

Why Do We ...

Vote In The Baptist Church?

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Since the Lord called me into the ministry – an honor I neither deserved nor have earned – I have have been richly blessed by God's precious saints. His Church has always been a joy to me. Though my first two pastorates were somewhat rocky (part of which was my fault), every day in the Lord's service grows sweeter and sweeter. It's as that old Gaither song says:

**Since I started for the kingdom,
Since my life He controls,
Since I gave my heart to Jesus,
The longer I serve Him
The sweeter He grows.**

**The longer I serve Him,
The sweeter He grows,
The more that I love Him,
More Love He bestows;
Each day is like heaven,
My heart overflows,
The longer I serve Him,
The sweeter He grows.¹**

The Lord's local Church is sweet to serve. This doesn't mean that there aren't problems from time to time. A local Church is made up of people, all bound together as a unified Body under the headship of Jesus Christ our Lord. Even saved people have an *old sin nature* – this is why we are encouraged to **put off the old man and to put on the New Man.**

¹ THE LONGER I SERVE HIM, words & music by William J. Gaither, (1936-), C. 1965

FOCAL Ephesians 4:22-25 That ye **put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; (23) And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (24) And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.** (25) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for **we are members one of another.**^{KJV}

We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord – but we *put off or put away sin from ourselves* because **we are members one of another**. You see, the local Church is God's method and God's mandate to reach a lost and dying world. Though certain para-church organizations like *Promise Keepers* and *Campus Crusade for Christ* do great works, God has always invested the Great Commission in the local Church. The local Church is a God ordained, God formed Body whose purpose is to function as a *unified body for Christ* on this planet earth.

Sometimes people come to our local Church, visit for a time, then want to become a part of this Church. Now I want to make this very clear – visitors have the right to enjoy all of the functions of the local Church. If visitors are in the hospital I as pastor of this assembly will visit you, if you so desire. Visitors are welcome and encouraged to participate in *all* of the teaching sessions of the Church. This Body cordially invites you to come

KJV All texts are King James Version (authorized) unless otherwise noted

to Sunday School, Sunday morning and evening worship, Wednesday night Bible study, Tuesday night Discipleship classes, and (when available) Friday Book studies. You are encouraged to come to any fellowship meal, to sit and enjoy our Saturday Seniors luncheons, our Sunday Men's Prayer breakfasts, or any other social event of the Church. We will laugh with visitors, love visitors, teach visitors, pray for visitors, and cry with visitors when they suffer loss. This is the Christ-like thing to do.

However, IF you want to officially join our Church, you must first of all be *born again* – saved by faith in Jesus Christ. If you do not understand this please ask me, or any member of this local Church, and we will show you how to turn your life over to Jesus Christ. Secondly, you *must come forward during the invitation* to be accepted into the formal membership of the Church. Finally, you *must have been Biblically Baptized in water* to become a full member of this local Church.

What are the benefits of joining the local Church? You will gain voting privileges, and be able to vote with the congregation on the future direction of the Church. Voting members have a say at every Business Meeting of the Church – as long as you continue to serve the Lord in this Church. If you become inactive as a member – that is, you stop coming to Church for 6 months or longer – you DO lose your voting privileges. However, we do not believe this of you, and expect you to come and be a part of this wonderful Church. Voting members assume positions and offices within the Church as the Lord so directs. Once you become a voting member another member may come and ask you to serve in some official

capacity, either on a committee, as a teacher, or as a Deacon. Every officer of the Church is a voting member, duly accepted into membership and Biblically baptized in water.

We Are Members One of Another

FOCAL Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for **we are members one of another**².

