all the time at funerals. It is unbelievable the fabrications we put into life.

So we have the ekklesia gathered and scattered so why would it be so crucial as Jesus assumes in Matthew 16 and 18? When you go through the Epistles we see many of them addressed to local churches. For instance let’s take Philippians. Philippians 1:1–2 says *[1] Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:** [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* Here Paul writes a letter to the saints in Philippi, so does he write to each one individually? No, he sends it to the church at Philippi assuming that is where they will be. He is speaking to all the Christians specifically addressing the elders and deacons assuming they are all a part of the church and a church that is properly led with elders and deacons – those ordained offices that guide the church.

So if Paul were to send a letter to all the Christians in Birmingham, would they be found in a local church or are they just kind of doing their own thing? I want to be very clear here. I’m not talking about formal membership simply, but I’m talking about functional membership. I’m not talking about simply taking the vows to get my name on the roll but I’m talking about taking

vows to fulfill them where I will assemble with the saints. I will submit to those in authority over me. I will love the brethren. Those are commitments that I will work out in my life. When the church gathers I will gather with them. When the church scatters in its mission, I will scatter with her. When its leaders give direction, I by God's grace will submit to those in authority over me. This is a functional commitment and not just a formal commitment.

We don't become members just so we can put in the obituary column that we were a member of a specific local church. I wonder how many times someone has read the obituary column, noticing someone they knew but had no idea that they were a member of their church. Why? It is because it was a formal membership and not a functional one. So when Paul was writing to believers his letters were sent to churches. If they were written to an individual Christian then it would be affirmed in the letter their involvement in the church and the expectations of their involvement in the church.

Secondly is what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts. When God gives gifts they have to be ministered in connection functionally day by day with one another. I need to be a member of the body of Christ in a local situation in order to work out my spiritual gift and to bring my spiritual gift to bear in the lives of others. Each person in the church universal have a spiritual gift and if you are not functioning in the body of Christ in a local church then we are hurting. Will Jesus still get the job done? Yes you better believe it because while I'm dependent on Him, He is not dependent on me, but we have some arms, hands and legs that just aren't showing up. We still get the job done but we should rightly, expect and equip every member of the body of Christ to discern and make use of their spiritual gifts which are constantly developing in their life.

When I was kid growing up my mom would send me to a movie downtown and I loved do this because I would get to ride the bus downtown, get off and get a hot dog and orange juice at a place called Tanner's and then I'd go to the movie. Although I confess I would buy Milk duds and an orange drink while I was at the movie. At intermission I would go to the bathroom and wait for the movie to come back on and go in and watch it a second time. I'm still confessing that sin to the Lord to this day. I would always make sure I had ten cents so that on my way home I could buy a pea-shooter with peas for the bus ride home so that I could shoot peas into open windows on the way home. For me that was just so much fun to do that.

Whenever I got off the bus downtown to go to the movies I would pass this white house that was known as a hamburger place and there would be a man out front strumming a guitar who had no legs. As people walked by him they would flip him money and the money would not always get in the box or the hat he had sitting there. I would watch him take two blocks of wood, put them on his hands, pull himself up and walk himself over using his hands and arms to pick up the change that didn't make it in the box or hat. Did he get it done? Yes but if you asked him if he would have rather had legs or to keep using his arms to walk around, what do you think he would say? We have legs that just aren't showing up as functional members of the body of Christ. You have a unique gift that would make the job a whole lot better if we were engaged as members one of another, supplying the gift, the joint and the connection that God designed us to do.

A third reason why membership is important is because of Jesus' atoning death expects us to honor our church with commitment. Ephesians 5:25 says [25] *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* Here it is the church universal that He bought and paid for which now meets in local situation in local communities. When Jesus came into this world He went to the cross to do three things – one, save His people from their sins,

two, defeat Satan and his works, and thirdly, to purchase His church with His own blood. Acts 20:28 says *[28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* This is the church of God that has been purchased by the blood of Christ. The church of Christ is not only the one indestructible institution in this world but it the sacred institution in this world, sprinkled clean by the blood of Jesus.

