

## *Lessons From People of Faith in Hebrews 11*

David Halbrook

Do you realize how controversial the subject of faith is? Some atheists misrepresent true faith as being “blind faith,” ignoring the evidence for God’s existence (Rom. 1:18-20). Some agnostics think faith is a man-made tradition, not knowing the evidence for the divine origin of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:19-21). Some people mistakenly teach that faith requires a modern miracle of the Holy Spirit in your heart, overlooking the persuasive power of His word (1 Pet. 1:23).

If you want to know about true faith, read Hebrews 11. Here we see that faith is the result of learning what God has said and done (v1-3; Rom. 10:17). By this faith, Abel learned how to please God when he worshiped (v4; we hope you learned this from our recent articles about “playing songs to God”). By this faith, Noah knew that God would punish the disobedient, so he built an ark (v7). If you have seen the recent fictional “Noah” movie, we hope you’ll read the real events in Genesis 6-9 and the lesson Peter taught about baptism based on Noah’s life (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

For more study of Hebrews 11, join us Wednesdays (7PM). The class handouts are on our website (*Free Class Lessons*).

Editor’s Note: Our article in *Arkansas Weekly* serves several purposes, such as inviting the community to our adult Bible class which recently began a study of Hebrews 11. Use our article to invite a friend or stranger to join us for these studies. If you are a member of this church who chooses not to join us on Wednesday evenings, I hope the article on *Church Membership* reminds you of your commitment. Likewise, for the men and the monthly men’s meeting. Brethren, we are few in number, and if we do not all participate according to our ability, we are not growing as a church according to our potential (Eph. 4:16). *We need you.*

### Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

See the bulletin board in the classroom hallway, for lists of work needing workers.

Pray for: Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, our brethren who are travelling, and new Christians among us.

Our fall gospel meeting is September 9-14 (*Tuesday-Sunday*) with Ron Halbrook.

*We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM*

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# The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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## *What is “Church Membership”?*

David Halbrook

We must “test all things” to know whether any teaching or practice is from God or not (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Jn. 4:1). Sometimes, that might be as simple as reading a few verses in order to know whether something passes or fails the test of God’s word. At other times, we need to study several verses to understand the will of the Lord regarding some matter (Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17). When the matter of “church membership” arises, we must put it to the test.

**Defining “church” & “membership”** In order to know what we are testing, we must define what “church membership” is. That would be easier to do if those two words were found together in the Bible, but they aren’t. This does not automatically mean it is wrong, for “Bible class,” “worship service,” and “eldership” are not in the Bible, but the meaning of these words fits what the Bible teaches we may or must do. So, what is meant by “church membership” and does it pass “the test”?

First, we must identify what is meant by “church.” Even in the Bible, it is used in a few different ways. Most often, “church” refers to the group that is composed of every, single saved person (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23). Regularly, “church” refers to a group of saved people but not *all saved* people—just the saved people who have decided to work together as a church. Sometimes they are identified by their location (Col. 4:16), by their head (Rom. 16:16), or both (1 Cor. 1:2). There are a few other uses of “church,” but these are the two we will “test” in this study.

Second, we must identify what is meant by “membership.” “Member” simply means to belong to something. Your pinky finger is a member of your hand, arm, and body. When we commit to a group of people, we become members of each other---whether that group is a ball team, a government, a school, etc., and the length and degree of commitment simply depends on the nature of that group and their goals. “-ship,” at the end of a word, may help to identify the type of bond between people (as

used in “friendship,” “relationship,” “kinship”). People who are in a friendship, are friends of each other. People who are in a membership, are members of each other. “Friendship,” “membership,” and most other “-ships” imply mutual commitment.

