



**Dr. Michael J. Svigel**  
**Dallas Theological Seminary**

**Part 1:** In Search of Authentic Church

**Part 2:** In Search of Classic Church Order

**Part 3:** In Search of Authentic Church Membership



## Part 1: In Search of Authentic Church

### What Is the Church?

#### Four Common Myths about the Church

- *The Church Is Merely a Human Organization*
- *The Church Is a Market of Spiritual Groceries*
- *The Church Is Just a Gathering of Believers*
- *The Church Is Optional*

#### The Four Myths Dispelled

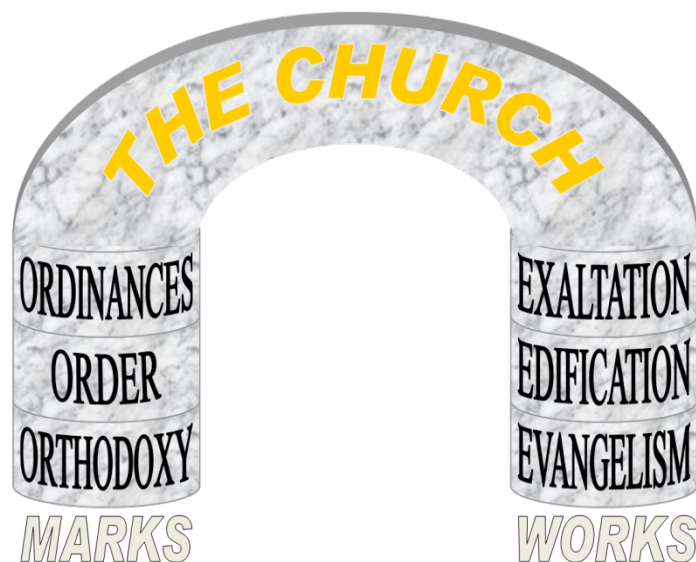
- *The Church Is the Spiritual-Physical Body of Christ*
- *The Church Is a Family with Covenant Commitments*
- *The Church Is a Gathering of Believers Bearing Necessary Marks and Works*
- *The Church Is Essential for Spiritual Growth*

#### Four Meanings of *Ekklesia* in the New Testament

1. General assembly (1 Cor 11:18)
2. Local Christian Congregation (Rev 2–3)
3. Regional Christian Community (1 Cor 16:19; Acts 9:31)
4. Catholic Christianity (Eph 1:22–23; 4:15–16; Col 1:18, 24)

#### The Marks and Works of the Church

- *Orthodoxy: Word of God Purely Preached*
- *Order: Ordained Leaders and Discipline*
- *Orthodoxy: Word of God Purely Preached*
- *Evangelism: Conversion and Mission Work*
- *Edification: Disciples Trained for Ministry*
- *Exaltation: Public Worship Properly Performed*





## **ORTHODOXY**

Orthodox believers have always held to the essential, unchanging truths of the Christian faith—the triune God as Creator and Redeemer, the fall and resulting depravity, the person and work of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, inspiration and authority of Scripture, redeemed humanity incorporated into Christ, and the restoration of humanity and creation. (1 Tim 4:6, 13, 16; 2 Tim 3:13–4:5)



- **The Center:** The person and work of Jesus Christ in His first and second coming.
- **The Story:** The major biblical narrative of creation, redemption, and consummation from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.
- **The Markers:** The doctrinal boundaries within which Christians think and act.