The Bible says that in the Church **we are members one of another**. The words “**one of another**” is the Greek, ἑλλήλων, allēlōn, (pronounced *al-lay'-lone*), which means “**together or in unity**”. The local Church is a **unity**, a **Body** formed together under **One Head, our Lord Jesus Christ**. The Church is *married to Jesus, just like a husband is married to his wife* (Ephesians 5:25-30). It is **God Who adds members to the Church**, member by member as it so pleases Him. We read in the Book of Acts:

Acts 2:47 ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Every soul added to this local Church is truly *added by God*. We add no one by voting them in, but by our vote we *recognize that which God has already done*. Our vote

2 G240, ἑλλήλων, allēlōn, *al-lay'-lone*, Genitive plural from G243 reduplicated; *one another*. (Sometimes with G3326 or G4314.): - each other, mutual, one another, (the other), (them-, your-) selves, (selves) together [sometimes with G3326 or G4314].

is a vote of confidence, an affirmation of the Lord's gracious Gift of new life in the Body. Our vote is *not permission* for the Lord to do that which is His right to do.

We the Church are members together in unity, members of one another. We must be a unified Body, else we cannot do the work of God. We are told in the Book of Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. (13) For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (14) For the body is not one member, but many.

When a person is saved God the Holy Spirit enters that person's life. The saved person is **born again by faith in Christ** (John 3:7; 1 Peter 1:23). God the Spirit enters each believer into union with Christ. We are all **baptized into one Body by one Spirit**. Christians are children of God and Spirit indwelt. **Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer** notes that all Christians are³:

1. "**Born of the Spirit**" (John 3:6, etc.).

3 (Dr. Lewis S. Chafer, *Salvation*, 1917, Sunday School Times Company, Philadelphia, PA, 1919 edition, Chapter VI, pgs. 54-68)

2. **"Baptized with the Spirit,"** "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13; 10:17).
3. **"Indwelt by the Spirit"**. "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2:12; John 7:39; Romans 5:5; 8:9; 2 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:24).
4. **"Sealed by the Spirit,"** "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:22).

Each believer is a priest unto God, and as long as he or she is in fellowship each believer-priest has a voice in this Body called the Church. When we vote – either on new members, or for officers (Pastors, Deacons, Teachers, Committees) in the Church we are affirming the direction that we – **in unity** – believe the Lord wants us to take.

The Most Important Thing For A Church Is Unity With God and With One Another

FOCAL Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for **we are members one of another.**

Remember that I said earlier that the words **"one of another"** in our focal text is the Greek , ἀλλήλων, allēlōn, (pronounced *al-lay'-lone*), which means **"together or in unity"**? This word is emphasized over

and over again in the Biblical pattern of the local Church. For instance, we read in Romans:

Romans 12:5 So we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

There is **one Body in Christ**. We are members **together in unity**. We vote to show that unity. We vote to reaffirm that unity.

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

We are to **edify or build up ourselves in unity or togetherness**. Unity is so very important for the local Church – we must be one within the Body and with Christ our Lord.

Romans 15:5-7 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded **one toward another according to Christ Jesus: (6) That ye may with one mind [and] one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7) Wherefore receive⁴ ye **one another**, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.**

The Greek ἀλλήλων, allēlōn, (pronounced *al-lay'-lone*), is repeated twice here. We are to be *in one accord*,

4 G4355, προσλαμβάνω, proslambanō, *pros-lam-ban'-o*, From G4314 and G2983; to *take to oneself*, that is, *use (food), lead (aside), admit (to friendship or hospitality)*: - receive, take (unto).

unified together, without dissension in the ranks, with **one mind and one mouth glorifying God and admitting or taking to oneself one another.** We do this when we vote, affirming new members into the Church.

God *tempers* the Body together, and wants us to realize that *schism or division* in the Body will prevent us from fulfilling our mission – the saving of souls and the equipping of saints.

1 Corinthians 12:24-25 For our comely [parts] have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that [part] which lacked: (25) That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another.

