

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Chapter 26 The Church

What is the church?

What is church membership?

Why is church membership important? See Eph. 4:11–16.

The practice of church membership occurs when Christians grasp hold of each other in responsibility and love. By identifying ourselves with a particular local church, we are telling the church's pastors and other members not just that we commit to them, but that we commit to them in gathering, giving, praying, and serving. We are telling them to expect certain things from us and to hold us accountable if we don't follow through. Joining a church is an act of saying, "I am now your responsibility, and you are now my responsibility" (Mark Dever).

A. Overseers

The terms *ἐπίσκοπος* (overseer, bishop) and *πρεσβύτερος* (elder, presbyter) are the same (Acts 20:17, 28; Ti. 1:5, 7).

The office of overseer is a noble task (1 Tim. 3:1). Why?

The office of overseer involves caring for God's church. How? An overseer must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). He must hold "firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Ti. 1:9).

Paul gives a series of qualifications. By and large, they're related to character. To begin with, he says that an overseer must be beyond reproach (1 Tim. 3:2).

1. Are you a one-woman man? (1 Tim. 3:2)

- An overseer must be married. Not likely, as Paul would have said: "An overseer must be married."
- An overseer must not be guilty of polygamy. Not likely, as polygamy was outlawed in the Roman Empire.
- An overseer must not be remarried, after the death of his wife. Not likely, as this is inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.
- An overseer must not be divorced, or he must not be married to a divorced woman. Possibly, if his divorce has no biblical warrant.
- An overseer must be faithful to his wife. Morally? Emotionally? Spiritually? Financially? Physically? Practically?

2. Does your love for God control your affections? (1 Tim. 3:2–3)

The soul possesses four motions...

Moderation (self-control) is walking by the Spirit. When we love God, our desire and delight are fixed on Him. This moderates our affections. (1) It moderates our attitude toward people. We're hospitable. (2) It moderates our pursuit of pleasure. We avoid drunkenness. (3) It moderates our indulgence of anger. We aren't violent, but gentle. (4) It moderates our handling of conflict. We aren't quarrelsome. (5) It moderates our use of money. We aren't greedy.

How do you know when the Spirit is active in someone's life? It isn't by the gifts of the Spirit. The church at Corinth had plenty of gifts, but Paul rebukes them as carnal – not spiritual. It's by the fruit of the Spirit. In these verses, Paul describes a Spirit-filled man.

3. Is your household well managed? (1 Tim. 3:4–5)

If a man is incapable of maintaining order in his home, it's unlikely he'll have any success in the church. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The term *nouthesia* (instruction) is a compound word: *nous* (mind) and *tithemi* (to put). It means "to put in the mind."

4. Do your roots go deep? (1 Tim. 3:6)

Paul forbids a "novice" from becoming an elder. He might "become puffed up with conceit." Pride comes before a fall.

- When it comes to the church's history and confessions, he lacks knowledge. Therefore, he has nothing by which he can test his own understanding.
- When it comes to the Christian's journey and trials, he lacks experience. He doesn't know what it means to be a Christian in the home, workplace, or community. How can he lead others into unfamiliar territory?
- When it comes to the Word's profundity and intricacies, he lacks understanding. He doesn't know how to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.
- When it comes to his own wisdom and abilities, he lacks perspective. Moses spent 40 years in Egypt and 40 years in Midian, before God called him. Admittedly, there's something contagious about youthful enthusiasm, but it's no substitute for the quiet, mature, humble, patient, steady, unassuming man, who has been well-tested by fire.

5. What do people say about you? (1 Tim. 3:7)

"He must be well thought of by outsiders." Why? It reveals true character. It's easy to pretend on Sunday. The most certain way to destroy the church's testimony is through the poor example of overseers.

B. Servants

When we translate πρεσβυτερος, we get elder. When we transliterate it, we get presbyter. When we translate επισκοπος, we get overseer. When we transliterate it, we get episcopate (bishop) – KJV.

When we translate διακονος, we get servant. When we transliterate it, we get deacon. Why is διακονος transliterated in our Bibles? The result is unfortunate: *deacon* has become a religious term. In the NT era, it wasn't a religious word. In the NT, it's used in reference to Christ (Rom. 15:8), officials (Rom. 13:4), servants (Jn. 2:5), believers (Eph. 6:21), and preachers (1 Cor. 3:5).

What's the difference between overseers and servants? An overseer oversees. A servant serves. That's illustrated in Acts 6:1–4. The noun διακονος isn't used here, but the derivative verb is used in verse 2. These verses point to the difference between the two roles. Generally speaking, overseers are called to minister to people spiritually, whereas servants are called to minister to people physically.

“I know of scarce any duty which is so much insisted on, so pressed and urged upon us, both in the Old Testament and New, as this duty of charity to the poor” (Jonathan Edwards).