### **Principles to Practice**

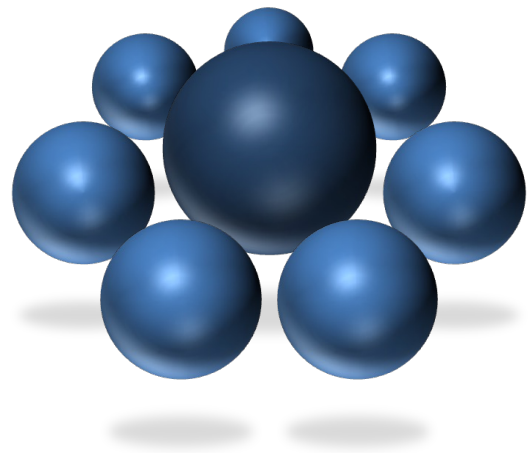
1. An orthodox doctrinal statement doesn't necessarily mean you have an orthodox congregation.
2. Work sound doctrine into your evangelism, teaching, preaching, worship, new members training, baptismal training, etc.

## **ORDER**

Just as the Triune God functions with a distinct order in everything he has established—from the cosmos to an anthill—the church, too, must function with a distinct order and discipline. This includes qualified leadership and stable membership. (1 Tim 3:1–13; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:5–9; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1–4)

### **Principles to Practice**

1. Lead from *among* your people, not over, under, in front of, or behind.
2. Never be tempted to replace *personal physical presence* with impersonal media or middlemen.
3. Regard your responsibility as a holy calling, regardless of the title or task. (If you're called to be a pastor...)





## ORDINANCES

The ordinances (or, “sacraments”) of the church include baptismal initiation and table fellowship (communion, Lord’s Supper, eucharist). These marks of one-time covenant initiation and ongoing covenant renewal signify and communicate spiritual realities through visible means. (Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 11:23–26)

### What Is Baptism?

1. A public confession of faith in the Triune God (Matt. 28:19)
2. A personal association with the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3–4)
3. An act of repentance to forsake the path of sin and death (Eph. 2:1–10; Col 2:11–14; Heb. 6:1)
4. A pledge to live the new life of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 3:21)
5. A rite of initiation into the community (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27)

### What Is the Lord’s Supper?

1. A sacred memorial of Christ’s person and work that you can see, hear, feel, smell, and taste (1 Cor. 11:23–25)
2. A corporate means of spiritual blessing and growth as one body (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:27–33)
3. An opportunity for weekly repentance, response, renewal, and recommitment (Rom. 12:1–4)
4. A communion with Christ, who is actively present as the host through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 10:16)

### Principles to Practice

1. Consider a more robust relationship between baptism and conversion/membership.
2. Consider a clearer functional relationship between baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
3. Consider a more faithful and meaningful observance of both of these ordinances, including a restoration of the weekly observance of the supper.

## EVANGELISM

The Greek word *euangelizo* means “bearing a good message.” The church’s work of evangelism is primarily outward and world-focused; its mission as bearers of God’s message includes invitation and initiation into the Church. (Matt 28:18; Acts 1:8)

### Principles to Practice

1. Commit to growing your church the old fashioned (biblical) way: conversions.
2. Resist the strong cultural temptation to resort to gimmicks.
3. Consider whether old evangelistic methods of outreach are doing what they originally did.
4. Never give up.





## ***EDIFICATION***

The Church's role as a covenanted community in Christ is to be the primary locus for the building up of believers in love and good works through the participation of its various members in their Spirit-gifted ministries, resulting in unity and maturity. (Matt 28:19; Rom 12:4–8; Eph 2:19–22; 4:11–13; Heb 5:12–14; 10:23–25)

### **Principles to Practice**

1. The best (and most biblical) means for growing believers are the “one anothers”—the true meaning of the priesthood of all believers.
2. In making disciples, don't neglect instruction in orthodoxy (and orthopraxy!) and observance of the ordinances, as you build believers toward maturity

## ***EXALTATION***

The purpose, goal, and focus of all creation is to glorify God the Father, through the Son, and by the power of the Spirit. The Church is called to exalt God through public worship and a God-glorifying active presence in the world. (Matt 5:16; Rom 11:33–12:2)

### **Principles to Practice**

1. Your church's worship should be Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered, and God-glorifying.
2. Your church's ministry should be Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered, and God-glorifying.
3. These things exclude self-empowerment, self-centeredness, and self-glorifying.





