

WAS MEMBERSHIP IN A LOCAL CHURCH A PART OF NEW TESTAMENT POLITY?

By: Fred P. Miller

1. **Acts 18:26-27** is the earliest mention of letters which would accompany a person moving to another church fellowship. Speaking of Apollos:

"26 ...Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. 27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, **exhorting the disciples to receive him**: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:"
2. **II Corinthians 3:1** shows that some needed letters of commendation also showing that was a common practice as it says that they also wrote such letters as well as receiving them.

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? **or need we, as some others**, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?"
3. **I Timothy 5:9** speaks of supporting widows. "Taken into the number" shows there had to be a reckoning of who was and was not a member "in the number."

"Let not a widow be **taken into the number** under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man,"
4. The tradition of extending "the right hand of fellowship" to someone who has not been a local member but makes their own statement that they have been baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins and wish membership in a local Christian Church is based on **Galatians 2:9**. Our tradition is to accept a statement in lieu of a letter.



No letter seems to have been given to or carried by Paul and Barnabas.

Galatians 2:9, "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas **the right hands of fellowship**; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

5. A person could be deprived of membership. He could be "disfellowshipped" by the action of the whole congregation (not the preacher of elders). If he was removed as a member then there must have been a membership roll to which he with others belonged.

I Corinthians 5:4-7, "4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when ye are gathered together**, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 **Purge out therefore the old leaven**, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:"
6. Elders have responsibility over the "flock". There has to be some way to know who is in the flock and who is not. How can you watch over someone if you do not know who is in the flock?

Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to **all the flock**, over the which the Holy Ghost hath **made you overseers**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."
7. Christians are admonished to obey the elders in their local church. How do you know which congregation's elders are responsible for you and which ones you are to respect as your spiritual

overseers if you are not a member of a local church?

Christians are to obey their elders of their local "flock". Members at First Church do not need to seek the advice of the elders at Ben Hill Christian Church. Their elders are responsible for their flock, not ours unless someone from that congregation places their "membership" here.

Hebrews 13:7, 17, "7 Remember them which have **the rule over you**, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation. 17 **Obey them** that **have the rule** over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

8. A Bible based church Scripturally, fully "set in order", (see **Titus 1:5**) has elders who are the leaders assisted by deacons who SERVE the saints who make up the congregation. Paul and Timothy wrote to them. Notice that they did not write to "The saints or those saved Christians who would be in the "number".

Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons.**"

9. A sinning member who had been expelled from the local church could be restored to membership. That is: he could be restored to the fellowship of that local church upon his repentance. There seems to have been a formal acceptance offered that was yet to be offered in Corinth to the repentant sinner who was expelled after the action in **I Corinthians 5**.

The following Scripture shows that the disfellowship action was carried out by the congregation i.e. was inflicted of many, not by officers or one man. The repentant brother was restored to membership. **II Corinthians 2:6-10**, "6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, **which was inflicted of many.** 7 So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. 9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. 10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your *sakes forgave I it* in the person of Christ;"

10. Some people in Bible times, as well as the present, usurp authority that does not Spiritually

belong to them. (We are speaking about a New Testament church not any denomination, which does not try to follow New Testament church order as Christian Churches or Churches of Christ have aimed at doing.)

Diotrophes mentioned on **3rd John** usurped the congregation's authority as to who could and could not be received as a member and also "cast out" members of the church. If there was no church roll as who was or was not a member, how could they be "cast out"? Diotrophes could not have acted arbitrarily at all if he did not know which member opposed him. He was a usurper of the freedom, which belonged to all. The rest of the letter shows John ignored the false usurper and visited the church anyway.

II John 1:9, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not."

What do you think happened to Diotrophes? Did the church let him stay?