

Submitting to a Local Church: Commanded or Optional?

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[0 : 00] This is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient word for us as people.! Matthew 28, verse 20. Jesus Christ telling his apostles, Teach my disciples to obey everything I have commanded.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. All right, now let's begin at verse 18 and get this passage in its context. Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

Let's pray. Lord, we praise you. All power and authority are yours. You rule over all things, from your throne in heaven, from the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

[1 : 27] And yet, Lord, you've poured out your Spirit in a powerful way upon your church. And your Spirit brings the presence of God to be with your church, even to the end of the age.

And we praise you that this includes the generation we are part of right now, that we have this promise that you are with us. Lord, we pray that your Spirit will minister your word, your truth to your people.

We pray that you please help the preacher. Please guard the ears of your people. Please help me, Lord, as you helped in the preparation. Help me now to proclaim Christ.

And all that you have commanded us to obey, with joy, with love, because you first loved us. That your name will be exalted. That all those who belong to you, Lord, will willingly give themselves to you in your day of power.

And that your Spirit will apply your truth gently, patiently, in your own timing, to each one that you have made to hear your words. We pray this for Christ's sake. Amen.

[2 : 27] Amen. Well, the first four years of our marriage, Andrea and I moved to São Paulo, Brazil.

And we are two American citizens with American passports, voting by ballot from the foreign country. We're expats. And while we were there, a little bit unexpectedly, we had our first child.

So Andrea went into labor on the opening night of Carnaval, 9 p.m. And what could sometimes take two hours to get to the hospital, the taxi driver did it in 40 minutes. By God's grace, all the lights were green, and we made it safely.

But once this happened, we had to take a step with the American government from a hospital in Brazil. And it was to apply for a consular certificate of birth abroad.

The reason this is fresh on my mind is because we're trying to renew an expired passport from Brazil, and this is one of the documents needed. Consular certificate of birth abroad.

[3 : 32] Every nation has embassies, like one big embassy in another foreign country. But then off of those embassies are smaller offices in other cities that are not the capital.

They're called consulates. Consulates. So when I say consulate, you can picture an embassy as well. Our country, the United States of America, has the responsibility of safeguarding and helping its citizens on foreign soils.

The U.S. paid, maybe you shouldn't know this as taxpayer, they paid \$2 million to an American school there to fortify the perimeter, to make the walls higher, to add cameras and stuff like that, to keep the American citizens abroad safe.

And while we were there, as an expat, the consulate taught us what the American law commands. We were not forced to get the certificate of birth abroad. We wanted it, and it would be negligent not to get that for our son.

We voluntarily filled out the application and happily gave the required proof, submitted it, and waited to see whether or not it would be approved. When we did get it, we were very happy, not because we were afraid of losing the citizenship that was already ours and by extension his, but because it is a great privilege of the citizenship we already enjoy.

[4 : 53] This is a limited analogy for the theme of today. Christians are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. That's what we are called in the Bible. And we're even sent out into this world as ambassadors.

So I picked a very catchy topic, very popular, and here's the title of the sermon. Submitting to a local church, commanded or optional.

So maybe you're rightfully wondering why this topic, why now? Maybe you're questioning pastoral prudence. Is this even wise? As I mentioned, there are a few reasons for this.

One is, or going down that paragraph in our confession of faith, and this was once a more common understanding among mature Christians, but it's been systematically undermined by wrong teaching and consumer church models.

That's the reality for our country. Is it urgent to teach about submitting to a local church? It's as urgent as obedience to Christ is urgent.

[6 : 01] It's as urgent as the spiritual health of a soul is urgent. It's as urgent as the strength of a congregation is urgent. A church is an embassy of heaven.

We're charged by Christ in the verse we just read for today to teach his disciples to obey all that he has commanded. All the privileges and all the duties of belonging to his kingdom.

Most of us come from backgrounds where this has not been taught at all. The emphasis in many churches today is on making converts, having someone sign a card or raise their hand, not making disciples, which is what Christ commanded.

