

BIBLE ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS

And Interesting Facts About the Holy Word of God

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ISSUE 7

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QUESTION: What is the Biblical basis for church membership rolls?

ANSWER: I understand the term “church” in this context to refer to a local assembly of believers, members of the Body of Christ, who meet regularly for the purpose of fellowship and the teaching and preaching of God’s Word in order to build up and establish the saints (believers) in the faith (Eph. 4:11-13; II Tim.3:16-4:5). In this regard, I am not aware of any specific instructions in Scripture for local churches to keep a written record of those who are members of their fellowship. At the same time, I do not know of any place in the Bible that specifically forbids doing so. However, there are Biblical considerations to take into account when organizing a local fellowship of believers. *See the next question.*

QUESTION: Does the Apostle Paul teach local church membership? Is there any record of a membership roll for the Antioch Church, or the churches at Corinth and Ephesus?

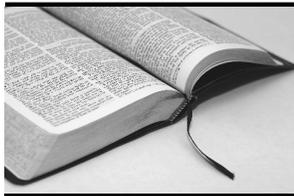
ANSWER: There is no Biblical record of any such rolls that I know of. Neither do I know of any archeological evidence that would confirm that any of these, or other churches that Paul established, kept membership rolls. However, that does not prove that they did not keep them. While the Apostle Paul does not teach local church membership in so many words, it seems clear from his epistles that he expected local believers to regularly meet together on the first day of the week. Paul was taking up a collection for the poor

saints at Jerusalem during his travels. He instructs the churches of Galatia and the church at Corinth to take up a collection for this cause (see I Cor. 16:1-2; cf. Rom. 15:25-26). From Paul’s instructions, it seems obvious that he believed that both the Galatian and Corinthian local assemblies were meeting together regularly on the first day of each week. That being the case, he admonished them, as individuals, to give out of what God had provided each week so they would not have to take up a special collection when the Apostle visited them. We might say that this would be something like a church today having a mission month during which an emphasis is put on giving to missions with a special offering taken each week to build up the offering towards a special mission work or project. Each member gives a designated free will gift to the local church who collects the combined offering and distributes it accordingly.

My point here is not that local churches should meet on the first day of the week (the day commonly known as Sunday today) or to encourage giving to missions. While these things are good and proper in regard to the question at hand, what we need to recognize here is the fact that the church at Corinth was organized. To what extent is hard to tell, but the fact that they were collecting money in what seems to have been relatively large sums over a period of time shows that there must have been some kind of structure and oversight in place. While the names of the individual donors may or may not have been recorded, the amounts given most certainly would have been. Nevertheless, Paul assured them that

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“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” II Timothy 3:16



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those he would entrust with the responsibility of taking the Corinthian's generous offering to Jerusalem to deliver to the saints there would be those of their number that they approved of in writing (I Cor. 16:3). We simply don't know if they had a formal membership roll as such, but the church at Corinth certainly had organization and leadership. Furthermore, nine of the thirteen letters that bear Paul's name (Romans–II Thessalonians) are addressed to churches and the other four to leaders within local churches (I Timothy– Philemon).

A number of things come into play when considering the organization of a local church. First of all it is to take into account what "the Church" is and then to address the subject of what a "local church" is. The Church of the present Dispensation of Grace is made up of every sinful person who has been saved from God's wrath by believing that Jesus Christ died for their sins, was buried, and was raised to life on the third day just as the Bible says He was (I Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:1-4). This is "the Church, which is His (Christ's) Body" (Eph. 1:22-23; cf. I Cor. 12:12-13). Jesus Christ is the Head of "the Church." Local churches, such as Paul established during his work, are made up of a group of individuals who gather together locally and regularly for fellowship and edification.

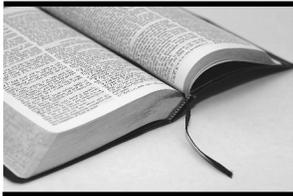
Historically, church membership rolls have often been misunderstood, misapplied, and abused by misguided church leaders in denominational churches. Coupled with false doctrine, they have also been used by unscrupulous men as a means to control and/or intimidate individuals, and even whole churches, for the purpose of dishonest gain. A great number of people have been led to believe that they must be an official member of a church to secure their salvation. I have personally dealt with several people who had not attended the local church I was pastoring for years. Yet they insisted that their name remain on the church membership rolls as a proof of their salvation. I do not know

what message had been preached in those churches in years past when these people were there, but that is not part of the Gospel of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ that is found in God's Word. People are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. A person who has been saved through faith in Christ need not, and indeed cannot, do anything to add to or take away from their salvation. The moment a person puts their trust in Jesus Christ to save them, they receive complete forgiveness of their sins and are given eternal life, redeemed, sealed into Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-26; I Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:3-4; II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:7, 12-14; 2:8-9; 4:30; I Tim. 2:5-6). A person's name being on or not being on the membership roll of a local church has nothing to do with whether a person is saved or not.

