

Why Joining a Church (“Church Membership”) Is Important

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Many find it difficult to join a local Church. We live in the consumeristic era of quick fix, instantly prepared, immediate results, and self-served passions and cravings. If something meets our needs, we stay. If it doesn't, we've fled already. From cars, to websites, to food, to clothes, to coffee, to shopping. Our lives could be characterized by the simple adage of “making life easier for *me*.” Sadly, however, this cultural thinking has crept into the mindset of the Church of Christ. Many are looking for the right place to “fit in,” or the best kind of music, or the best preacher, or the ministry (or, ministries) that a church offers that meets what you are looking for. What many fail to realize, however, is that all of these thought-patterns are not only foreign to the New Testament, they are completely opposite what the New Testament teaches about the local Church. Many hesitate to join the church. Many won't decide *now* to join a church. Some want to give it time and check out a few churches to see which one “fits better.” We all need the loving reminder that one pastor gave to a group of people: “*church ministry is not about you!*” It's about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of God magnifying Christ through the powerful work of the Spirit in the preaching of the Word of God and the faithful, selfless and sacrificial worship of the saints to maximize joy in the One worthy of all praise!

It is my conviction that every single Christian should be a member of a local church body. There should not be a prolonged season where you are *not* an active, serving, prayerful member of a local church.

Here are a number of reasons why **every** Christian should join a local Church body.

1. To Visibly Show Your Union with the Body of Christ.

To be a believer in Jesus Christ by necessity means that one is a member of the body of Christ. Undoubtedly, this is a picture of the universal church of Jesus Christ, but one must not remember that members *never* function in isolation – especially in a body. If one ponders the different pictures that the Scriptures utilizes to speak of the Church, one may recall the shepherd and sheep motif. If a shepherd is to oversee his flock, then he must know who his sheep are. A building is another picture. A building comprises many stones that are put together with Christ as the cornerstone. A stone left by itself will be thrown aside as it is not a part of the building. Another picture is that of a marriage. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom and His Church is the bride. Never will the bride refuse to associate with the bridegroom. But wherever the bridegroom is, that's where the bride wants to be. And Jesus Christ dwells among His churches (Rev 1-3). So then, when a person actively, intentionally, deliberately, and faithfully finds a bible-believing church with a high view of God, a low view of man, a towering view of the preaching of the Word of God, and a commitment to Spirit-enabled holiness and prayer, he is visibly showing *outwardly* the union that has already taken place *inwardly*, that is, committing to the body of Christ.

2. To Readily Acknowledge Your Need for the Body of Christ.

No Christian possesses all the resources for spiritual growth. No one can live successfully in the Christian life on his own. All believers desperately need the loving, caring, encouraging, and stimulating support of other Christians. We are in need of the gifts of others, the ministry of others, the encouragement of others, the discipline and rebuking of others, and the fellowship of others. Without them, no Christian can grow. Every Christian needs to be taught, counseled, encouraged,

challenged, accountable and meeting with other believers regularly. If this is absent, Christian growth cannot occur. Thus, when a person intentionally joins himself to a local church, he says, in effect, that he needs the body of Christ and the spiritual gifts of the people at large to minister to his own mind, heart, soul, and life.

3. To Faithfully and Diligently Commit Yourself to One Local Church Body.

It might be easy to treat church like a buffet. One line offers this food. Another line offers a different variety. There may be a third line that provides appetizers, salads, and desserts. And just as a person would fill his plate with a little bit from every single line – whatever suits his tastes. This, to be sure, should not be the mindset of a child of the Living King as this would evidence a self-focused way of looking at the church. Undoubtedly churches are different. From locations, to pastors, to musicians, to emphases, to ministries that are offered, to facilities, to financial resources, to sizes, no two churches are absolutely identical in every respect. There are differences. So then, the consumerism of our hearts prompts us to pick and choose from different churches rather than faithfully and diligently committing to one local church body. A person may go to one church on Sunday because the preacher is better. Another place may offer children’s ministries during the week. A third venue may provide the youth group for the teens and young adults. A fourth ministry may have the men’s or women’s small-group Bible study that someone has longed for. And before long, a person might find himself involved – to one degree or another – in two or three or even four (or more) churches! There is not a hint of pride or arrogance in saying that Christians should plug themselves into one ministry (to the exclusion of others). This is not to say that we can’t get along with other Christians. The purpose of this point is to compellingly show that Christians should be faithfully and diligently committed in attendance, prayer, financial support, ministry exertion, and deliberate fellowship/discipleship primarily to one local church body.