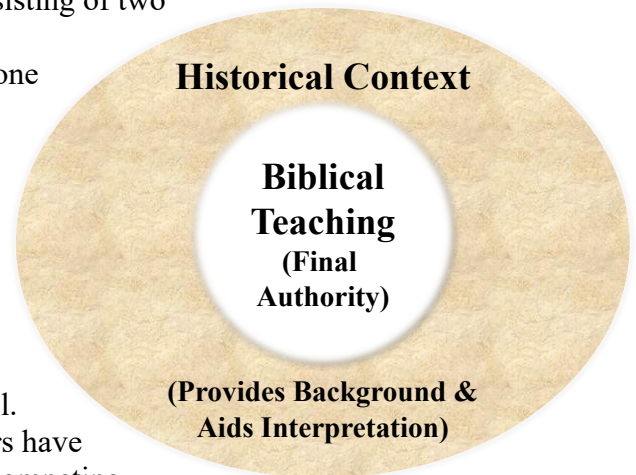
## Part 2: In Search of Classic Church Order

### VITAL QUESTIONS:

- Is it true that the apostles left only vague, non-binding, or flexible guidelines for how a local church is to be ordered and led?
- How do we discern *what* the apostles established and *whether* they meant for it to continue?

### *The Apostolic (Biblical/Historical) Model of Church Order*

- The apostles established a basic church order consisting of two offices: elders/overseers and deacons/ministers.
- The apostolic order included a “presiding elder,” one of the elders but with specific responsibilities.
- The apostolic order was established worldwide by the end of the first century, but it was limited to the local (or city) churches.
- The apostles established this order to continue beyond the apostolic age (e.g., *prescriptive*, not just *descriptive*).
- As churches grew, church order grew in complexity, far beyond the simple apostolic model.
- In the Reformation and modern eras, church orders have multiplied and diversified, resulting in countless competing models.



### The Apostolic (Biblical) Order (AD 40–90)

*ACTS 14:22–34*

<sup>21</sup>They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith... <sup>23</sup>And when they had appointed elders (*presbyteroi*) for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

*ACTS 20:17, 28*

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (*presbyteroi*) of the church... <sup>28</sup>“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to shepherd (*peripoieo*) the church of God.”

*PHILIPPIANS 1:1*

<sup>1</sup>To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoï*)...

*EPHESIANS 4:11–12*

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors (*poimenes*) and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service...



1 TIMOTHY 3:1, 8

<sup>1</sup>If a man aspires to the office of overseer (*episkopos*), it is a fine work he desires to do....

<sup>8</sup>Deacons (*diakonoi*) likewise must be men of dignity...

TITUS 1:5, 7

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders (*presbyteroi*) in every city as I directed you.... <sup>7</sup>For the overseer (*episkopos*) must be above reproach as God's steward...

1 PETER 5:1, 2

<sup>1</sup>I exhort the elders (*presbyteroi*) among you, as your fellow elder... <sup>2</sup>shepherd (*poimante*) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (*episkopeo*)...

**ELDERS (*presbyteroi*)**  
=  
**OVERSEERS (*episkopoi*)**  
=  
**PASTORS (*poimenes*)**

***I.e., Scripture does not separate these into different offices.***

HEBREWS 13:17  
Obey your leaders (*hegeomai*) and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18

<sup>17</sup>The elders (*presbyteroi*) who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