This consumer approach to church focuses more on tickling ears rather than teaching people to obey all that he has commanded. And what we're left with is we walk away thinking God is a God that we approach however we want, and we worship God on our terms rather than a God who calls his disciples to do what he has commanded as the king of kings.

So I want to walk through five questions on this topic. My goal is to teach and to persuade you of what the Bible says and then how this one local church does our best to carry it out at this time.

[7 : 30] So the first question we need to reckon is this. Is obedience to Christ optional? Is obedience to Christ optional?

King Jesus calls you and me to obey him. Look again at verse 18. The reason is because all authority has been given. The person of Jesus Christ, having accomplished his mission, receives now from the Father special authority over his church and his advancing spiritual kingdom on earth.

And what does he command with that authority? Verse 19. Make disciples. Teaching them to obey. Look at verse 20. How much do we obey?

Obey all that I have commanded. If you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, obeying him is not optional. And this is not the first time we hear this declared to us.

Luke 6, 46. Jesus himself said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say? John 14, 21. He who has my commands and keeps them, it is he who loves me.

[8 : 46] John 15, 14. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. See, Jesus is a good king. And he loves us too much to leave us without instructions, without a clear path of following as his disciple.

1 John 2, 3. Now by this we know that we know him if we keep his commandments. So this is a call to Christian obedience. The reason it's unpopular is because it often gets mixed with legalism.

When a Christian obeys, it's out of gratitude. It's a reflex because he first loved me. It's not, I do this so that he will love me. No, he loved me so much, he freely saved me.

It's a joy now to obey him. Our confession of faith has wonderful clarity about this to guard us from all kinds of wrong teaching about obedience as a Christian. Chapter 16, paragraph 2 says, These are good works of obedience to Christ, done in obedience to God's commands, not adding on or inventing our own rules, but they are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.

It's the evidence of a lively faith when we obey Christ. So is obedience to Christ optional? Not if he's the king of your life. Now, we don't obey him perfectly, and his spirit is so gentle, so patient with us.

[10 : 10] The purpose of making this point clear is simply to put us in our place. We are disciples, and we learn over years patiently by the gentle work of the spirit to obey Christ.

And we don't get to pick and choose. When his spirit brings a conviction on us from his word, we obey him. With his help, with his power, imperfectly, but more and more. Second question, How do disciples of Christ learn to obey him?

How do disciples of Christ learn to obey him? Look at verse 20 again. He's telling his apostles, He's telling his apostles, along with the congregation that will soon receive the Holy Spirit and become the early church in Jerusalem, teach them to obey.

So disciples of Christ must learn, and we learn by being taught to obey Christ. We must learn through his word, through his spirit, and through his church.

We are to declare the word of God with authority. How often do we teach God's people what he has commanded? Always, in season, out of season, preaching the full counsel to his people and letting the spirit apply it.

[11 : 27] Colossians 1, 28, We preach him, Jesus Christ, his person, his work, his promises, and all he has commanded us to obey, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ Jesus.

That's the charge on the teachers within a church. Keep preaching Christ, warning everyone, teaching everyone, helping everyone grow slowly decades toward maturity in Christ.

You notice how Christ is the unifying theme of our teaching and of our maturing. Acts 20, 27, For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

So when we teach God's people to obey Christ, what is this encompass? What all is included? A quick summary is this. It's going to include God's moral law, what he's already made very clear.

Christians need to know what is pleasing to God, how to love God the way God tells us to love him, and how to love neighbor the way he tells us to love neighbor. That's given to us in the Ten Commandments.

[12:36] In addition to that, as disciples of Christ, we learn what's called the positive laws or positive commands, simply meaning these are in addition to the moral law that God has given in a special way to his church.

And this includes baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Well, these are the ordinances for the church that we learn to obey.

Now, how do we exercise these teachings? And you see how the list is pretty short. That's what we do. How do we exercise it, though? Well, it gets worked out in three different spheres, as we've seen.

