

“Members in Particular”

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Church membership, as it is called, has become a very controversial issue in churches today, especially in many of the “non-denominational,” or “independent” churches (like ours).

It is texts like this one before us from which we get the terms “body of believers,” or, “local body of believers.”

Church membership, as we know it today, does not resemble what is referred to here as “members.” What we have today, in many Western countries, is a result of history and hierarchy structure that has no real basis in the Bible. It is also a legal issue, especially for those churches that are incorporated under the authority of their particular state structure. In Ohio, we are bound to follow certain protocols when it comes to the corporation that is the church. That’s the reason we have a church constitution and by-laws – we are to be governed by those by-laws and it is those that give membership its authority. None of that, however, comes from any particular scriptural text, nor should it sum up the entirety of what a “member in particular” is according to the Bible. Having a name on a church role doesn’t make one a Christian, nor does it mean that that person is a godly believer. And just because a name isn’t on a role doesn’t mean that they can’t worship and serve and participate in the church.

That said, it is necessary at times (and, for us, in this church at this time, it is necessary) to make modern church membership important and follow some of the guidelines that have been held to for

centuries in the true New Testament church. As such, it is important that we understand what a member in good standing means for Milan Friends Church, and each of us needs to decide whether we want to become, or continue to be, "members in particular" in this church. The current church by-laws give some good principles to follow in this area. I may suggest we amend those by-laws to clarify some things, but since we have a force in place already, we will do what we can to follow that plan as it is, for now.

Let me read a relevant portion of our church constitution and by-laws so that we all understand what is meant today by a church "member." Although the Bible may not have all these points found in the texts given to the churches on the matter, that does not make them inherently wrong.

Article IV: Statement of Polity

1. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of His body, the Church universal, and of each local church.
2. We believe that each local church is in itself a complete church and therefore autonomous and possesses all rights and responsibilities of the church by the Holy Spirit as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.
3. We believe that Jesus Christ exercises His authority in each local church by the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Scriptures.
4. We believe that each local church is ultimately answerable only to Jesus Christ, and not to any association, conference, council, synod or any other ecclesiastical body.

5. We believe that it is proper and beneficial for each local church to seek fellowship and counsel of other such local churches.
6. In accordance with the Bible, our church government is vested in its elders, who act as trustees for the church [our church currently has no elected elders so this would fall on the pastor and deacons], and its active members who together exercise the right of control in all its affairs. We recognize the laws of the State of Ohio relating to non-profit ecclesiastical corporations.

Article V: Membership

1. Qualifications of membership – a person shall qualify for membership who:
 - a. Has trusted Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior and Lord.
 - b. Has been baptized by immersion in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19).
 - c. Has committed to attendance at all established instruction sessions for new members, during which there will be opportunity to re-acknowledge faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. The Pastor may, at his discretion, waive the requirement of attendance at instruction sessions for persons whose circumstances prevent them from attending.
 - d. Agrees to be governed by, and support, this church statement of faith, constitution, leadership, and programs.
 - e. Agrees to faithfully attend our services

of worship, study and fellowship.

- f. Agrees to support this church with his/her time, abilities, and finances; and to labor toward its spiritual growth and development.
- g. Agrees not to cause dissension or division with regard to the doctrinal position stated in this constitution or the positional statements issued by this church.
- h. Agrees not to gossip about or engage in quarrels with others who are a part of this church.
- i. Agrees to discipline him or herself to live a life of purity in thought and action, and to live a life of sexual integrity, practicing celibacy outside of marriage, fidelity in marriage, and marriage when entered into as the union of one man and one woman intended for a lifetime.
- j. Has received a vote of confirmation by the congregation.

I want to say something here: there is no coincidence that this particular text came up to be dealt with at this particular time in our church. When I began this study, I intended to be finished with the book of First Corinthians by now – but God had different plans. For 35 years of ministry, this has happened over and over again. I did not plan on covering this at this time, but it is exactly the time we need for it to be covered.