REVELATION 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14

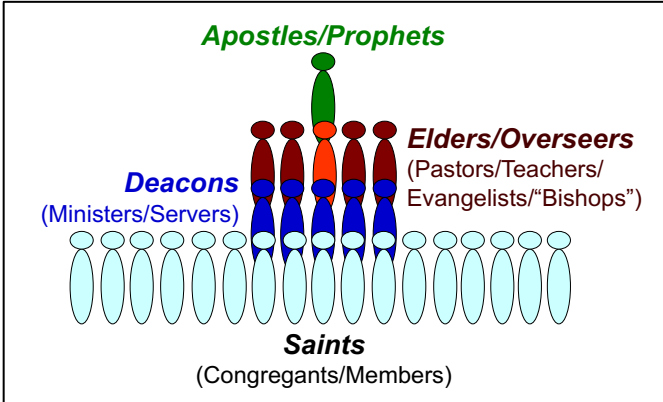
<sup>3:14</sup>"To the angel (*angelos*) of the church in Laodicea write... <sup>15</sup>I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.... <sup>15</sup>You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.... <sup>15</sup>Therefore be zealous and repent."

DIDACHE 15.1

<sup>15.1</sup>Appoint therefore for yourselves bishops (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) worthy of the Lord, meek men, and not lovers of money, and truthful and approved....

DIDACHE 4.1

My child, you shall remember, day and night, him who speaks the word of God to you, and you shall honor him as the Lord, for where the Lord's nature is spoken of, there is He present.





## The Post-Apostolic (Historical) Order (AD 70—)

*SHEPHERD OF HERMAS*, *VIS.* 2.8.3 (c. AD 90–100)

“And you will write two books, and send one to Clement and one to Grapte. Clement will send it to the foreign cities, because it is permitted to him so to do, but Grapte will admonish the widows and orphans.” (cf. Rev 1:11; 2:1)

*I CLEMENT* 42 (c. 96)

<sup>42</sup>And thus preaching through countries and cities, they [the apostles] appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be overseers (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) of those who should afterwards believe....

<sup>44</sup>Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the overseer (*episkopos*). For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those [leaders] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.

*POLYCARP*, *PHIL.* 5.3

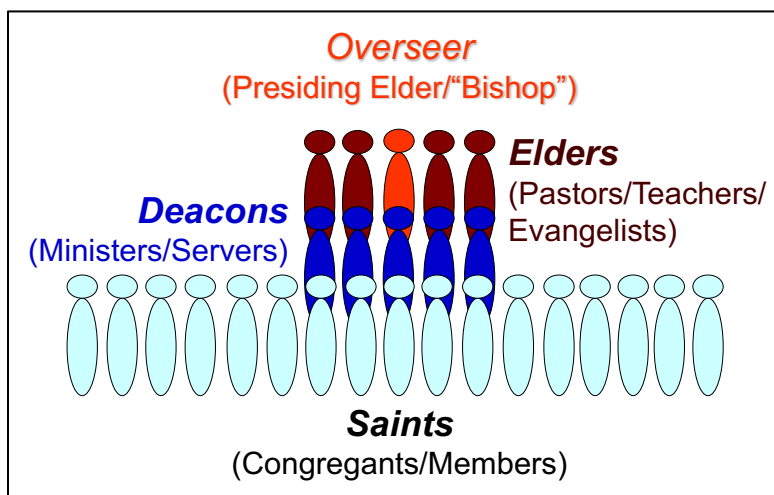
For this reason, it is necessary to abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters (*presbyteroi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*), as unto God and Christ.

*IGNATIUS*, *SMYRN.* 8.1–2

<sup>1</sup>[But] shun divisions, as the beginning of evils. You must all follow your bishop (*episkopos*), as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles; and to the deacons (*diakonoi*) pay respect, as to God’s commandment.

*IGNATIUS*, *TRALL.* 3.1

Let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as they should respect the bishop, who is a model of the Father, and the presbyters as God’s council, and as the band of the apostles. Without these no group can be called a church.





