

WHAT IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Acts 2:37-47

Introduction:

- This will begin a new series over these next few weeks- “HOW TO BE A GOOD CHURCH MEMBER IN 2018”
- Two common scenarios:
 - Attendees afraid of commitment
 - Over-abundance of inactive members
- A healthy church must be committed to meaningful church membership
- It is amazing how many misconceptions there are regarding the Church
 - The church is not a building
 - The church is not a club of people with loose affiliations
 - **The church is a local assembly of baptized believers committed to Christ and to carrying out the Great Commission**
 - Christ is the Head!
- We are living in the Church Age, or the Dispensation of the Church- so we ought to learn and be obedient to God’s plan for us!
- But first we must figure out what is church membership, anyway?
- My conviction is that our attachment to the local church reflects our attachment to Christ
- This is not a very popular subject in our day, for a few reasons.
 - Today, there is a strong emphasis on consumerism- buffet-line Christianity
 - Many have “commitment-phobia”
- Let’s consider what God tells us in His Word about church membership:

I. IS IT BIBLICAL?

- a. YES! Acts 2 teaches the genesis of the church that Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18- This is God’s plan for our Day

- b. The reality of the universal body of Christ- I Corinthians 12:13
- c. The reality of local churches- V. 41- 3000 Souls were saved, baptized, and added to the church-
 - i. Notice the power of the Gospel here!
 - ii. This indicates a record was kept! See also Acts 2:47, 4:4, I Tim 5:9- These passages do not explicitly command church membership, but they definitely assume it as the norm
- d. Church discipline- I Cor 5, Matt 18:17- If someone can be put out, then it follows we must know who is “in”
- e. What about the fact of corrupt churches? “The church is corrupt; it’s just about money and a pastor’s ego,” or “I love Jesus, it’s the church I have a problem with.” “When you organize the church it loses its power.”
- f. We shouldn’t let the corruption of some churches take away from God’s plan for true churches
- g. God wants us to be in an imperfect congregation with imperfect leaders so that we can perfect our faith! Eph 4:12 **note: not false teachers, or clearly sinful churches
- h. Church membership is implied in the way the New Testament requires Pastors to care for the flock in their charge. (I Peter 5:2) Which flock am I to shepherd??

II. IS IT NECESSARY? PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- a. Accountability
 - i. Hebrews 13:17- Accountability
 - ii. I Thess 5:12-13- And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.
- b. Church discipline is designed by God as a way for us to grow spiritually. As we have already seen, discipline only makes sense if membership exists. Your theology might be deeply opposed to our church’s, and your decisions might

violate our church covenant at every point, and yet I won't be coming to your house to ask you about it—if you are not a member of our church. And while you might think that it would be better not to have that kind of accountability, the Bible says otherwise.

- c. V. 42-47- The Bible makes it clear that our pursuit of Christlikeness is not supposed to be an individual endeavor. That's exactly why discipline passages like Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 exist: they teach us how to help one another be faithful to Christ. That's why we are told to "stir up one another to love and good works," and that this is to occur as we meet together (Hebrews 10:24–25).
 - d. If you view church as some sort of ecclesiological buffet, then you severely limit the likelihood of your growing into maturity
 - i. Institutional loyalty has shifted in our day, consumerism has seeped in
 - ii. Church-hopping is not a wise practice (we need regular, systematic teaching)
 - e. Why join if I can just attend regularly, pray, give, etc?
 - f. Members have privileges and responsibilities: leadership, service, baby dedications, weddings, etc.
- III. **WHERE DO I FIT IN?**- I Cor. 12:12-18 as applied to a local church
- a. Identification- illustr putting on your team jersey
 - b. Commitment- It is one thing to visit a church or to attend the services at a church, but it is another thing to be committed to that church. When a person becomes a member of a local church he is saying, "I am a part of this church and therefore I am committed to it. As a church member I have certain responsibilities that I must faithfully carry out!"
 - c. Service- teaching, ushering, singing, etc.
 - d. The Bible clearly tells that we are not to neglect gathering together with other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25) so it is important to be committed to a fellowship of believers.

Conclusion:

- The New Testament knows of no Christians who are not accountable members of local churches in the sense that we have just seen. No “Lone-Ranger Christians”
- Church membership is important because it demonstrates that God’s plan for the Great Commission is bigger than individuals.
- One has said, "Churches are so imperfect. I don't know any church without problems. I just don't feel comfortable being part of one."
- Churches are imperfect. Once this advice was given: "If you find a perfect church, don't join it, or you will ruin it!" Churches are imperfect because we are all sinners. But thankfully we are sinners saved by grace and God sees us perfect and complete in His beloved Son and He calls us "saints"! As we look to the living God and to His infallible Word, He can enable us to be the church members He wants us to be!
- Are you an accountable member of a local church? Not just: Is your name somewhere? But, are you committed to discipline and being disciplined according to biblical standards? Are you willing to be shepherded and to be led by the leaders of a local church? Do you see yourself and your gifts as part of a living body? Do you show by your firm attachment to Christ’s body that you are attached to Christ?
- Our attachment to the local church is a reflection of our attachment to Christ