Another way that church membership rolls are abused is when they are used to pressure members to tithe. In other words, people are told they are not a member in good standing if they do not give their tithe to the church regularly. This is blatantly unscriptural for a couple of reasons. First, in the present Dispensation of Grace, tithing is not required. "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Second, grace giving is to be voluntary out of a willing heart. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7).

On the practical side of this issue is the "why" and "how" a local church is to be organized. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of a local church is for fellowship among believers and the edification and equipping of the saints through the preaching of God's Word. There are many who think that the primary purpose of a local church is evangelism and growing large congregations. While evangelism is an important aspect of ministry, and we rejoice whenever a lost soul trusts Christ for salvation and begins attending a local church, this is not what the local church is to focus on. According to Scripture, the ministry of the local church is "for the perfecting

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of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:" (Eph. 4:12-13ff). We should always welcome unbelievers when they visit the church or attend a Bible study or preaching service and pray that they will hear the gospel and trust in Christ for salvation. But that is not the reason for the existence of a local church. The goal of each local church should be to establish believers in the faith through the proclamation of sound doctrine. Paul put it this way; "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works**" (II Tim. 3:16-17). The sound teaching of God's Word prepares believers to defend the truth of God's Word, to live according to God's Word and to minister God's Word to others. In this regard it is most practical, we might even say necessary, that a local church have a doctrinal statement, a statement of the beliefs that the church holds to and is obligated to proclaim and defend as a local assembly of saints and as redeemed believers. Of course, as both Scripture and history tell us, there is no absolute safeguard against false doctrine being introduced into the church because man is fallible and prone to error. As he came near to the time of his death, the Apostle Paul commissioned Timothy with the following words: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things,

endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (II Tim. 4:1-5). In Titus we read that elders must be men, "Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:9-11). Notice, false teaching had already crept into the churches in Crete and that it was "by sound doctrine" that the mouths of the deceivers were to be stopped. Churches need doctrinal statements to let people know up front what it stands for and to serve as a defense against error.

QUESTION: I was reading a book in which the author said that in order for mankind to be reconciled to God, he had to be cleansed of all unrighteousness by the forgiveness of all his sins. He said this took place at the cross when Christ died for the sins of the world. Is this true, or must each lost person appropriate the finished work of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be forgiven and saved?

ANSWER: This is a question that I have dealt with several times over the last few years. It is true that, through the work of the cross, Jesus Christ paid a price sufficient to forgive all of mankind's sins, but no one is forgiven of any sin at all apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ. To be forgiven of their sin, and all have sinned, a lost person must realize their sinful lost condition and then trust in the fact that Jesus Christ died for their sins and that He was buried and raised from the dead on the third day just as the Bible says He was, so that they can be justified (see Rom. 4:24-25; I Cor. 15:1-4). Upon having heard the Gospel, believing it and trusting in Christ, a person is "sealed in Christ" by the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

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It is true that the whole world has benefited from Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in that it has made the forgiveness of sins available to all. But only those who personally trust in Christ as their Savior receive forgiveness and, having been forgiven, they are also saved. Scripture is clear; in Christ *"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* (Eph. 1:7). Take heed to the Scriptures and do not fall for the lie that the sins of the world have been taken away. Each individual sinner must personally trust in Jesus Christ to be forgiven. If they have not received Christ by faith and die in their sins, they will pay the terrible penalty their sins have earned them in the everlasting torments of the *"Second Death"* in the *"Lake of Fire"* (see Rev. 20:10-15). [For a more in depth treatment of this subject, see my booklet *"The Remission of Sins,"* available from *Berean Bible Institute.*]

INTERESTING BIBLE FACTS

"The Anabaptists"

In the 1500's, the Protestant Reformation brought about a major split from the Roman Catholic Church. Another split took place when some believers who had come out of the Catholic Church became convinced that the Protestant Reformers were not being faithful to the New Testament Scriptures. This group became known as Anabaptists, which means *"rebaptizers,"* because of their practice of rebaptizing adults after they made a profession of faith in Christ, even though

they had been baptized as babies. This riled the Catholics and Reformers, both of which insisted on infant baptism. The Anabaptists argued, correctly, that infant baptism is not found in the Bible. They also believed that the teachings of the New Testament should be strictly followed, which led them to adopt a high moral standard based primarily on the so-called Sermon on the Mount. They suffered severe persecution at the hands of both Catholics and Protestants. The Catholics condemned them as heretics because they had left the *"mother church"* and the Protestants, primarily because of their rejection of infant baptism and their practice of rebaptizing adult believers.

"The Shortest Verse in the Bible"

The shortest verse in the Bible is only two words, *"Jesus wept."* It is found in John 11:35 (see John 11:1-46 for the context in which the Lord Jesus spoke them). The Lord was not weeping over the death of His friend Lazarus as was supposed by them who witnessed this display of emotion. He was weeping over the unbelief of those who mourned for Lazarus. He then went to the grave of Lazarus and raised him from the dead to show His power even over death.

"In every thing GIVE THANKS:

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

—I Thessalonians 5:18

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