Voting in the Baptist Church fosters and affirms unity. Is each member, as led by the Spirit of God, going to accept or receive this new convert? Will we disciple this person? Will we support this person until he or she finds their level of service in the Body? When we vote and accept new members we are saying “yes” to these important questions. One of my heroes of the faith, C.H. Spurgeon, stated:

“...whenever it can be said of an assembly, “the Lord is there”, *unity will be created and fostered.* Show me a church that quarrels, a church that is split up into cliques, a church that is divided with personal ambitions, contrary doctrines, and opposing schemes, and I am sure that the Lord is not there. Where there are envyings, jealousies, suspicions, backbitings and

dislikes, I know that the Holy Dove, Who hates confusion, has taken His flight. God is love, and He will only dwell where love reigns. H is the God of peace, and will not endure strife. The children of God should be knit together. It would indeed be a shameful sight should children of His family fall out, and chide, and fight. Saints who dwell with God love each other “with a pure heart, fervently”. Where God is present the Church is edified in love and grows up, like a building fitly framed together, to be a Holy Temple in the Lord!”⁵

Why do we vote in the Baptist Church? We vote on new members to *affirm* what God has done. We vote on officers and leadership within the Body to recognize the decree of the Almighty. We also vote to *correct any areas that may lead to division in the Church.*

Spirit Led Voting Among Its Members Reduces Division In The Church

FOCAL Ephesians 4:25 **Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.**

We are members together, a unified Body of Christ.

When the early Church first formed, it formed rapidly. *Three thousand souls* were added to the Church, even though the first Church had *no formal facilities to meet in.* The local Church met on **Solomon's Porch**, an area of the Temple, to hold their services. The Bible says that

5 C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon *Jehovah Shammah*

the first Church:

Acts 2:41-47 ... gladly received his word [Peter's preaching and] were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls. (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common; (45) And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. (46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (47) Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The *unity of the Church* was amazing – and God did amazing things in His Church. But it wasn't long before trouble cropped up. The Bible tells us that there was **murmuring between the Grecians and the Hebrews (Acts 6:1)**. The Church was doing as the Lord asked, looking after the *widows and orphans (James 1:27)*, but trouble was coming. The families of the Church started to believe that either the *widows of the Hebrews* (Hebrew speaking Jews) or the *widows of the Greeks* (Greek speaking Christians) were being favored, one over the other. The Church was going to split not along *ethnic* lines, but along *native language* lines – as all these

people were more than likely Messianic Jews. How did the Apostles handle this?

They voted on deacons – servant ministers – who were to take care of the physical needs of the Church. The Apostles *did not choose the deacons themselves*, but told the Church:

Acts 6:3, 5 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. {5} And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

Since this is the pattern of the Apostolic Church, Baptist Churches follow the same pattern. The Church is directed to **look ye out among you ... men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost**. The local Church – under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit – looks for and calls **pastors, teachers, evangelists, deacons, and other officers** to fill its needs. The **Biblical standard for the Office of the Pastor (yes, it is an office - see 1 Timothy 3:1)** is found in **1 Timothy 3:1-7**. The **Biblical standard for the Office of the Deacon (yes, it is an office – see 1 Timothy 3:13)** is found in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**. The Bible tells us in:

Ephesians 4:11-13 And [God] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (13) 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:

that **God calls Pastors and Teachers**. If God calls Pastors *why did God give us qualifications for the office of Pastor?* Because God wants the Church to *examine each officer* according to His Word and determine whether that person *meets God's qualifications*. We examine and call officers in the Church by voting, by affirming *that which God has already established*. Our vote does not negate the Will of God, but merely reflects that will.

Baptists believe that the New Testament pattern of the Church is a *Christocracy* – not a democracy. Each member – indwelt by the Spirit of God – is to allow God to direct their hearts during any vote. When the members are surrendered to God's leading the vote will always be in unison with the Will of God. There is a WE to the Body of Christ. Each person who is saved is *indwelt by the Spirit of God* and attached to the Body *by the Spirit of God*. On my own human body every part of that body recognizes the other parts. When I hammer and miss the nail, hitting my finger, the hand with the hammer senses pain just as surely as does the hand that was offended. The Body is *in union with each of its members*. We vote

to formally recognize that unity. If you are saved, the Spirit of God is in you. If I am saved, the Spirit of God is in me. The Spirit within me bears witness in my heart that **we are the children of God**. We vote together under God's leadership.