## An Apostolic Model of Church Order?

### PRESBYTERAL

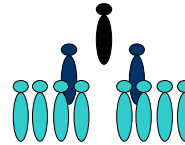
- Definition: authority in the church rests among the college(s) of “elders” (*presbyteroi*) assisted by deacons
- Denominations—Presbyterian, Reformed churches
- Local Churches—Many local independent churches with a plurality of elders or pastoral staff
- Allows for congregational involvement in membership/dismissal/ordination
- This appears to be the earliest order



**APOSTOLIC**  
(A.D. 50-150)  
Apostolic Period,  
Clement, *Didache*



**MODERATE EPISCOPAL**  
(A.D. 100-600)  
Ignatius, Polycarp,  
Apologists, Theologians



**HIGH EPISCOPAL**  
(A.D. 500-1500)  
Archbishops, Papacy

### EPISCOPAL

- Definition: authority in the church rests in the office of the bishop (*episkopos*)
- Denominations—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, some Lutheran
- Local Churches—those with single-pastor/elder leadership or CEO-type or celebrity pastors
- Strong clergy-laity distinction
- Almost no congregational involvement
- This order develops over the course of the first several centuries

### CONGREGATIONAL

- Definition: authority of each autonomous church rests in the congregation of voting members
- Denominations—Congregational Churches, Baptist Churches
- Local Churches—Many non-denominational churches
- Leadership authority derived from the will of the congregation
- A church constitution serves as the governing standard for the congregation
- This order is not found in church history until after the reformation

### Questions

- What are your confessional commitments?
- Are you trying to *adopt* or *adapt* the apostolic order?
- Do you have any symptoms of extreme primitivism, extreme stagnation, or extreme progressivism?
- What is your starting point for historical and cultural contextualization?

### Priorities

- Establish the two biblical-historical offices of elder and deacon
- Erase elder-pastor dichotomy
- Enhance elder and deacon training/equipping
- Encourage greater membership involvement

### Principles

- Work patiently within the existing order.
- Nudge, don't push; patiently approximate, don't rashly appropriate.
- Be flexible within biblical-historical guidelines and changing cultural realities



## Part 3: In Search of Classic Church Membership

### Preview

- The early church's testimony is clear: formally joining a local church *is not optional*.
- "Formally joining" means entering into a "covenant commitment."
- The local church becomes our spiritual "nuclear family," where we commit to all of the "one anothers" with both fellow members and our leaders through good times and bad.
- Membership means a responsibility for positively building up the church and resisting destructive attitudes and actions.

### Commitment or *Covenant* Commitment?

- By becoming a member of a particular church, we do not simply receive rights and privileges, but we assume responsibilities and obligations.
- We who have formally entered into church membership made a "covenant commitment" when we publicly affirmed our loyalty to carrying out the responsibilities as members of a local body of believers.
- Covenant membership reflects the teaching of the New Testament and the early church, but not that of modern American church culture.

### Reasons for Covenant Commitment

→ *Baptism into the Church* (Matt 28:19–20; John 4:1; Acts 2:41–42; Acts 11:26; *Didache* 1–7)

### What Is Baptism?

1. A public confession of faith in the Triune God (Matt. 28:19)
2. A personal association with the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3–4)
3. An act of repentance to forsake the path of sin and death (Eph. 2:1–10; Col 2:11–14; Heb. 6:1)
4. A pledge to live the new life of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 3:21)
5. A rite of initiation into the new covenant community (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27)

### Conclusion

- The notion of unbaptized members of a church is entirely foreign to the New Testament and early church.
- The notion of baptized non-members of a local church is an oddity, and only likely in the case of new missionary efforts or apostolic ministers.
- Functionally, baptism served as *both* the official mark of conversion to the Christian faith *and* the rite of initiation into a local covenanted community.