4. To Earnestly Desire Biblical, Shepherding Soul-Care from the Shepherds of the Church.

Pastors must know their sheep. They must care for their sheep. They must look out for their sheep. They must protect the sheep from wolves and other predators. They must feed, nurture, lead, guide, reprove and carry their sheep. A shepherd is not responsible for every sheep in the world. Of course not! Rather, a shepherd responsibly cares for his own flock. A father especially cares for his own children. A pastor must provide biblical, shepherding soul-care to the sheep that God has purchased with his own blood. Anything less is unfaithful shepherding. A Christian who zealously desires to grow in Christlikeness and in the knowledge of the Lord is one who earnestly desires biblical care from church leadership. In fact, this Christian knows that he needs the appointed leaders that God has called to care for his soul. A sheep without a shepherd is lost, doomed, in danger, and soon will inevitably die. In like manner, a Christian will long for the shepherding soul-care that God’s appointed leadership/pastoral team of a local church will provide to the sheep.

5. To Lovingly Help the Pastors of the Local Church Know if You are Inside or Outside their Local Church.

God tells elders to “shepherd the flock of God *among you*” (1 Pet 5:2). God does not tell elders to care for every Christian on the planet. That would be an impossible task. Rather, God clearly prescribes that His leaders whom He has sovereignly appointed to lead, guide, serve, and care for His precious sheep *know* who is “in” and who is “out.” These are biblical terms. There is no hint of self-aggrandizing pride in this wording. There is nothing arrogant about this. The Apostle Paul uses these terms in writing to the church in Corinth when he tells them not to reprove or discipline those who are “outsiders.” As a leader and preacher in the church in Corinth, Paul states that the church is to “judge” (by that he simply means: discipline, reprove, rebuke; that is, lovingly and gently confronting sin) those who are “within” the church. Those, outside, on the other hand, God judges. This clearly refers to those who are inside and outside a *local church*

since the final phrase tells the church in Corinth to remove wicked men (that is, those who remain in sin; 1 Cor 5) from *among yourselves* (1 Cor 5:13). Church leaders are given demands from God to remove perpetual sinners who are on the “inside”. But the church leadership should not meddle in the affairs of those outside since it would be to take time, effort, and resources away from the flock over which God has called them to provide oversight. So then, every person that joins himself to a local church by membership is then an “insider.” There are innumerable blessings that come with being an “insider.” God mandates all pastors – undershepherds – to give shepherding, caring, diligent oversight to those who are “insiders” of his particular flock.

6. To Regularly Allow for Biblical Confrontation and Reproof When You Stumble into Sin.

Christians by definition are those who are saved by the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ whereby the sinner’s punishment has been appeased and Christ’s righteousness has been credited to the believing sinner. At the same time, a believing saint will still struggle with sin in this earthly life. No human being will fully and finally conquer sin in this life – ever. With that said, however, a believer in Jesus Christ will most definitely hate his sin to such a degree that he will desire biblical accountability and caring friends who love him enough to rebuke him when he has stumbled into sin. When a sinner falls into sin, another believer is to privately, tenderly, gently, biblically, and humbly approach him in love with the Bible open and show him his fault (without telling the offense/sin to anyone). If the sinner repents, all is well. But if not, the person who rebuked before should gather one or two others to function as witnesses so that they together can call the sinner to repent. By the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed. If the sinner still refuses to repent even when others have passionately and graciously pleaded with him to repent, Jesus Himself commands that the issue be told to the entire church assembly. This has the sole purpose of calling the entire assembly of believers to aggressively pursue the unrepentant sinner in hopes that he will see the gravity of his sin, the deception of his heart, and the seriousness of ongoing sin. It is precisely at this point that a person who is a member of a Church understands that *if* he were to fall into sin to such a degree that he did not repent with the first (private) attempt or the second (with the witnesses of one or two others) attempt, that the entire church assembly will be alerted to the sin so that everyone together can aggressively, passionately, and persistently call to repentance! A non-member can easily slip away from a church if church discipline ever were to begin. But those who are members are those who genuinely want to grow in their spiritual lives and who readily and honestly seek other like-minded believers to biblically confront and biblically reprove when he stumbles into sin.

7. To Practically Remind Yourself That Your Allegiance Must Be to Christ and His (local) Church in Your Pilgrimage on Earth So That You Know Where to Invest Your Time, Resources, and Ministry.

All people have limited time. All believers have limited talents and opportunities. All have limits on financial resources to give. Church membership helps remind the believer that the primary place that God has designed one’s time, prayerful support, financial giving, and discipling ministry is the local church of which he is a member. To be a member means to be actively involved. To be a member means to have an allegiance to Christ and His glory and the ministry of a particular gospel-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-driven, and God-glorifying Church. Lives are short and they must be lived to the maximum for Christ’s honor in Christ’s church. To know where to go during the week, to know who to spend a bulk of time prayer for, to know what shepherds to go to for help, guidance, counseling, and assistance, to know which other Christians to predominantly spend time discipling and fellowshiping with comes with faithful, diligent membership in a local church.