So let me refresh your memory. The first sphere, we're all born into it, is a family. The second sphere is we're born in a land, a state, a nation. And then finally, if God is gracious to you, you are also put into a local church.

Now, the New Testament uses commands relating to each of these three spheres. We're told to submit, obey, and honor. And those are the three spheres.

[13:46] Think about how our obedience to Christ is exercised in each of those three. Home, state, and church. Let's use an example we can all relate to.

Let's say a child is an orphan living on the streets somewhere in the southern hemisphere. They get lovingly adopted into a home, and they're just so happy all the time, but they're doing these cartwheels on their way to the dinner table.

The family says, wash your hands before you share this meal. You're going to be touching and passing, and you're going to put whatever germs were on this floor onto the food that we're all going to be eating here.

So that's a rule. In this household, now that you are our child, you belong here, wash your hands before the dinner table. That's not legalism for the family to give that rule. It's a good, loving law for the good of the child and the whole family.

And the child would joyfully learn slowly over time and perfectly to obey. And by obeying in the family setting, the child is exercising obedience to Christ ultimately.

[14:52] It's a sphere in which we get to practice that. Submitting to Christ, obeying my parents in the Lord as it is pleasing. This also is applied to us in the book of Romans relating to the federal government or the national government.

The government's given the sword. Family doesn't have a sword or an army. The church doesn't have a sword or an army. That's given to the government. And the laws of the land are given for the good of those who are walking uprightly.

And so obey the laws of the land. Jesus said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. So in obedience to Christ, ultimately, no matter my feelings about the president or the governor of my state, I'm submitting to the land where I live, where he's put me at this time.

And when you submit to the land, sometimes the laws might not make sense or you might not like them or they may need to be updated. But it's still important that we learn to obey Christ in them. I learned recently that in Arizona, it's still illegal, according to the internet.

I'm sure it's very reliable. In Arizona, it's illegal for a donkey to sleep in a bathtub. I guess in the 1920s, there was a donkey that used to always go sleep in this tub and it got swept away by a flood.

[16:09] And then all the government had to spend money to go rescue this donkey, carried off far away. In Connecticut, for a pickle to be legally considered a pickle, it must be able to bounce.

So you're going to put it on a counter there. You have to be able to bounce the pickle. And it was a food safety measure because if it's mushy, it won't bounce and you shouldn't be able to sell it. See, these are laws of the land.

If I live in Connecticut, I have to follow that law. If I live in Arizona, I have to follow that law too if I own a donkey. Now, the third sphere is the church and those same verbs are used.

Hebrews 13, 17, obey your elders. Obey not all the elders out there in all the churches, just like you don't have to obey all the parents out there. You obey your parents.

1 Timothy 5, 17, let the elders who rule well. And so those same terms, ruling, obey, and the response of a Christian is to exercise obedience to Christ in each of those spheres.

[17:07] It does not give anyone in those positions of authority, government, home, or church, a license to lord over this authority. Instead, it should make you tremble in your boots.

You're giving account to Christ in the home, on behalf of the state, or within a church. But our part as Christians is to submit ourselves to Christ and obey and exercise that in each of those spheres in the Lord.

We learn to obey Christ by being taught this and by giving the practice in three different spheres. Third question, how ought churches uphold obedience to Christ?

How ought churches uphold obedience to Christ? Obedience to Christ is not optional. Obedience to the king of kings is very important.

And his spirit is in the churches. We Christians have the Holy Spirit in us. And when we gather in his name, it's the glory of his name that we care about. So we have a very big responsibility to uphold obedience to Christ.

[18:14] In fact, some of you found this church eventually, not because this church is perfect, but because you were in another church that was neglecting to uphold obedience to Christ in very public ways.

All right, our responsibility as a church, imperfectly, with all of our limits, we have the duty to do our best to have earth, the church on earth, be a reflection of the kingdom of heaven.

It's our responsibility to close out certain things and to open up the church to others. Now, this teaching, I'm going to argue, I hope to persuade you, it's necessarily contained in scripture that churches must be cautious about who is admitted or who is admitted to join the church and who has access to the privileges of a church.