Voting and Church Discipline

FOCAL Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for **we are members one of another.**

We are **members together, unified as one Body**. But what happens when one or several members begin to bring *division* into the Church. Our Lord Jesus gave very clear instructions on handling *discipline among Church members* when He said:

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (16) But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

A very clear pattern is set forth by our Lord – a pattern for unity. If your brother has offended you, you are required to go to him *alone*. You do not backbite, you do not tell everyone in the Church, but you go to this person **his fault between thee and him alone**. If he will not hear you, you then *take at least one witness with you*. This does two things. First of all, *it insures you are the one in the right*. You yourself could be wrong, and the witness will correct you if you are wrong. Secondly, *it establishes that you have taken every recourse in Christ to resolve the problem*. It is a principle of God that guilt always be established **in the mouth of two or three witnesses**. What next? What if the person will not hear you? THEN YOU TAKE IT BEFORE THE CHURCH. If that person still rejects the decree of the Church, **if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican**. The Church should disfellowship from the offending party until he or she repents. This is done by voting. Voting to disfellowship from *believers acting like unbelievers* was a pattern of the early Church that the Baptists have periodically (and sadly) had to resort to.

The **Apostle Paul** rebuked the **local Church at Corinth** for continuing to fellowship with a young man who was in sexual sin. He said:

1 Corinthians 5:9-12 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: (10) Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or

extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. (11) But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (12) For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

The Church is required to **judge them that are within**, active members in the Church who have moved into *active and open rebellion against God*. If this occurs we must – as the Body of Christ – **not keep company nor eat with these people until they repent**. Until they repent they are to be regarded as **heathen and publicans (unsaved people)**. This is *not* something that is done joyfully – it is a tearful, sad day when the Church must disfellowship from an errant believer. And we must remember – if this person repents, we are *commanded to receive them back into fellowship*. The Apostle Paul found out that this same man that was mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 *had repented of his sin*. The Apostle wrote a second letter to the local Church saying:

2 Corinthians 2:6-8 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.

When the fallen repent, the Church is to restore fellowship. The purpose of all discipline in the Church is *restorative* – to restore the believer to a proper relationship to God and to one another. **We are members together in unity.**

One final point, and then I shall close. Baptists *never* vote on that which is clearly established by Scripture. The Bible is our authority, the Bible is our direction from God. However we do vote in Business Meetings on matters not clearly established by the Word of God.

Spirit Led Voting Resolves Points Of Dispute During Business Meetings

One of the earliest recorded **business meetings** of the Church settled the matter of **whether Gentiles would be accepted in the Church or not**. You see, **Gentiles were not circumcised according to the Law of Moses**, and there were some in the Church who believed that circumcision was *still* a requirement of salvation. Gentiles were being saved under the preaching of the Gospel – should they be circumcised? Let's look into this Business Meeting ...

Acts 15:6-11 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. (7) And when

there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. (8) And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as [he did] unto us; (9) And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. (10) Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Peter stood for the Gentiles – and the vote passed. The Gentiles would be received into the Church and recognized as saved *apart from circumcision*. We read:

Acts 15:22-29 KJVA Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; [namely], Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: (23) And they wrote [letters] by them after this manner;

The apostles and elders and brethren [send] greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: (24) Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, [Ye must] be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no [such] commandment: (25) It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell [you] the same things by mouth. (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; (29) That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

You can see in this text how **the vote of the Church was in accord with the Holy Spirit of God.** Verse 28 says,

“it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us”. There is synergy between the believer and the Spirit, and between each member of the Church. Baptists vote to maintain unity in the Body. We know that..

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not [the author] of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

The purpose of voting – whether it be to receive new members, to recognize officers, or to clarify that which is not clearly outlined in Scripture – is to maintain unity in the Body and minimize confusion. Other local Church denominations may not follow the pattern we follow. That is their right – each local Church is autonomous to the Lord Jesus. This local Church is a Christocracy – we maintain unity by voting as the Spirit of God so directs.

May God touch your hearts with these words.