I am unabashedly a member of a church and this decision came down in my life in a very real way as I was coming out of seminary. I was in that era where parachurch ministries were blossoming. It seemed like these very gifted guys were getting the calls to these exotic parachurch ministries. I believe there is a place for parachurch ministries and here at Briarwood we are engaged in a number of them. I am grateful for them but when that moment came I sensed in my heart that I wanted to be a churchman. I didn't know at the time specifically what God was calling me to do but I love the covenants and vows of the church. I don't want to embarrass him but I want to make it clear that I cannot tell you how much I learned in those initial years as a newly ordained minister of the Gospel from the founding pastor of this church, who also had an appreciation for parachurch organizations, but who was a great model to me and for others of what it meant to be a churchman. I would be a churchman for multiple reasons but not the least of which is that Jesus went to the cross to purchase that church, His bride, therefore I love her vows, covenants and ways.

Fourthly, membership is important because of the apostolic strategy. When Paul turned the world upside down he went to every town to do Gospel evangelism and discipleship and then would plant a church. If Paul was willing to give his life and suffer as he did for the sake of planting churches then not only should we be planting churches but we need to realize the importance of the church with our engagement and membership.

Number five is apostolic strategy number two. Paul not only planted churches but went back and revitalized churches when they were in trouble. Acts 15:41 says *[41] And he (Paul) went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.* Paul went back to strengthen the churches he planted. He sent Timothy back to the church at Ephesus to revitalize it. He sent Titus to Crete to revitalize those churches which yet remained on the island. So if the Apostle Paul would take his best men to plant and revitalize churches then ought not we embrace the church with our membership and honor her with our engagement when she gathers and scatters?

Number six, the church universal is manifested in local churches. The church universal is actually seen worked out in local churches. So there is this glorious text of the church universal in Ephesians 2 yet the letter ends up going to local churches beginning with the mother church, Ephesus, thus it's called Ephesians, with exhortations as to how the local church is to live out what the church universal has enjoyed with its blessings.

Number seven, baptism is inseparably tied to church membership. What does the Bible say? They and their households were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41). Maybe that meant the church universal? No, you don't have to be baptized to be added to the church universal – you get converted and you're added to the church universal. When you are baptized, you are baptized in a local church and added into that local church.

Number eight, membership is important because it is singular in its existence, its indestructibility and its mission. There is no greater call than the church's call for me to be a part of it. I thank God for many who are serving God in our nation and for as much as I thank God for all of those who are living out the claims of Christ in what they do each day, I will never be effective in those callings if I am not being rooted and equipped in a local church. For those who

serve in our senate that are a member here have told me that unless it is a dire emergency they will be in their church. They know they won't be able to do their job Monday through Friday if they are not in their church. I want to be connected to my congregational community and in my small group. I want to be accountable, trained and matured. So it is necessary for me to be effective in what and how I function outside of church.

Number nine, the church is so multi-faceted that it communicates to me that I need her. In the Bible there are so many word pictures given to show us the church of God. It is called the field of God, the temple of God, the army of the Lord, the family of the Lord, the bride of Christ, the vineyard and there are all kinds of names and pictures that are given to the church because it is multi-faceted in its effectual ministry in our life and we need her. I love the way the Puritans say it – the Gospel came and brought me from death unto life but then the Gospel nurtured me in the womb of the church of Jesus Christ that I might grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Number ten is we need the church to work out the multiple commandments of our relationships with one another. There are twenty plus 'one another' commandments. It says be devoted to one another, love one another, submit to one another, pray for one another, honor one another, esteem one another, encourage one another and on and on. I did a series on 18 of these and how do we live with one another unless we are members one of another. Hebrews 10:25 says **[25] not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (NAS).**

Hebrews 13:7 says **[7] Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith (NAS).** Who leads you? Maybe across the street from you is a Methodist pastor or next door to you is a Baptist pastor. In the same chapter it says in Hebrews 13:17, **[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.** Are those the leaders I'm to submit to because they happen to live near me? No, you submit to, draw from, accountable to and shepherded by those leaders you have recognized. Let's look at I Peter 5.

