

19—Saul—A Case Study in Local Church Membership

Acts 9:26, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples...”

Introduction: The question of local church membership is an important one. Some are hesitant to identify themselves with a local congregation and it is important to eradicate such hesitation as we realize this is a Scriptural practice. We may criticize the terminology sometimes involved, but the principles of being a working part of a local congregation are certainly in the New Testament. Today, we will study the Scriptures to discern between the universal and local church, confirm the precedent of being a member of a local congregation, and use Saul as a case study for both.

I. Two Types of Membership

A. First, when one is baptized into Christ he is added to Christ’s church (Galatians 3:26-27; Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5).

B. Yet, the Bible also uses the term “church” in the sense of a local, tangible congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Corinthians 14:23; Acts 14:27)

1. Paul addressed his letter to Philippi, “*To all the saints who are in Christ Jesus in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*” (Philippians 1:1).
2. The New Testament speaks of 33 separate, local churches.

C. It is important to recognize the distinction between the universal and local church.

<u>Universal Church</u>	<u>Traits</u>	<u>Local Church</u>
One (Eph 4:4)	Number	Many (Romans 16:16)
Saints (Acts 2:47)	Members	Saints/sinners (1 Cor 1:2)
Heaven and earth (Eph 3:15)	Location	Earth (1 Cor 1:2)
Lord Adds (Acts 2:47)	Entry	Join (Acts 9:26)
Lord Removes (Matthew 13:41-42)	Departure	Death (1 Thess. 4:13-14) Disassociation (1 Cor 5)
Head, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists (Eph 1:22-23; 4:11)	Organization	Bishops, Deacons, Saints (Phil. 1:1)
No Assembly, No Treasury, No Work	Participation	Assembles (Heb 10:25) Has Treasury (1 Cor 16:1-2)

II. Becoming a Member of a Local Congregation

- A. One becomes a member of the body of Christ at baptism (Galatians 3:26-27).
- B. Yet, after the Christian's initial conversion, Scriptures show us the disciples banded together into local congregations (Acts 16:15,33,40; Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:2,10-14).
- C. However, what was the practice if one moved from one city to another?
 - 1. Saul left Damascus, went to Arabia, returned to Damascus, and then moved to Jerusalem for a short time after his conversion (Acts 9:18-25; Galatians 1:17-19).
 - 2. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he tried to "join" the brethren (Acts 9:26-28).
 - 3. This passage concerning Saul indicates a dual responsibility...
 - i. Saul sought out the local church of Jerusalem.
 - ii. Yet, the local church had the right to accept or reject Saul as a member (cp. Galatians 2:9)!
 - iii. This is not any one individual's responsibility (as Diotrephes, 3 John 9-10).
 - iv. To help with one who moved to another local work, a word of recommendation helped (Acts 18:26-27; 2 Corinthians 3:1).
- D. Knowing this is a Scriptural practice, we should be hesitant to make excuses.

III. Saul—A Template for Post-Conversion Responsibility

- A. Vocalize your faith where you have opportunity (Acts 9:20).
- B. Live differently than your sinful past (Acts 9:21-22).
- C. Persevere through the trials your faith will bring (Acts 9:23-24; Matthew 13:20-21).
- D. Rely upon and seek the aid of your brethren in trials (Acts 9:24-25).
- E. Seek to associate, not isolate, with the local disciples wherever you live (Acts 9:26-27).
- F. Be there when the local church meets to work or worship (Acts 9:28).
- G. Use your ability to help the church accomplish its mission (Acts 9:29-30)

Conclusion: In future lessons we will discuss the attitudes, roles, privileges, and responsibilities of being a member of the body of Christ. Today, we are just laying the groundwork. As we conclude, let's just end with this point. God wanted you to be inter-connected members of His body. Are you living according to God's design or trying to do it alone or while being disconnected? Follow His will...