I am going to ask each of us that considers this

church their church – that consider ourselves to be a “member in particular” here, to recommit to the principles and doctrines of this church and resubmit ourselves to be faithful members of the Lord in this church. You may have joined in the past, but I would ask that we do that again – if not literally, at the very least to confirm with your voice that you want to stay a member. I will propose this in a week or two in our annual business meeting in a more formal manner, but I would ask that you pray about this issue. We will make this meeting available to those that don’t feel comfortable being in a congregate setting in-person (for whatever reason that may be). We are going to set up a private Facebook group for those that consider this their church to join and be part of that meeting so you can have a voice.

I’ve been here almost five years and I rarely mention “church membership.” That doesn’t mean, however, that I don’t agree with it, or don’t believe in it. I just am careful to not use modern church membership to usurp what the Bible teaches of the same.

Now, to the text:

The title for this message comes from verse 27. This verse is the key to understanding what the previous verses teach – that the church (the local church, in the case of this letter to the Corinthians) is the “body of Christ,” which is what verses 12-26 explain, and that the individual “members” in the church at Corinth are part of that “body of Christ.”

“Each church is said to be the body of Christ, as each is said to be the temple of God...: not that there are many bodies or many temples; but that each church is an image of the whole aggregate,— a microcosm, having the same characteristics.”
(Alford)

The word for “particular” (μέρος) is one often translated “part” or “parts.” “Each according to his own place and function” (Vincent). We are not just members of the “universal” church of God – the greater family of God – but we are members (or at least we are supposed to be) of a local part of that body, each having a specific part to play in that local church. As we have seen with the work of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, the work of God is not a “one-man show.” All of those that are part of this church, that are active, serving, giving to this church, are “members in particular” – you have a role to play that only you can play.

This text on “members” is part of the same context (same paragraph, actually) as the first eleven verses of chapter twelve, dealing with spiritual gifts. This is further explanation of the Holy Spirit’s influence and work in the local church, and the importance of the spiritual gifts given to believers as they work within that local church – local body of believers.

There is a progression in this text that is fairly clear, if considered within the greater context of the purpose of the letter to the Corinthians.

I. ONE BODY – VS. 12-13, 19-20

A. This speaks of the true New Testament church. The church today is somewhat different than that of the early church. We have the ability to travel further distances and we have capabilities of gathering in larger buildings than they did then so the look of the church is different today, but the points made here in this text, and through the letters to the churches in the New Testament, are still meant to be valid for the true New

Testament church wherever it may meet.

There were no denominations then – there was only “the church.” As we’ve seen in this study before, and will see again in this text, there were divisions in the church at the time and that division caused the church to begin to divide. That was not of God.

If one was saved, they were a member of that one church – water baptism is the thing that placed them as such. Whether there was a vote taken is unknown but improbable, considering it was God that placed them in the church (Acts 2:47). As a saved, baptized believer, they were automatically part of the membership of the local body of believers where they lived. They didn’t go from church to church to find one they liked or find a pastor they liked – they didn’t change churches every time their feelings got hurt. That’s a modern, Western phenomena that doesn’t exist in other parts of the world where the church is growing. To be a born-again child of God, scripturally baptized, meant that you were a member of the church, and as such were expected to be an active, participating part of the body (as this text will show).

Acts 2:47a

⁴⁷ And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

B. Vs. 12 – the first point made in relation to the church and its members is that of

the analogy comparing it to the human body. Just as there are many, many parts to the human body (there are 206 bones alone, not to mention all the other parts), there are many parts to the church. Yet, just as all those parts of the body make up only one body, so also do those many members make up one church (in this case, speaking of the local body of believers).

The final phrase of this verse makes the clear connection to the body being of Christ – the church being His “body” on earth, so to speak.

1. He is referred to as the “head” of the body in other epistles written by Paul, connecting back to this text. In fact, similar terminology is used in those texts to show this very same truth.

[Colossians 1:18](#)

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

[Colossians 1:24](#)

²⁴ Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

[Ephesians 5:23](#)

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

[Ephesians 5:30](#)

³⁰ For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

2. "What Paul here means is Christ as the Head of the Church has a body composed of the members who have varied gifts and functions like the different members of the human body. They are all vitally connected with the Head of the body and with each other. This idea he now elaborates in a remarkable manner." (Robertson)

C. Something to consider here is the teaching that the true New Testament church is alive. As a body is of no use if it is dead, so is a church that has lost its "life source" – in this case, the power of the Holy Spirit.

