

Church Membership: is it Required?

Charles Dailey 1995

We can save many words by starting with the definition of *church*. It is *a called out assembly*.¹ We cannot NOT ASSEMBLE and say that we are in the church. God does not permit His people to operate independently from one another.

America is a land of individualism. Our magazine stands used to carry a selection of magazines: five or six to choose from. Now the publishing industry caters to hundreds of specialized interests. Each person follows his special interests. We treat our religion the same way. But that is not God's way.

In the beginning of the church, it was (and still is) God's intention that we lay aside our personal and special interests to meet with others of different walks of life to share in glorifying God together. For this meeting, the master and the slave were equals. They were brethren in Christ.²

Christianity, properly understood, is not a casual spectator sport. It requires personal involvement even when someone else is doing the public leading.³

Here are several ways that we can tell about the togetherness of the original church of the first century.

Paul wrote his letters to the church in specific towns. He did not make a provision for those who stayed home rather than attending.

Acts 20: 28: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the *church of God*, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in *among you* and will not spare the *flock*."

This implies that the Christians are in a body of believers (the church) that can be defined and has elders watching over it. Further, Christ died for the whole group as well as individuals within the group.

Jesus spoke to seven specific churches in Revelation 2 - 3. He did not make provision for communication with those who seldom attended. In fact, the early church appeared to have daily contact with one another. This is further evidence that they were in a functioning body rather than functioning as individuals alone.

Sharpening the Sword

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otherwise stated in the text.

Acts 2:47: ". . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord *added to their number* daily those who were being saved."

The church was a defined group on Pentecost and beyond.

Acts 6:1 "In those days when the *number of disciples* was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."

The disciples were increasing in numbers and they functioned as a *group* rather than individuals doing their own thing.

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

The disciples are viewed as a developing *group*.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

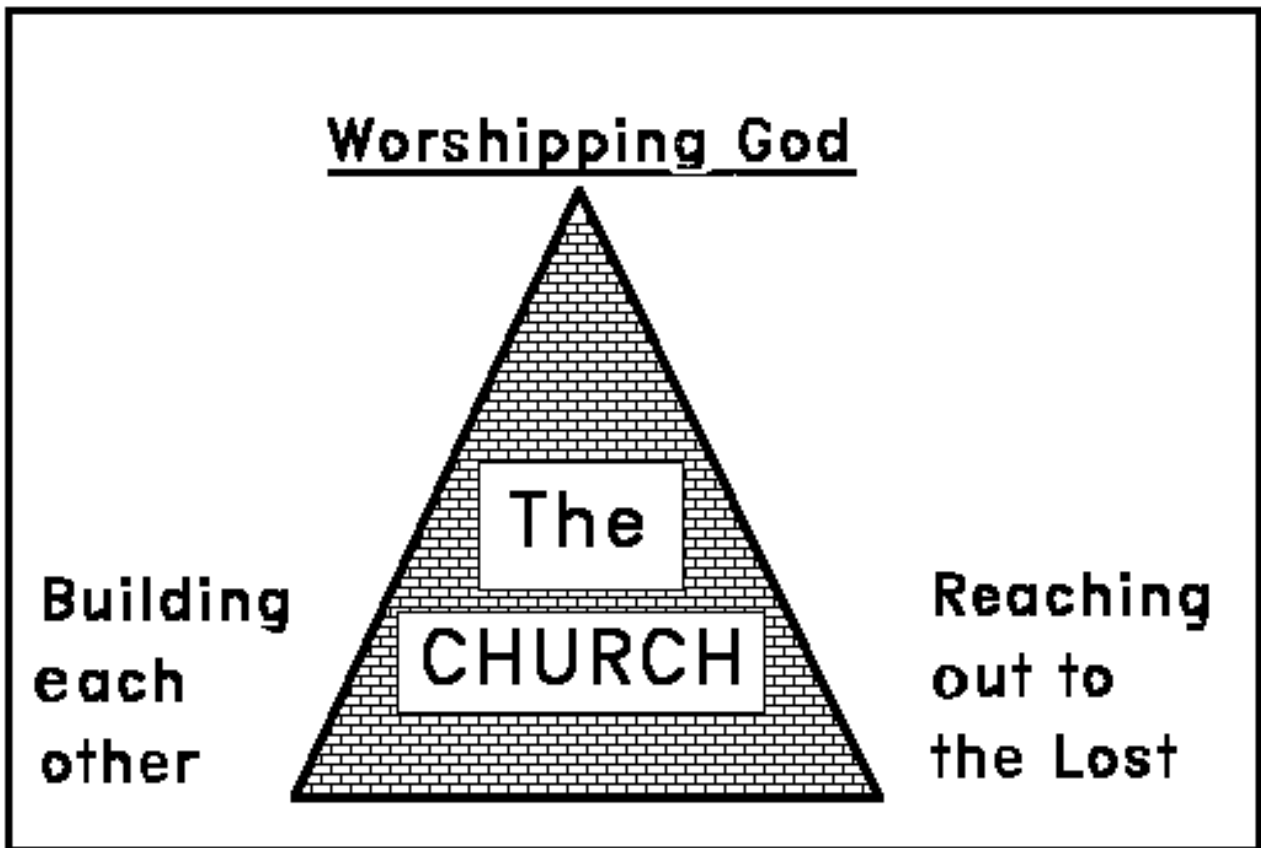
The disciples had an obligation towards each other.

The mission of a properly functioning church can be viewed as three fold:

1. First of all, to worship God. May we praise and honor his name!
2. Then we are to build one another. We all need encouragement, support, guidance and comfort. This includes the teaching program of the church. We need to be a part of the body both to give and to receive.
3. The church is to reach out to the lost. This is evangelism. One person will not do this alone and have the results last.



If an activity does not fit under one of these headings, then it is suspect. The mission of the church needs to conform to the goals that God has given it.



There is no hint that Christianity was to be a do-it-on-your own program. All indications are that the saved would *join in community*.

The regular observance of the Lord's Supper implies the Church met at least weekly. It was a group activity. Hear Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (NIV)

Luke says of Jesus: "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read." (NIV) Did he "get anything out of it?" Jesus already knew anything that would be said. Was he beset by Divine boredom as he listened to people talk that might not have been good speakers? There's not even a hint. He set an example of being a part of the body of worshipers each week even if he didn't "get anything out of it."

1. ASSEMBLY : 1. ekklesia ^1577^, from ek, "out of," and klesis, "a calling" (kaleo, "to call"), was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens "gathered" to discuss the affairs of state, <Acts 19:39>. In the Sept. it is used to designate the "gathering" of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a

"gathering" regarded as representative of the whole nation. In <Acts 7:38> it is used of Israel; in <19:32,41>, of a riotous mob. It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, "I will build My Church," <Matt. 16:18>, and which is further described as "the Church which is His Body," <Eph. 1:22; 5:23>, (b) in the singular number (e. g., <Matt. 18:17>, RV marg., "congregation"), to a company consisting of professed believers, e. g., <Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:5>, and in the plural, with reference to churches in a district. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words Copyright (C) 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

2. Ephesians 6:5 - 9.

3. Luke 4:16