You can turn to Acts 9 if you like. I'm going to read it kind of quickly. Otherwise, you can write it down and study it later. Acts chapter 9, verse 26 and 27. Saul got saved, the man who was going around killing the Christians.

God later renames him Paul, so that's what I'll refer to him as. And Acts 9, 26 tells us that Paul had come to Jerusalem again now after getting saved and being discipled.

[19:37] And he tried to join the disciples there in Jerusalem. Well, that's good. That's what Christians do. They join other Christians. They find one another and participate in the assembly.

But they were all afraid of him. Now, listen to this part. And did not believe that he was a disciple. So the church in Jerusalem is closing out Paul, who's going to become the Apostle Paul, through whom we get most of the New Testament.

And they have authority as a local church to say, not so quick, buddy. Don't presume upon this congregation. Don't come in and mingle and act as though you already are here, because first, we have a responsibility to uphold obedience to Christ.

Do you belong to Christ? We need to discern that, and it was right for them to do that. The church was practicing due diligence and testing.

Okay, he made a profession of faith. Do we receive that? Now, this is so beautiful and humbling how Paul then turns around, and he actually warns and equips the other local churches to do the exact same thing.

[20 : 49] In 1 Corinthians 5.11, he says, I have written to you now, local church in Corinth, not to keep company with anyone named a brother, so they made a profession of faith who is, in the present continual sense, living in sin that misrepresents the name of Christ.

And Paul says to the church, not even to eat with such a person. A letter to the local church referring to sharing a meal together, it would include both the fellowship meal that was their custom and our custom, and in a special way, the Lord's Supper, which is one of the sacraments Christ instituted.

And the same caution is repeated in the book of Jude, for example. He says there are those who will creep in unnoticed, and otherwise they'll pay lip service to Christ, but they will very soon, you'll be able to tell they are spots on your feasts.

In other ways, they don't love Christ. The feast or the Lord's Supper, the meal that a church shares, that is not for wolves that are in there to destroy God's lambs.

You see how the pattern and the teaching in Scripture, it says there is a clear line between the church and the world. And most of the churches that we've all come from and experienced and spent years in do a really good job of blurring those lines, don't they?

[22 : 12] In Scripture, you as a church have the responsibility, hand such a one over to Satan. In other words, if you're not in the church, you are in the world, the dominion of Satan, so that you'll see how miserable it is out there.

It's a parched desert wilderness. Find your way back to Christ in his church. But it's one or the other. The lines between the church and the world are not blurry.

And this is an authority that the church rightly has to exercise. This has been tested in every generation. I'll give you one famous example.

Switzerland, 1553. There was a rowdy group of people who paid lip service to Christ but were not true believers called the Libertines.

They lived openly immoral lives, but they insisted on their right to keep taking the Lord's Supper at the Reformed Church in Geneva. Reformed meaning Protestant, not Catholic, and putting themselves under Scripture, doing their best to work it out.

[23 : 15] When the Geneva Civil Authority ordered Calvin to admit them to the table, John Calvin refused, insisting in the authority of the church alone to fence the table from those who remain unrepentant.

And then came the one Lord's Day where it all came to a head. The Libertines, with swagger and with their swords, ready to go on their belts, took the front seat of the church.

Calvin stood up there, preached through a passage of the Bible, and then he walked down from the pulpit, laid out the Lord's Supper, and invited the church to take it.

Well, the Libertines stood up in force, and all were walking forward, and Calvin slammed his arms and hands down on the table of the Lord's Supper, covering up the bread and the wine, and he said, These hands you may crush, these arms you may lop off, my life you may take, my blood is yours, you may shed it, but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profaned, and dishonor the table of my God.

It's the Lord's table, and the lines between the world and the church are not blurry. About a hundred years later, Benjamin Keech wrote something similar, To admit the profane is to pollute the sanctuary.

[24:49] The church is a garden enclosed. It is not a common field for all to roam in, but a place for those who have given themselves first to the Lord, and then to us, that's quoting scripture, by the will of God.