D. Vs. 19 – very simply put, the church does not exist without the varied members with their varied spiritual gifts.

"The idea which this seems intended to illustrate is, that if there was not variety of talent and endowment in the church, the church could not itself exist. If, for example, there were nothing but apostles, or prophets, or teachers; if there were none but those who spoke with tongues or could interpret them, the church could not exist. A variety of talents and attainments in their proper places is as useful as are the various members of the human body." (Barnes)

E. Vs. 20 restates the point of verse 12 – there is one body (one true church) and within that body (within that church) are a variety of members, working together

as a whole.

Part 2 – The Baptism of the Spirit

F. Verse 13 deals with a subject that I said we would come back to as it relates to the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the believer, and in the church – what is termed "the baptism of the Spirit."

1. A few notes need to be made on what is meant by the term "baptism" as we consider what this "baptism of the Spirit" is.
 - a) This is a fairly common word in the New Testament, used some eighty times. The word simply means to dip or immerse. It's used in several ways:
 - (1) *It's used of water baptism – what is referred to as believer's baptism. That is its most frequent use, but by no means its only use.*
 - (2) *It's used in Galatians 3:27 in the phrase, "baptized into Christ." This is simply speaking of what water baptism pictures – to "be baptized into Christ" is nothing more than true believer's baptism, where baptism is a demonstration that the believer has accepted Christ and is willing to follow Him in obedient living.*
 - (3) *It's used by Jesus as He spoke of His death.*

[Matthew 20:22–23](#)

²² But Jesus answered and said, **Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to**

drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

²³ And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

(4) *It's used by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:2 – "baptized unto Moses" – metaphorically for immersion in the law of Moses, as he spoke for the Lord.*

(5) *It's used in perhaps the most difficult verse in the New Testament, in 1 Cor. 15:29 in the phrase, "baptized for the dead" – we will study this text when we study chapter fifteen. Suffice it to say at this time that there are no contradictions of Scripture so this can't mean anything that would go against any other text.*

Even though we will delve deeper into this verse at a future point, let me read a short quote by Adam Clarke that sums up a logical understanding of this verse. It points back to the verses we read out of Matthew 20.

"The sum of the apostle's meaning appears to be this: If there be no resurrection of the dead, those who, in becoming Christians, expose themselves to all manner of privations, crosses, severe sufferings, and a violent death, can have no

compensation, nor any motive sufficient to induce them to expose themselves to such miseries. But as they receive baptism as an emblem of death in voluntarily going under the water, so they receive it as an emblem of the resurrection unto eternal life, in coming up out of the water; thus they are baptized for the dead, in perfect faith of the resurrection."

(6) *It's used in two verses in the New Testament to speak of washing with water in order to clean something – hands, dishes, tables, etc.*

Mark 7:4

⁴ And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

Luke 11:38

³⁸ And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

(7) *And it is used, as it is in our text, for the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."*

b) The first mention in the New Testament is in relation to Jesus' baptism and the beginning of His earthly ministry (Matt. 3:5-17). Within the context of that water baptism, that example to follow, is also mentioned the "baptism of the Spirit," or, as it is termed there, "with the Holy Ghost."

Matthew 3:11

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto

repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

2. By the use of the term "baptize" (in its various forms), to be "baptized with the Holy Ghost" would be, in its simplest use, to be completely immersed into the body of Christ (the church) as well as to be completely immersed in the work of Christ.

Not only would we be immersed "by" Him, but we are immersed "in" Him and He in us – we are to allow Him to have all of us, to be "immersed" with Him, not just by Him.

3. "For by one Spirit" – as seen in the earlier portion of chapter twelve, as well as in other texts of Scripture, there is only one Spirit doing the work in us.
4. "Are we all baptized" – every believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Water baptism is the external expression of this internal work, so to speak.

II. MANY MEMBERS OF THAT BODY – VS. 14-17

A. As pointed out in the introduction to this text, this does not speak to the family of God worldwide, but it is dealing with the local part of the worldwide body – the local church.

III. THOSE MEMBERS ARE EQUIPPED AND PUT WHERE THEY ARE BY GOD HIMSELF – VS. 18,

21-24, 28-31

**IV. AS SUCH, THE BODY IS TO BE UNITED – VS.
25-27**