I Peter 5:1–5 says **[1] So I exhort the elders among you (Among who? The members of that church), as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: [2] shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [5] Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."**

This text applies to those who are members of a local church. So if a person is not a member of my church but of another they should feel no need to submit to me but to the pastor and elders they are under in their church. It is those who are 'among us' (members of Briarwood) that are to submit to me, the elders and deacons of this church and we are to shepherd them. They are the ones who have said they recognize our leadership – me as their pastor, and the elders and deacons of this church and therefore they submit to us. The same goes for who the leadership is to shepherd – the members of this church. Now we are certainly available to shepherd any and all but we have a responsibility according to Scripture to shepherd those 'among us' (members of Briarwood).

Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus when he left in Acts 20:28, **[28] Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to**

*shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (NAS).* Who made them overseers? It was the Holy Spirit. How did the Holy Spirit make them overseers? He not only gifted and called them but the church had recognized them as their elders. Therefore they were to submit to them and the leadership were to shepherd those who were among them.

Again, Hebrews 13:17a says *[17a] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.* It tells us to obey our leaders and those are the leaders you have recognized by your membership. As a member I take a vow to submit to them. One day I will have to give an account for almost 4300 people according to this verse, as a senior pastor in concert with a pastoral staff of elders and deacons of this church. I will not have to give an account for members of another church. I will certainly love them and be available to them but I will not have to give an account for them. I will have to give an account for this one. You will have to give an account for your response to the leadership of the church. Why? It is because we are members one of another.

Those things we have just looked at make no sense without membership. According to Scripture you are to commit yourself as a member to a local church, recognizing the leadership of that church in your life, submitting to that leadership and affirming that leadership and you commit yourself to lay down your life for that flock that is among you. Ask God to enable you to be an example to them. James 5:14 says *[14] Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* Local church has elders where I am a member and I call on them when I need them. The Bible tells us to confess our sins to one another, where? It is where we are committed in our membership with one another in the life that the Lord has given us together.

So here is the dynamic of the local church. There are all kinds of passages, exhortations and commandments in the Scripture about this that make no sense if there is not the membership of the local church. If you are a member of the church universal I praise God for it makes you a member of it by your conversion, by the power of the sovereign grace of God that brought you from death unto life. You may be thinking 'I just haven't made a commitment to Briarwood' alright so where? If it's not here then call me and I will help you find one but don't try to live the Christian life your way (saying 'I did it my way'). His way is to be members one of another, recognizing pastors to submit to and be accountable to, recognizing a people who are not a people but they become the people of God and they are my people. In the world I may not have even been a friend but in the body of Christ we love one another. God has called us into that relationship. Don't try to live individually, independently but live in Christ in the body of Christ manifested in a local church. If the Lord were to send you a letter He would know which one to send it to. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for Your grace, mercy and Your church. Thank You Father that it is manifested in local situations with none of them being perfect or sufficient but it is only the body of Christ that is ultimately, completely sufficient but I am insufficient apart from that local church. So Father, I pray that in this church our pastors, beginning with this senior pastor, the elders and deacons will shepherd the flock of God among us, those who have recognized our leadership. I pray that those among us will esteem those who labor for them in leadership and encourage them even as they submit to them. Then I pray Father that we might serve You as a local church in concert with other local churches as the body of Christ fulfills the Great Commission into all the world and then we who gather together on the Lord's Day and scatter

throughout every day to fulfill the mission will look forward to that glorious Day when You will gather together and gather up Your Church for a new heavens and a new earth. Come quickly Lord Jesus, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.