Well, this is a much higher view of the church, and of the authority of the church, and of the sacraments than most of us have ever heard taught.

And that's the first step. We teach clearly about what we believe Christ has commanded. If a person does not yet receive this teaching or this truth, has not yet been convinced of this, or taken steps, it's understandable that this is going to take time, first time to be taught this.

I'm going to have to think about that. I'm going to have to weigh that against all the other teaching I've sat under. The other possibility is that a person has never received redeeming grace yet.

And it's lack of submission to Christ manifesting in lack of submission to one of the spheres in which he gives it to practice it. We don't know the person's heart.

[26:07] Only God does. So we teach. And we do our best to elevate in our own minds what God has said about his church. We must lovingly emphasize that membership is the only way for a church to know who the flock is, who will elders give account to Christ for, who are they to care for, who is voluntarily wanting discipleship in this church.

The church has a duty, I believe, to still block those who are openly, you know, showing a hatred for God and a disregard for him. But only God can change the heart.

And until he does, we keep teaching. We don't compromise the standard of the church. We proclaim his truth, and we do this in a loving way. Now, I've mentioned church membership, and that's another one that's come under a lot of attacks and been undermined by many.

So that's the fourth question we need to wrestle with. As churches uphold obedience to Christ, that's non-negotiable, is the concept of church membership necessarily contained in Scripture?

I'm choosing my words carefully. I'm referring to the concept, in other words, the principles that we use now in this term membership, are those principles, that concept, necessarily contained.

[27:33] Can we walk away and say, that's not in the Bible, you can't do it, or you shouldn't do it. If it's necessarily contained, then we should submit to the Lord in that. Well, one line of interpretation that's very new the last 30 years or so, which is most common today, has listened to teachers like, and I'm going to mention names, because their quotes are out there on the internet.

We've listened to teachers, and this is a line of interpretation. Francis Chan, he said, you can't find the term church membership in the Bible. Here's another one.

Chuck Smith, on behalf of the Calvary Chapel movement, we don't have a formal membership because we don't find any scriptural basis for it. That's the end of his quote.

Well, both of these are presenting invalid arguments and uncertain conclusions. There's a fallacy called term concept fallacy.

So, it's true that you can go to the Bible or your app and put in the term church membership and you won't get any hits. You can also put in the word trinity and you won't get any hits.

[28:47] or the word eternal state which is or like intermediate state, you know, so the body is buried and the soul is with Christ. What do we call that? Well, that term is not in the words but the concept is undeniable.

Another concept is moral law. You won't find that but it's necessarily contained in scripture. Covenant of grace. These are all examples. I mean, if you're to do away with all the terms that have been helpful over the centuries for the church because of that fallacy you're going to end up with a very shallow religion and really it's misleading.

And here's a third one. David Platt actually published this in a book. Quote, we have taken the command of Christ to make disciples and we have mutated it, okay, dropping in a negative term, mutated it into a command to make church members.

I've not read his book, don't plan to and I don't know what his experiences was that made him write that. But he's confusing categories. He's saying discipleship is what counts.

Well, discipleship is personal communion with God through Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. That's what matters most. Membership are the orderly steps a local church wisely sets up out of love for Christ.

[30 : 08] It's a totally different category. And he's setting up a false dilemma between the two. As if you can't be a genuine disciple of Jesus and also take the steps your local church has laid out to become a member in obedience to Jesus Christ.

I would argue mature members will joyfully do that. We need to be aware of these teachings. I'm not saying anything about them as people. Never met them. I believe they are probably sincere Christians.

But these teachings I think are have been very detrimental. I think many of us have been misled. I think those teachings are unwise. It can really hurt a person's maturing in the faith.

Imagine if you said that in another sphere. Don't pay all your taxes to the government. That's just immature and unwise and detrimental to your becoming a full-fledged responsible adult.

