

Church Membership: Some Biblical Answers - Wayde I. Goodall

Many Christians ask, "Is joining a local church necessary?" The New Testament has ample evidence that when a person trusts Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and takes on new identity in Christ, that person immediately attaches to a local group of believers.

10 REASONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. *It was an apostolic precedent (Acts 2:42–47).*

In the Early Church believers met with the apostles daily for teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. No indication is given that any believers remained separated from the local church. For example, the apostle Paul tried to "join the local disciples" when he relocated to a new community (Acts 9:26).

2. *The first-century believers kept track of each other (Acts 2:42–47).*

Several times in the Book of Acts the phrase, "The Lord added to their number daily," is recorded. The church kept track of who was becoming a part of the body of Christ. Numbers represented believers, and they added those believers to themselves. Other places in Acts reaffirm the first-century church practice of "adding to their number" (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31; 11:21; 16:5).

3. *Ecclesia is the original Greek word for "church."*

Ecclesia means "the called-out ones." The word itself denotes being called *out* of something (the world) and *into* something else (the church). This includes both the Church universal and the local church. Spiritually speaking, we become a part of the Church (the body of Christ) worldwide. Practically speaking, however, we become a part of the local church in our own communities. We cannot be called out of one thing without being called into another. The Book of Acts does not mention an "invisible church."

4. *Church membership is an expression of commitment.*

In a world where commitment is diluted and loyalty is nonexistent, the church serves as a standard of commitment. Jesus is looking for those who will not look back, have counted the cost, and are willing to give up everything to follow Him (Luke 9:62; 14:33). Church membership is a commitment to the Body through the times of blessing as well as times of trial.

5. *Church membership models caring.*

Church members exist to accomplish many functions, including devotion to each other, honoring one another, sharing with each other, and practicing hospitality (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). The apostle Paul went so far as to say that the members belong to each other. This model of a caring community can best take place when the individual members of the Body make a commitment to one another. In the PAOC, church membership is considered the best means to accomplish these standards of caring in our pursuit of becoming a Romans 12 church.

6. *Church membership shares the burden.*

We are instructed to carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). The picture here is of a beast of burden (the mule) who can carry 10 times more baggage than one man can bear. It is the same with the church. Sometimes we need each other to carry the heavy burdens life hands out. A commitment to church membership says, "I'm willing to share the load and help carry someone

else's burdens. I'll be available when needed." This also allows the individual members to rest assured that someday they'll need help carrying a burden, and someone will be there to help—much as a healthy family functions (1 Corinthians 12:26).

7. Church membership breeds encouragement.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25). Being spurred on (motivated, energized) and encouraged are just two of the blessings we receive and are called to give out as a result of being committed to the local church.

8. Church membership says, "I'll serve."

As one must join the military to have the privilege and duty of serving one's country, so it is with the church. We must join the ranks of the committed to receive the full benefit of serving God. Someone has said, "You are either a spectator on the sidelines or a participant in the trenches." God is looking for participants in His army. Ephesians 4:12 declares that the members of the church are to be equipped for service. Only true members are issued equipment to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). All spiritual gifts are intended to operate within the context of the local church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

9. Church membership is an attitude of submission.

Church members submit first to each other and then to Christ (Ephesians 5:21–24), for Christ is the head of the Church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Scripture is clear that the church is not an organization with a ladder of hierarchy, encouraging its members to climb the ladder. In sharp contrast, the church is like a body with Christ as the head—at the controls. All members are to submit to the head, her one and only leader. The result should be mutual submission to one another and to Christ. This allows accountability with each other and enables others to add counsel and correction to our lives if necessary (Matthew 18:15–17).

10. Church membership is symbolic of our heavenly citizenship.

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household..." (Ephesians 2:19). Being committed to the family of God grants us citizenship and eliminates our alien status. When foreigners want to become official citizens and gain access to the rights and privileges of a different country, they must make a commitment to and take responsibility for the safety of, defense of, constitution of, and authorities of that country. Christians are God's people through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and are added to God's household.

CONCLUSION

Making a commitment to the local church means much more than adding your name to a membership roster. It means taking the responsibilities that come along with the privileges, being blessed and blessing others, and saying "No" to the world's standard of commitment and "Yes" to God's. These are good reasons to formally join the local church through membership.