→ *Cleaving to a Local Church* (Acts 9:26–27; 1 Clement 15.1, 30.3)

*Kollao*—to join, hold fast, cleave to

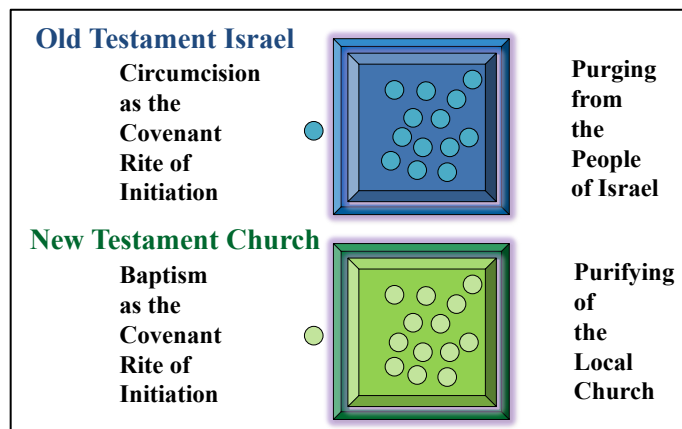
- Literally, “to glue, cement.”
- In classical Greek, “to join fast together,” “to cleave to.”
- Of husbands and wives (Matt. 19:5)
- Of an employee hiring himself to an employer (Luke 15:15)
- Of our permanent relationship with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17)
- Of Paul attempting to “join” the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–27)

Conclusion

- Scripture and the early church both affirm the strong bond a believer should have to his or her local church community.
- The language of “cleaving” or “joining” implies an intimate association in which a person becomes one with the group.
- The term itself usually implies permanence, fixedness, and union.
- Though *kollao* is not in itself “covenant” language, it suggests far more than merely an informal voluntary commitment.

→ *Accountability in the Church* (1 Corinthians 5:2; 5:13)

- Membership in a local church involves unique accountability to that particular community.
- This relationship defines who is “in” the community and who is “out.”
- A formal covenanted relationship must exist in order for the community to exercise accountability and discipline.
- The New Testament and early church communities *did* exercise accountability and discipline.
- Therefore, churches were established on the basis of a covenanted relationship with one another.



Conclusion

- Without a covenanted submission of believers to one another and to the established leadership, the kind of church discipline described by Jesus and the apostles is simply not possible.
- Without official membership *in* a community, there could be no official ejection *from* the community.
- Without a covenant commitment to the local community, there could be no discipline.



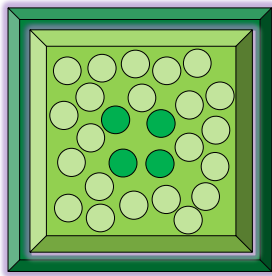
→ Church Leaders Imply Church Members (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–3)

- The fact that leaders are exhorted to take care of the members of their churches demonstrates that they have a God-given responsibility for a particular, definable covenant community.
- Without such covenant membership, no such authority and responsibility could legitimately be exercised.

*Kleros*—lot, portion, possession, responsibility

- Literally, “a lot.”
- In classical Greek, “an allotment of land assigned to citizens,” “any piece of land, a portion, farm.”
- Of an official set membership in Acts 1:17, 26; 26:18

### New Testament Local Church Leadership Responsibility among the Flock



- Established leadership began in the Jerusalem church where the Apostles themselves served as the “elders” (Acts 8:1; 9:27; 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1).
- During their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders” in every church (Acts 14:23), which elders were responsible for overseeing the “disciples” (formal students) in each location (14:21).
- Establishment of ordained leadership in each local church was intended to continue (Titus 1:5).
- The responsibility of the members of the local church was to live in a relationship of mutual

encouragement and support, meeting together consistently (Heb. 10:23).

- This membership in the local established church also involved a relationship of submission to leadership (Heb. 13:17).

→ Seriousness of Covenant Commitment (Gal 3:15; 2 Cor 1:17; Luke 14:28–30; 1 Cor 3:5–17)

- When a person joins a local church, he or she commits to a ministry of building up that particular family of God.
- This commitment before God and His people is solemn and serious.
- Such serious commitments should not be entered into flippantly.
- Church leaders and current members should not accept new members hastily.
- Severe consequences are threatened against any member who fails to contribute positively to the local church.

### Membership Responsibility: To Build Up the Local Church with Quality Work