1. Does your love for God moderate your affections? (1 Tim. 3:8)

Does it moderate your actions? You must be dignified.

Does it moderate your words? You must not be double-tongued?

Does it moderate your appetites? You must not be addicted to much wine?

Does it moderate your desires? You must not be greedy for dishonest gain.

Is love for God the governing principle in your life?

2. Do your roots go deep? (1 Tim. 3:9)

Theological knowledge is more important than administrative skill. Servants must hold to “the mystery of the faith” (3:9). They must be sound in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Moreover, their life must reflect their knowledge of the truth. This implies conviction, which naturally manifests itself in appropriate conduct – “a clear conscience.”

3. What do people say about you? (1 Tim. 3:10)

Servants must be tested. The verb is δοκιμαζω - “to prove with a view to approval.” This testing serves to determine their reputation.

4. Are you a one-woman man? (1 Tim. 3:12)

“They are one body, one flesh, and so should have but one soul, one spirit; they have one bed, one board, one house, and therefore should be one in heart. The love between Christ

and his spouse, which is so fervent that she is sick with love for him, and he died out of love for her, is set out by the love between husband and wife, to show how great this love is, or at least ought to be” (George Swinnock).

5. Is your household well managed? (1 Tim. 3:12)

- “Be careful whom you allow into your family.”
- “Mind holy performances in your family.”
- “Set a good example for your family.”
- “Be careful that your whole family sanctifies the Lord’s day.”
- “Maintain discipline in your family.”
- “Make sure that all in your family are well employed.”
- “Maintain peace and love in your family.”

“Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth” (A. W. Tozer). If we see something here we lack, we must set our hearts to seek it. At the same time, we must look to Christ, remembering that “the grace of our Lord overflowed for me” (1 Tim. 1:14).

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Chapter 27

The Fellowship of the Saints

A. The Meaning of Church Fellowship

“Not only are we bound to God, but all who are in Christ are bound together with us by His blood” (Charles Simpson).

See Acts 2:42–47. We become a community – a unified body with common values, interests, purposes, and characteristics, living together within a larger society. As a community, we enjoy fellowship. In the NT, the Greek term is translated *participation*, *partnership*, and *communion*. It means we share a common life.

1. *We share our life in Christ*

It involves sharing with others what God has revealed to us with the purpose of edifying each other. See Rom. 1:11–12; 1 Jn. 1:3; 5:6.

2. *We share our material possessions*

See Acts 2:44 and 4:34. This includes giving our time, abilities, and possessions in serving each other. See Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:16.

3. *We share our daily experiences*

The early church practiced hospitality and enjoyed each other’s company in the course of daily life. This interaction provided the context for their mutual service and ministry.

B. The Nature of Church Fellowship

Fellowship is necessary. See Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:14–21.

1. *Edification*

Each of us has at least one gift that contributes to the common good. See 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11–16. We help each other resist sin through regular times of encouragement and accountability. We interact for the purpose of exposing sin and practicing godliness.

2. *Evangelism*

One of the most powerful witnesses is our unity and love for each other in the church. See Jn. 13:35; 17:20–21.

3. *Encouragement*

We need others to come alongside to support us. See Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26.

- We comfort the distressed. To comfort means to cheer, or to ease someone's grief or trouble. See 2 Cor. 1:4; Gal. 6:2.
- We encourage the discouraged. To encourage means to inspire with courage and hope. See 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24-25.
- We correct the sinful. See Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:16.
- We help the weak. See Rom. 15:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; 1 Jn. 3:17-18.
- We counsel the ignorant. See Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16.

4. Protection

We watch over each other, and protect each other from sin, deceit, and foolishness. See Lk. 17:3; Rom. 16:17; Eph. 6:18; Jas. 5:20.

C. The Qualities of Church Fellowship

1. Love

See Jn. 13:34; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:6; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Pet. 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:18; 4:7-8, 20-21.

2. Unity

Encouraging unity: It's a desire to work together in love, respect, and mutual submission to glorify God in our mission and relationships. See Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:25; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:1-2; Jas. 2:1.

Discouraging disunity. Unity is tested whenever we face challenges and difficulties. These challenges are exasperated by gossip, slander, bitterness, etc. See Gal. 5:15; Eph. 4:30-32; Col. 3:13.

3. Humility and Integrity

We're to confess our sins to each other, and resist any impulse to pretend to be something we aren't. See 1 Jn. 1:1.

We're to receive and express biblical correction, so that we can help each other grow. See Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16.

We're to bless each other through praise, encouragement, thanksgiving, and other expressions of love. See Eph. 4:15.

4. Commitment

Commitment includes a pledge to walk faithfully with God and His people in a local church. It's the norm, not the exception. It establishes trust.

Care/Cell/Small Groups provide the context for all of the above.