

# Chapter 5

## Devoted To the People of God

**Acts 2:42** And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings and **the fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers

In chapter 2, we discussed the essence of God's redeemed people as being the bride of Christ, the family of God the Father, the body of God the Son, and the temple of God the Spirit. But how does one practically devote themselves to the fellowship of the church? This lesson covers the practicality of church membership and what the Bible teaches about our devotion to the fellowship of believers.

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### Together (Baptism)

Before the new believers in the book of Acts could truly devote themselves to the fellowship, there was an initial step of obedience that publicly professed who had put faith in Jesus and who had not.

**Acts 2:41** So those who received his word were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

How is it that the author of Acts knew that there were three thousand people who came to faith in Christ? He knew because three thousand people publicly professed their new faith through the act of baptism.

To baptize someone is to dip or immerse them into water as a symbolic profession of their faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Baptism initiates the new believer into the Christian community.**

**Acts 8:12** <sup>12</sup>But **when they believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized**, both men and women.

**Matthew 28:19**<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**,

**Baptism symbolizes the death of the old life and the resurrection of the new life of the believer.**

**Romans 6:4** <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him **by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life

## JOINING TOGETHER

It is very important that the church think rightly about the act of baptism.

According to the example and instruction found in the Bible:

- Baptism is never performed on an infant.
- Baptism is only performed on those who believe in Christ Jesus.
- Baptism is performed by complete immersion of the believer into water.
- Baptism does not save. It is a symbol of salvation that has already happened.

\*Believers baptism is a required prerequisite for church membership at most evangelical churches and rightfully so as it is the public testimony of true and saving faith. There is no category in the Bible for a born again believer being disobedient in this area.

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## Together

### (Church Membership)

Devoting ourselves to the fellowship of the church involves much more than baptism and regular church attendance. While you will not see the exact words “church membership” in the Bible, the New Testament does suggest that the people within local churches are to be truly committed to one another in a deep and meaningful way.

Local churches receive commands throughout the New Testament to commit to one another in a variety of ways:

- **Love one another** (Jn 13:34-36; Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 3:11-12; 1 Jn 4:7-12)
- **Strive for Unity with one another** (Rom 12:16-18; 15:5-6; 2 Cor 13:11-12; Eph 4:1-3)

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- **Forgive one another** (Eph 4:31-32; Col 3:12-16)
- **Teach and Exhort one another** (Rom 15:14; Titus 2:1-4; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:23-25)
- **Confess to one another** (Js 5:16; Gal 6:2)
- **Serve one another** (Gal 6:9-10; 1 Pt 4:9-10)

Church membership is a commitment to a local group of Christians to live out community with one another. This is one of the reasons why many churches embrace a membership covenant where church members formally commit to one another. Covenant promises were often made throughout the Bible to ensure that everyone understood the terms of the relational commitment. Church covenants are a helpful teaching tool that unite the church together around common faith and practice.

(You may find an example church covenant in Appendix 1 at the end of the book)

- Covenantal church membership is a declaration of who officially represents Jesus and the local church.
- Covenantal church membership protects the church from false teachers.
- Covenantal church membership helps the Pastors know who are officially under their care.
- Covenantal church membership is a means of accountability as members make a promise to one another to be the church for one another.

Without covenantal or meaningful church membership, it is difficult to be obedient to the plain Biblical teaching to hold one another accountable through the act of church discipline.

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**Together**

**(Church Discipline)**

If you read the example church covenant in the appendix you will find this statement:

***“Motivated by our love, we will humbly and gently confront one another and will receive correction from one another according to the Biblical understanding of church discipline and restoration.”***

While it may be the most uncomfortable responsibility of the church, church discipline is also one of the most vital for the church’s health.

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## CHURCH DISCIPLINE

In the narrowest sense, **church discipline** is the act of excluding someone who professes to be a Christian from membership in the church and participation in the Lord’s Supper for serious unrepentant sin - sin they refuse to let go of.

We believe that the gospel supernaturally changes people, but what if someone claims to believe the gospel, but in no way, represents that change in their life? They may have false assurance of a salvation that they do not actually have.

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Compelled by love, the church must confront those who live in rebellion to God while falsely presuming they are in the right with God.

### Jesus' teaching on church discipline:

**Matthew 18:15-17** “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, 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. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall **be bound in heaven**, and **whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**”

Jesus gives both the responsibility and the authority to local churches for the discipline of those who claim to be believers, but who refuse to repent of their sin.

When Jesus says, “let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”, he suggests that the church can no longer affirm that this unrepentant person is truly a member of the Kingdom of God.

## Paul's example of church discipline:

**1 Corinthians 5:1-13** "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 **Cleanse out the old leaven** that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who

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bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. **“Purge the evil person from among you.”**

According to Paul church discipline is the removal of someone from the church because of their refusal to repent from open rebellion against God (v.2, 5, 9-13).

