

Sermon: **Don't join a church. Submit to one.**

Text: 1 Peter 5:1-5

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Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church,

Hong Kong

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It's been almost one year since I came to CBIBC. On my first Sunday, I preached from 1 Peter 5. I am sure all of you remember that! Well, today we again return to 1 Peter 5 to take a look at Church Membership. We will look at some other passages as well.

Is Church Membership in the Bible?

Is there a direct command that I sign my name on a card and go up front in a church service and join a church?

No, there is not.

But belonging to a local church is in the Bible. In fact, it is all over the place, if you think hard about what it means to be the church and a member of it. The church is not a club we join, like joining the Jockey Club or the tennis club or the Toastmasters. We are a family with a Father. We are a kingdom with a king. We are a body with a head.

There are other passages that I could go to address Church Membership, but I specifically want to address it today from the angle of leadership. When we look at

Church Leadership, it will show us something about Church Membership. I want to start in 1 Peter chapter 1. We need to get the background and the context so that we can understand chapter 5.

1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Peter is writing to these people scattered around modern day Turkey. He's writing to people who are part of multiple congregations over a huge area. It's not one church, as we will see later, but many churches. They are being persecuted and he wants to encourage them.

In chapter 5 Peter, is addressing the Elders of the churches. The Elders are the leaders. He gives us the task of Elders and teaches us something about church membership as well.

5:1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over

those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Elders here is the Greek word, *presbyteros*. It's where we get the word Presbyterian. It means 'Old man' or an older person. In the New Testament it's an office of the church that is the same as Pastor, Bishop, and Overseer. They are used interchangeably. We will see that in a bit.

Peter is not the Elder of these churches but he is an Elder in another church, probably the church in Jerusalem. He is an apostle though. He's a 'witness of the sufferings of Christ' and a partaker in the glory that is revealed when Jesus comes back. So, he has some authority to which they should listen to.

I want you to see that each of these churches have Elders. He is writing to many people in many churches and he addresses the Elders (not just old people) of these churches.

He's writing to specific leaders of these congregations.

What is their job: verse 2

1. To shepherd the sheep, literally. They are to **Pastor** the church that is among them. Not to shepherd someone else's sheep, but the sheep that is among them.

2. To exercise oversight. This is the word “**Overseer**”. *Episkopos*. It means to ‘look upon’ or ‘look into or over’. Where we get the word, ‘Scope’. Not to oversee someone else’s sheep but to exercise oversight among the flock that is theirs.
3. **To be an example** to the flock. Not an example to the flock in the city 3 hours away but be an example to the people among them.

And in all of these things, the Elders are supposed to do these things:

- Not under compulsion but willingly.
- Not for shameful gain, not for money.
- Not to do be domineering over “those in their charge.”

There are 3 key phrases that I want you to see here that indirectly relate to belonging to a local church/ being a member of a local church.

1. **“Shepherd the flock that is among you.” verse 2**
They are not to shepherd some else’s flock, but the one **AMONG YOU**. Elders in the churches of Galatia should shepherd their flock. Elders in Pontus should oversee their flock. The one “among you.” Shepherd the sheep among you.

Question: Am I to shepherd the people of Island ECC?
Am I to shepherd the people of The Vine?

Am I to shepherd the people of Yan Fuk Church or Resurrection? Am I responsible for them? No. I am to shepherd the people of CBIBC.

2. **Exercise oversight over those “in your charge.”**

verse 3 This word is quite scary. It means that the Elders are ‘responsible for’ these people. The Elders, the Pastors, the Overseers have these people as a heritage, inheritance.....like a gift given to them. Am I to oversee Shatin Baptist Church? Am I to oversee Kowloon International Baptist Church? No, I am to oversee you. I am responsible for you.

Look in Acts 20:28. Paul is addressing the Elders of the church in Ephesus. He says to them,

“28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd bought you with his blood. You are his. But Pastors or Elders are under-shepherds, put here by the Holy Spirit to ‘pay careful attention to all the flock’ and to ‘care for the church.’

I am not to pay careful attention to every believer in Hong Kong. I am not to care for every born again Christian in Sai Kung. But you, the people of CBIBC.

So, each local church has Elders who are to shepherd their own sheep and oversee those in their charge. In order to shepherd and care for them, they must know WHO THE SHEEP ARE?

Lastly....is that people in the church are to “be subject” to the Elders of the church.

3. “Likewise...And on that note....on that subject....younger people....submit to the Elders.”

This doesn't mean that ONLY younger people should submit to the authority of the local church, but the others are probably NOT mentioned because they are older and know better. Younger people need reminding. It also may mean younger believers. Those who are new in the faith. It doesn't really matter which ones he means. The fact is that Peter says the Elders have authority in the local church.

Now, I am not trying to give a message to make sure you know I have authority. I want you to simply see what makes a church different from a campus ministry.

Take a look at **Hebrews 13:17,**
“17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Jonathan Leeman says this in his book on Church Membership, *“Christ does not call us to join a church, but to submit to a church. The church is not simply another volunteer society, like the Boy Scouts or the Sierra Club. It’s an embassy of Christ’s kingdom.”*

Whether you realize it or not and whether you meant it or not, when you joined a local church as a member, you put yourself under leadership. They are responsible for you before God. They will give an account for you. They are supposed to be shepherding you. They are supposed to be overseeing you. And you are supposed to be submitting to their loving humble leadership because you chose them to lead you.

Why membership?

Pastors need to know who their sheep are.

Overseers need to know who to oversee and care for.

Elders need to know who they will give an account to before God.

Every Christian needs to be under the care of a local church and it’s Elders for the good of their walk with Christ.

Who is responsible for you?

Whose leadership are you submitting to?

* Can I lovingly say with all humility...that you need to be a member of a local church. A local one. Peter wasn’t an Elder of the church in Galatia! And you

don't need to be a member of a church 3000 miles away or 30 miles away. Better yet, you ought to be a member of a local church that is near enough where you live so that you can reach out and bring friends with you.

- * If CBIBC is where God has led you, then become a member of this body who uses their spiritual gifts here, who supports this church financially and who grows with the brothers and sisters here.....and be under the care of the church here.

- * If this isn't the church for you, then as a brother in Christ I urge you with gentleness and humility to find a local church where you can belong...where you can give 100% to the brothers and sisters there.