Or the same in the household with what your parents are asking. And I've certainly seen this as an effect on local churches. There's a much better line of interpretation that's time-tested, stable, and it humbly trusts what God's Spirit has made clear by His Word to His church over the centuries.

[31 : 22] John Owen didn't even prove this. He simply observed it. He said, Christ commands, they bind every faithful believer to join and voluntarily submit himself to a single congregation that displays the mark of a true church.

Preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and discipline. These principles are evident in the Word, clear in themselves, owned by virtually everyone who claims to desire the reformation of the church.

Neither the Bible nor church history gives a valid basis for rejecting this. That's the end of Owen's quote. And then he goes on to say what a joy and what a blessing it is to enjoy life in a church and the fellowship.

But he's simply saying this is what the church has received and we should continue with. So what is the criteria if we're going to test whether these principles are necessarily contained in Scripture?

From our own confession of faith, we have this language that is very helpful. We must obey whatever is either expressly set down, that means the words are clearly stated for everyone to read and get right away, or necessarily contained.

[32 : 32] So using that criteria, let's test it one part at a time. is the term membership necessarily contained in Scripture?

Yes. Membership is a metaphor that God himself gives us in his word. Colossians 1.18, Jesus Christ is the head of the body, the church.

1 Corinthians 12.17, you are the body of Christ and members individually. So the term membership is a good one.

We can't do, we can't find a more biblical term and that's what the church has used. Might as well keep it. Is the requirement for membership necessarily contained? The criteria for opening the doors and welcoming members or saying, no, we're not going to open membership to this person at this time.

What's the requirement? Matthew 10.32, Jesus said, whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.

[33 : 39] You can look at Acts 2, we read it in Sunday School, Acts 2.41 and 47. Those who gladly received his word, how do we know they received his word? Repent, believe, they have faith.

They were then baptized and that day about 3,000 souls were added to them and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

The Greek word here is the Lord added to the church, *te ekklesia*, the assembly. It's a definite article indicating a specific group here, the local church in Jerusalem.

They were added to a concrete, visible group of believers who were baptized, devoted to the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, who met daily in the temple and in homes and who grew numerically as new converts joined them.

So the requirement is the same. Shouldn't add on to that, shouldn't introduce preparationism or all these other things but if you make a credible profession of faith and we see the fruit of the spirit, you're joining, you're being part of the worship, you've been baptized, you should be welcomed into a local church.

[34 : 52] 2 Corinthians 8.5 gives us an insight into the question about the vows. When you become a member, you stand up here and you make vows to a local congregation, not to all the churches out there but to this group of believers.

Are those vows to become a member within the bounds of scripture? 2 Corinthians 8.5 tells us that these believers in a church gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

It was the will of God that believers give themselves to a local church and the local church knew that they had given themselves to them. Ephesians 5.21, we're told to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord and build each other up through singing, through prayer, our worship, our life together.

But what about the process for membership? Is that within the bounds of scripture? Because everything I've said so far is expressly set down. All of those things we don't get to wiggle out of.

Now the process for membership is going to look different in different cultures, different settings, different needs and there's one simple rule for this. 1 Corinthians 14.4 Let all things be done decently and in order.

[36 : 12] And so if a church is doing these steps as best they can, these non-negotiables decently and in order, then that's like a parent reasonably saying we all wash our hands before we share a meal together.

It's reasonable and it's orderly. Well, I've given you my best shot at it. The principles of church membership, I hope I've persuaded you, they are necessarily contained in scripture.

If they were not, we should regret, we should reject the statement from our confession of faith. We should change our constitution in a lot of places. We should change out our training handouts and we should put different authors on our book table.

It's more than a good and necessary consequence. It's expressly set down and necessarily contained. What Christ commands us to obey, it's given to us in his word and Christ's disciples are told to be taught, to learn, to obey all he has commanded.

Reformed churches, those who have put themselves under God's word, have consistently taught this same thing for over 500 years, which our confession of faith expresses in one sentence or two or three.

[37 : 25] It's three. It's this. Second confession, Second London Confession 26, 12. All believers are obligated to join themselves to local churches when and where they have opportunity.