### **Why is church discipline necessary?**

#### **Love for the \_\_\_\_\_ compels us.**

Because of the ongoing presence of un-repentant sin, Paul assumes that the man is actually not a Christian. Because Paul assumes the man is lost, the most loving thing that Paul can do for this individual is take extreme measures to warn him of his dangerous position.

#### **Love for the \_\_\_\_\_ compels us.**

Sin spreads and spoils God’s church. Paul urges the cleansing of this sin so that the church could be who they truly are “unleavened”.

#### **Love for the \_\_\_\_\_ compels us.**

If church members are the representatives of Jesus to the world, a church member who is living in unrepentant sin damages the outsider’s perspective of the church and of the gospel itself.



## **When is Church Discipline Appropriate?**

All Christians still struggle with sin, but we struggle against it, repent of it, and we run from it. Church discipline is only appropriate when someone who claims to be a believer is openly and unrepentantly engaging in sin.

(Other examples: 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Titus 3:10-11)

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## **Together (Church Leadership)**

Just like any group of people, there must be leadership to keep the group from slipping into chaos. The church ultimately submits itself under the leadership of Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd, but God has also called under-shepherds to lead God's people.

There are three synonymous words for these under-shepherds in the Bible:

- Overseer
- Elder
- Pastor

These three words show up repeatedly throughout the Bible to describe the office that we normally refer to as pastor. They are men who meet certain qualifications and who are called by God to lead God's church.

## **Biblical Qualifications for a Pastor:**

(1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

- Aspires to the office of overseer
- Is above reproach
- A one-woman man
- Sober-minded
- Self-controlled
- Respectable
- Hospitable
- Able to teach sound doctrine
- Sober
- Gentle
- Peacemaking
- Not a lover of money
- Leader at the home
- Mature
- Humble
- Respected by outsiders
- Able to rebuke false doctrine
- Disciplined

## **Biblical Responsibilities of a Pastor:**

(1 Tim. 4:7-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Pt. 5:1-5; Acts 20:28-35)

- \_\_\_\_\_ **God's Word**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **God's People**
- **Set an \_\_\_\_\_ for God's People**

## **Biblical Responsibility for the Church:**

- Follow and honor the leadership of pastors

**Hebrews 13:17** 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.

**1 Timothy 5:17-18** <sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "the laborer deserves his wages."

Many churches operate under the leadership of only one pastor, but the practice of the New Testament suggests that pastors were constantly being trained, equipped and affirmed by the local churches so that the pastoral burden could be shared by multiple qualified men.

**Acts 14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

**2 Timothy 2:2** and what you have heard in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

**Titus 1:1** "... put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you

When multiple pastors are appointed, these pastors hold one another accountable while also sharing the leadership and decision making responsibilities of the church.

Pastors are not the only source of official leadership in the church. While they are responsible for the teaching and much of the oversight of the church, there are many other areas of ministry that require specific oversight and service.

## **Serving Together (\_\_\_\_\_)**

In the New Testament, areas of specific need are assigned to specially qualified and ordained servants known as deacons.

### **Biblical Qualifications for Deacons: (1 Tim. 3:8-13)**

- Dignified  
(worthy of respect)
- Not double-tongued
- Not addicted to wine
- Not greedy for gain
- Keeps hold of the faith
- Blameless
- Not slanderers
- Sober-minded
- Faithful in all things
- Monogamous
- Manages household well

## **Biblical Responsibilities of Deacons:**

- **Serve the \_\_\_\_\_ in the Church**

The office of deacon exists to serve the church in tasks that would otherwise divert the pastors from their primary tasks of teaching the Word, prayer, and oversight. Deacons are responsible for disciple-making, as are all Christ followers, but they also serve the church in a wide variety of tasks. (1 Peter 4:10-11; Acts 6:1-5)

- **Seek the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church**

In addition to their service, deacons are responsible for maintaining unity within the church. In Acts 6 the servants were appointed to bring peace between opposing parties. Scriptural teachings about multiple serving gifts are often followed or preceded by the necessity of unity in the church. (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-30; Ephesians 4:1-16)

- **Symbolize \_\_\_\_\_ to the Church**

In general, deacons are official models of Christ's servant leadership to the world and to the local church through using their God-given gifts. (Matthew 20:26-28; Mark 10:45)

While all church members may not be ordained and assigned to specific deacon roles, all are called to serve the Lord through serving the church.



## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

If your church has a church covenant, take time this week to read through it. If not, read the example church covenant in appendix 1 of this book and take note of any portions that you have questions about. Look up the Scripture references in the footnotes of the covenant and spend time praying this week that you might be able to fully devote yourselves to God's people as God's Word commands. Come back next week with any questions that you may have about the local church.