

WHAT ABOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP? IS IT BIBLICAL?

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Four Types of People

One time a friend of mine made the following point. He stated that there are four types of people in the world. The first type has a high commitment to a low cause. This can be illustrated by a dog chasing a car. He has such a high commitment that he may lose his life to that trivial pursuit. The second type has a low commitment to a low cause. This would be like a cat getting his fur rubbed the wrong way. He is not going to be committed to that! The third type of person has a low commitment to a high cause. This could be illustrated by a guard dog sleeping while thieves break into the house. The last and most noble type of person is one who has a high commitment to a high cause. In the wake of 9/11/01, we can see this exemplified in the lives of those rescue workers that

gave their own lives to save others. We often recognize people in this last category as heroes.

The Church is a High Cause

When Jesus was here on earth, He set up an institution to accomplish His work here on earth. This institution is the church (Mt 16:18). The church is not a building, nor is it an industry, nor even a business. The church is an organism made up of every born-again believer that has ever lived from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 until the present time.

Jesus created the church for a unique purpose and gave it specific functions. Some of these functions include: worshipping God, building up the saints, holding believers accountable, and evangelizing the lost. All these functions, along with the others for which the church is responsible, are noble tasks.

The Local Church is a High Cause

The local church is a part of the universal church which is comprised of all believers who have ever lived (and all who will live as well). It is the local representation of the body of Christ, and thus it too is a high cause, for it exists to carry out the mission of the church in its particular area. As a Christian, how committed are you to this extraordinarily high cause?

You might be saying “I am committed to the church. I attend regularly and believe in it wholeheartedly. I just don’t see why I have to become a member.” If that is your position, then keep reading, for this pamphlet is for you.

What is a Local Church?

A good definition of a local church would be “A community of believers, having membership, and organized to fulfill the purpose of the universal church.”

Read that definition again. Notice that it is a community of believers, but that is not enough. It must also be organized to fulfill the purpose of the

church that Jesus laid out for it. This separates it from a Christian college or any other Christian organization. The one question that remains is “why must it have membership?” In short, a church is unable to do some of the functions given to it if it does not have some means of recognizing its members.

Local Church Membership in Scripture

If you were to hunt all through Scripture to find a command that instructed you to become a church member, you would search for a long time with no results. It is not taught in Scripture. However, before you jump to conclusions, let me point out that while it is not taught, it is *implied* in Scripture.

In Mt. 18:15-17, Jesus is speaking of church disciplinary procedures. He says that when a person in sin refuses to listen to individuals and witnesses who implore him to repent, as a last step, his sin is to be reported to *the church*. Then *the church* is to treat him as an unbeliever and put him out of the church. If there is no way of recognizing who is a part of that local church, and who isn’t, then who is to be told of the person’s sin? Who is to treat him/her as an unbeliever? There has to be a way of recognizing who is “in” and who is “out” in these circumstances.

This same point is made by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 5 where he deals with sin in the Corinthian church. He commands them to remove the sinful individual from their midst. Then in verses 11-13, he speaks of judging those within the church, not those without the church. He could only speak of removing someone *from* the church and judging those *within* the church if they had a recognized body of believers. The Corinthians had some way of knowing who was a part of their church and who wasn’t. So we see that while not explicitly taught in Scripture, recognizable church membership is assumed and implied in Scripture.

3 Reasons for You to Become a Member of a Local Church

Having shown you the implications from Scripture, I want to give you three reasons why you should be a member of a local church.

1. Being a member will help your spiritual growth.

Hebrews 3:13 says “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

When you become a member of a local church, you are committing yourself to look out for the other members’ spiritual growth, which in turn causes you to grow. God designed us to grow in community with one another. The Lone Ranger approach to the Christian life is unbiblical, and usually ends up in a mess.

By becoming a recognized member of a local church, you also place yourself in an accountability group. The church of which you are a member has responsibility to you to help you grow and to confront you when you are in sin. As a part of that church, you also have the same responsibility toward others in that church.

2. Being a member will help the Pastor.

Hebrews 13:17 says “Obey your leaders and submit to them, **for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.** . . .” Notice the responsibility of the leaders emphasized in bold. The Pastor and other leaders in the church are charged with the responsibility of watching over the souls of those who are of their church. They must give an account to God for how they have performed this responsibility.

By becoming a member, you make their job much easier. They are able to know on whom they are to focus their energy. While they are in some ways responsible for everyone who comes through the door, they have a higher responsibility to those whom God has placed under their care. Having some form of recognized church membership makes their job easier.

Your membership is also an encouragement to the pastor. By becoming a member, you are in essence saying to him, “I trust you to be my shepherd. I see that God has set you up to be a shepherd, and I am willing to let God work in my life through you”. This is an immense encouragement to any shepherd who truly desires to shepherd God’s flock.

3. Being a member will encourage other believers.

Ephesians 6:10-20 tells us that the church is in the midst of a spiritual battle. No Christian is exempt from this battle. It becomes a part of your life the moment you become a Christian. The question is how you will handle it.

Ephesians 6:11 says “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm...” Our English translations lose some of the meaning of that verse. The command is not given to individuals, but to the community as a whole. Let me try to communicate the verse this way: “All of you put on the single armor of God so that all of you will be able to stand firm...” Putting on the armor is a group effort, and we all stand as a group.

Like any soldier going into battle, a believer wants to know who will stand with him when things get tough. He wants companions in the Christian journey who will not duck out on him when they come under attack. By taking the step to become a member of a local church, you are affirming to the believers there that you are committed to standing by them through thick and thin through the spiritual battles that come their way. Such a statement is an unbelievable encouragement to them.

Our Style of Church Membership

The way our church conducts its membership procedure is a wise way of handling the responsibilities given to it in Scripture. It is not the only way, but it is a time-tested way that has worked well, and continues to work well.

We require everyone who wishes to become a member to be a born-again believer, baptized, and in agreement with our church doctrinal statement.

If you wish to become a member of our church, we have membership packets for you, in which are found our church covenant, our doctrinal statement, and an application for membership.

We have a Discovery Class from time to time conducted by the pastor during which explains our history, doctrinal statement, constitution, covenant and answers most questions about our ministry. Anyone is welcome to attend this class.

To find out more about our church membership system and requirements, contact the Pastor, one of the Interns, or an usher. They will be happy to assist you with obtaining the information you need.

Conclusion

Church Membership is *implied*, not *taught* in Scripture, but the local church is unable to fulfill its purpose without a recognized form of membership. By becoming a member of a local church, you grow, you help the pastor do his work better, and you encourage other believers.



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