***Membership in the church of Christ (universal)*** Let’s put what we’ve learned together. When speaking of “church membership,” we need to understand which “church” is being referred to---Jesus’ one church or His many churches. Membership in Jesus’ one church means we belong to Him, which only occurs when we have been bought and washed by His blood (Eph. 5:25-26; Rev. 1:5). God adds us to this church the moment we are saved, thus we become a member of Him and His body simultaneously (Acts 2:47; Rom. 12:5). God has revealed the qualifications which permit, but do not earn, our place in this group (Mk. 16:16; Lk. 24:47; Rom. 10:9-10). Man can neither add nor remove anyone from this church so this “church membership” is entirely known and overseen by God. In many man-made religious traditions, people are taught that they belong to Christ when saved by faith alone but that they do not belong to His body until they are baptized into “one of His churches” (the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church, etc). How can someone belong to Christ but not His body?! Any church beside the church that Jesus spoke about (Matt. 16:18) and the apostles wrote about (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23) is not Christ’s and membership in that church is spiritually useless. This is a vain type of “church membership” that we must avoid.

***Membership in one of the churches of Christ (local)*** But, we could also speak of “church membership,” referring to one of the churches of Christ, as we noticed the word “church” is sometimes used. Being a Christian does not mean that I belong to any or all of these churches. For example, the day that the Ethiopian was baptized into Christ and His body, he went on his way rejoicing but was not yet among any one of the churches, even if there was one in his hometown (which is unlikely). But did he remain uncommitted to and apart from any other Christians? While we do not know the rest of his life, as long as he continued learning the doctrine of Christ like his teacher Philip did, then we must conclude that at some point, he began working with other Christians as a part of one of the churches. Philip did this in Jerusalem, where those who were baptized continued with one accord (Acts 2:41-42; and later in Caesarea Acts 18:22; 21:8). This was the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Who was the church at Jerusalem? It was a specific, limited, definable group of people. We know this because the apostles assembled them and told them to “seek out from among you seven men” (Acts 6:3). Did that include anyone who happened to wander into that assembly? No. Even the fact that someone was a Christian did not

automatically make them a member of the church in Jerusalem (or Antioch or Quail Valley!). Mutual commitment to Christ and to each other is what makes a group of individual Christians one of the churches of Christ. This is seen in Acts 9:26-28, when Paul came to the disciples in Jerusalem and wanted to join them. He came to Jerusalem, not for a short visit, but intending to convert his former friends (Acts 21:17-20). He was already a Christian, but that did not automatically make him a part of the congregation in Jerusalem. It was not until they had an opportunity to know him (which was expedited by Barnabas) and were willing to receive him that he joined himself to them—mutual commitment.

There is no specific pattern, or plan, in the New Testament for how a Christian becomes part of a church (sometimes called “placing membership”) but somehow, a Christian and that church must have and show a mutual interest in working together. At whatever point this mutual commitment happens, we are members of one another and have responsibilities toward each other that we do not have, to the same degree, toward all Christians. We cannot regularly “consider” all Christians but must consider those people with whom we have agreed to assemble (Heb. 10:24-25). We can only look among ourselves in order to find elders and deacons (1 Pet. 5:2). We must identify those who are disorderly “among you” (2 Thess. 3:7). If this “church membership” is optional, then we are never obligated to do any of these things---you can see the problem with that! No, the church of Christ in Quail Valley is not equal to the “one church” of Matthew 16:18, but yes, God expects every Christian to regularly assemble and work with other Christians (according to their ability)—that is why God revealed His ideas concerning the churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16). When we speak of “church membership” in this way, it is with Christ’s authority, not with man’s authority or in man’s tradition. Man’s idea is for no one to be committed to anyone. A lack of commitment means a lack of responsibility and accountability—also man’s plan, not God’s. As members of one another, we are responsible for each other.

***Conclusion*** The multiple meanings of the word “church” sometimes contribute to confusion about “church membership” and because those two words do not appear side by side in Scripture, the work of testing that idea takes a little more study and thought. Whether or not we use the specific phrase “church membership” or not is not important. What is important is that we obey the gospel, at which point God adds us to His Son and His son’s church (kingdom, body, family, army, etc.). Have you been added? Then, God teaches us in Scripture to continue in all things Christ has commanded, which includes finding other Christians and working with one accord as a church of Christ. Have you made, and are you keeping, these commitments?