Likewise, all who are admitted to the privileges of a church are also subject to the discipline and government of it according to the rule of Christ.

So long as it's in the Lord, children obey their parents. So long as it's in the Lord, Christians submit to one another in a local church. That's the end of the quote from our confession.

So I believe we can say this. Membership gives us good order and formalizes the way Christians shall participate in the biblical duties, biblical fellowship, and privileges within their local congregation.

The privileges of belonging to a church means full participation. A church needs you. Local churches need believers. We need to be vitally connected and to know that the commitment is real.

[38 : 36] the privileges also include the Lord's Supper, the one another's and caring for one another, especially those who are of the household of the faith.

Full participation in fellowship, the ability to guide the congregation, to call out wrong teaching and false teaching, to confirm when God is raising up a servant, an officer, to uphold the truth and the peace, to support other churches who need us to be strong as a congregation, to have a part in an orderly way, even of church discipline if it's needed, and then certainly restoration when God brings repentance.

Well, that's the fourth question. The concept of church membership is necessarily contained in scripture. And here's the final question for today that I hope encourages you and me.

By what power do we learn to obey all that Christ has commanded? This is really the sweetest part. To be honest with you, I love you all so much and the first part was hard for me to preach up to this point.

It's a joy to encourage you with these final words from Christ. Please look again at verse 20. By what power do Christians learn to obey all that Christ has commanded us?

[39 : 57] He says in verse 20, Lo, I am with you always. Your version might say, look or behold. I love that old English, Lo, I am with you always.

The dictionary of 1828 helps us that word means look, see, behold, observe. It excites particular attention to what's coming next and Jesus says, I am with you church, always even to the end of the age.

Obeying Christ is calling people to orderly church practices out of a response of gratitude. It's not do this in order to make sure you get eternal life.

No, it's you're already alive in Christ because he first loved you. And he does call you and me to obey him out of love for Christ. John 14, 15, if you love me, you keep my commands.

Obeying Christ, it's not even possible by our own power. Jesus says, I am with you always. We can obey him because he gives us the power to do so.

[41:07] Remember John 15, 5, Jesus said, apart from me, you can do nothing. John 15, 10, if you keep my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands and abide in his love.

He says, I am with you always. You can abide in me. You will abide in me. I purchased you to abide in me. And obeying Christ, it's not burdensome.

It's learning to walk with him as one that's yoked to him. It's his power and it's his guidance with each step. 1 John 5, 3, for this is the love of God that we keep his commands.

His commands are not burdensome. Obeying Christ is only possible by his power. Paul understood this. Colossians 1, 29, he said, I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me.

Jesus calls you and me to obey in an orderly way what his church has laid out for you. The church teaches us but we must obey voluntarily.

[42:20] This is the end of it. The only authority a minister has is declarative. You must obey Christ voluntarily. Every Christian joyfully submits to!

Is joined to! and commits themselves to! A local church not because we're afraid we might lose our citizenship in heaven but because it is a great privilege of the citizenship we already enjoy in Christ's kingdom.

2 Corinthians 8 5 We give ourselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to his church. Ephesians 5 21 we submit to one another in the fear of God.

Submitting to local church is our way of saying I am part of this spiritual family and I invite you all to hold me to the standard of the gospel. I do so joyfully voluntarily in obedience to Christ because God first loved me and because the Holy Spirit has made me willing and because I want to joyfully enjoy all of Christ's blessings and the privilege of belonging to him here with you.

May we rely on Christ may we abide in his power. If you have questions about this or what this looks like in different situations I know it can be very complicated it can feel very difficult I promise I will never individually put any negative pressure on you but I also give me account to Christ as a minister I can't stop declaring what he has shown me and what's my conviction from his word we trust to Jesus Christ is with us always even to the end of the!

[44:13] Let's pray father we thank you for how you rule over your people and your church for how you are a good shepherd how you go after that lost lamb and you bring that one back to your flock!

for Christ we pray amen