

Local Church Membership
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I. Introduction

- A. Membership in a local church has fallen on hard times in recent years.
- B. One can see it in the way evangelicals relate to the church; it is not significant. We are ecclesiastical consumers.
- C. One can see it in the neglect of the ordinances of baptism and communion.
- D. There has been a massive development of ministry, the para-church movement, outside the church.
- E. Evangelism systematically turns people away from the church. One is won to Christ but not to His church. It is foreign to the New Testament to win to salvation but not to the church.

II. Overview

- A. The Lord assumed believers would be gathered in a local assembly, a church (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).
- B. Christ has no other plan but the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:10).
- C. The flock must be known (Acts 20:28).
- D. Believers were added to the others (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14).
- E. Letters of commendation were able to be given (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10).
- F. Non-membership is an idea foreign to Scripture.
- G. Leaders must give an account for how they lead (Heb. 13:17).

III. Membership in a Local Church

- Being a believer in Jesus Christ

IV. Essential Issues of Church Membership (John MacArthur)

- A. It is an obedience issue.
- B. It is a fellowship issue (Gal. 2:9; Heb. 10:23-25; 1 Jn.).

- C. It is an authority issue (1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17).
- D. It is an identity issue (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:5-6).
- E. It is an issue of loyalty (Eph. 2:19).
- F. It is a ministry/service issue (Eph. 4:11; Phil. 2:25).
- G. It is a witness/evangelistic issue (Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 14:24-25; 1 Pet. 2:9).

V. The Fact of Organization/Membership (I refer to the New Testament church because I am reflecting the churches as written about in the New Testament)

- A. The New Testament church had leaders serving in offices (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1:5-9).
- B. The New Testament church had a specific time of meeting (Acts 20:7; Heb. 10:25).
- C. The New Testament church functioned orderly and exercised discipline (1 Cor. 14:40; Col. 2:5; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 7, 11).
- D. The New Testament church had certain practices that presupposed organization:
 - 1. letters of commendation (Acts 18:24-28; 2 Cor. 3:1).
 - 2. contributions - they took and distributed them (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 1-2; 2 Cor. 8:6-9:5).
 - 3. registered widows (1 Tim. 5:9).

VI. Purposes of Organization/Membership

- A. To permit the Holy Spirit to raise up and approve workers (Acts 13:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9).
- B. To enforce apostolic discipline - includes any challenge to apostolic doctrine (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 5:19-22).
- C. To encourage the development and use of the gifts in all members of the body for ministry, which includes evangelism (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-30; 1 Thess. 5:11-14; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).
- D. To preserve the unity of the body (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:24, 25; Eph. 4:1-6; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15).
- E. To equip the saints and permit them to mature into Christlikeness (Eph. 4:11-16).
- F. To maintain orderly worship (Acts 6:2, 4; 1 Cor. 11:13-16; 14:18-40; 1 Tim. 2:11-12).
- G. To protect the purity of the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 5:7, 8; 10:14-22; 11:20-24; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).
- H. To support the full-time ministry financially (1 Cor. 9:1-4; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:10-19; 2 Thess. 3:8, 9; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

- I. To care for the widows and the poor (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:9-16).

VII. Reasons for Joining a Church (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines in the Church*)

- A. You prove that you are not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people.
- B. You stop being an independent Christian.
- C. You participate in a stronger, more unified effort of God's people.
- D. You have greater opportunity to use your spiritual gift(s).
- E. You openly demonstrate the reality of the body of Christ.
- F. You participate in a more balanced ministry.
- G. You demonstrate your commitment "to the proper working of each individual part."
- H. You encourage new believers to commitment to the local body of Christ.
- I. You encourage a ministry when you consider it faithful and join it.

VIII. Response

- A. Turn from living for yourself and follow Christ, the Head of the church.
- B. Present yourself to the church for baptism as an obedient response to the Lord's command, as a time to publicly profess your belief in and commitment to the gospel and as a symbol of identification with Christ and His church.
- C. Present yourself for membership in a local church. If your membership is in another local church you are no longer attending, become a member in the local church where you are presently involved. And then let the other local church know that you have done this.
- D. Reaffirm the commitment implied in your present church membership.