

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP
PART 4-“EVIDENCES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP”
VARIOUS

Introduction

Church Membership is very important! **It’s important for Christ’s sake!** (Christ was not just killing time and making small talk with His disciples when He told them in *Matthew 16:18* that He would build His Church!)

It’s important for the cause of Christ or we could say for the sake of the Gospel! The Great Commission was given to that first Local Church in Jerusalem that was made up of the Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Its important for our sake! We need a Local Church to be a part of as much as and maybe even more than a Local Church here or somewhere else needs us!

Someone might protest: “Well, if Church Membership is so important, then why is there no direct “*command*” in Scripture to be a member of local Church? I just don’t see it!” We choose to see what we want to and we choose not to see the things that we don’t want to see!

Someone else might say: “Well preacher, when I got saved and baptized I became a part of and am a member of the ‘*Universal Church*’ and that’s all I need! I just go worship and fellowship with all of God’s children in whatever Church I want to whenever I want to and am not tied to any one Church!

Well, let me ask you something, do you have Scripture on your side with that or did you come up with that all your own? You will not find the so-called “*Universal Church*” mentioned in Scripture!

While it’s true that there is no direct “*command*” as such to join and be a part of a local Church, understand that the “*command*” may be implied by some of the evidences that we see in Scripture! Let’s look at some of these **evidences that point to the necessity of Church membership!**

Each of these reveals something in the New Testament which would be **minimized or denied if there were no definable local Church membership!**

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I. SCRIPTURE REVEALS THAT THE CHURCH IS TO DISCIPLINE ITS MEMBERS!

i.e. A Local Church membership is implied by the way the Church is supposed to discipline its members.

A. Consider the implication of *Matthew 18:15–17* where “*the Church*” (*ekklesia*) is shown to be the final court of appeal in matters of Church authority as it relates to settling matters and as it relates to Church membership.

If there is no Local Church membership, then please tell me how can you define the group that will **take up this sensitive and weighty matter of Scripturally judging a matter between members**, and if need be, **exhorting the unrepentant person to repent** and if he fails to, **then finally rendering a judgment about his standing in the Church community?**

1. Universal Church – How ludicrous would it be to think that this passage is talking about the so-called Universal Church made up of ALL believers? Or even all believers in a particular nation or a particular state?

2. Also, it’s hard to believe that just anyone who showed up claiming to be a Christian could be recognized as a part of that gathering together called a Church!

My what a prescription for disaster THAT would be! Especially in the day and time in which we live!

Now, don’t get me wrong! Anyone is welcome to attend the services here, come and hear the teaching and preaching, and even be a part of most all we do here AS a Church as long as they are not being disruptive!

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But NONE of that gives a person a say so about what we do as a Church! Giving money to our Church, even if it is on a regular basis, does not give someone a say so! It does not give them membership or grant them a right to have a say so!

Surely, “*the Church*,” as used in this passage, by its very nature **must be a definable group** to handle such a weighty matter as discipline! We all know what is meant when we say “*take it to the Church*.”

B. Consider the implication of 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 as it relates to excommunication of an unrepentant member living in certain particular open sins!

1. Church membership is implied by the simple fact that possible excommunication even exists.

Paul implies this in 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 where he deals with the necessity of this local Church at Corinth putting someone out of the Church!

There are two implications here:

- a. One is that there is an group “*within*” the Church and the others are “*without*” or outside of the Church group. Being *within* the Church has to be definable!
- b. The other implication is that a person can be removed from being “*within*” the Church. Such a formal removal would not be possible if there were no such thing as a clear membership —i.e. Who is an accountable part of this body, and who is not?

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II. SCRIPTURE REVEALS THAT BELIEVERS ARE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT TO THEIR LEADERS! (Hebrews 13:17)

Church membership is implied in this Biblical requirement of Believers to be submitted to a group of Church leaders, elders, or pastors.

The point here is that without membership, who is it that the New Testament is referring to who must submit to a specific group of leaders?

It just makes sense that some kind of expressed willingness or covenant or agreement or commitment (that is, membership) has to precede a person’s submission to a group of leaders!

Consider the way this and other New Testament Scriptures talk about the relationship of the Church to her leaders!

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

How is this leadership and this submission going to work if there is no membership defining who has made the commitment to be led and who has been chosen as leaders?

If we downplay the importance of membership, it is difficult to see how we could take these commands to submit and to lead seriously and practically.

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III. SCRIPTURE REVEALS THAT SHEPHERDS ARE REQUIRED TO CARE FOR THEIR FLOCK! (Acts 20:28)

Consider Acts 20:28 here where Paul tells the elders how they are to care for their own flock!

Church membership is implied here in the way that the Scripture requires elders to care for the flock in their charge!

Of course pastors, or bishops, or elders can extend their love to anyone and everyone, and should, within the limits of their ability. But the question is whether the Bible tells elders that they are to have a special responsibility and care for a certain group—a group of members!

This verse does not say elders cannot visit unbelievers or those who are not yet members. But it does make clear that their first responsibility is to a particular flock! How are they to know who their flock is? Who are we as bishops, elders and pastors responsible for? For whom will we give an account to God?

The way Peter speaks to the elders is even more clear on this point.
1 Peter 5:2-3 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

This verse implies that the elders knew who their flock was and therefore whom they were responsible for and who they were to be an example to. This is just another way of talking about membership.

If a person does not want to be held accountable by a pastor or be the special focus of the care of a pastor, they will resist the idea of membership. And in doing so, they resist God's appointed way for them to live and grow and be sustained in their faith!

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IV. SCRIPTURE REVEALS THAT THE LOCAL CHURCH IS LIKE A BODY! (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

Remember last week when we looked at the metaphors used of the Local Church and one was the Metaphor of the Body?

Church membership is implied in the metaphor of the body in found in *1 Corinthians 12:12–31*. The original meaning of the word “*member*” is *member of a body*, like hand and foot and eye and ear.

That's the imagery behind the word *member* in the text.

So the question this imagery raises for the local Church that Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 12 is:

Who intends to be treated as a hand or foot or eye or ear of this body?

There is a unity and organic relationship implied in the imagery of the body. There is something very unnatural about a Christian attaching himself to a body of believers and not being a member of the body.

Conclusion

So for these reasons and more we believe that membership in a local Church is a New Testament expectation for all believers.

Each of us should be an active member of a local body of believers!

We should take responsibility to discipline those of the body who do not repent from public sin that brings reproach on the name of Christ.

We should declare ourselves part of the body so that if we are wayward, we ourselves would be liable to such exclusion.

We should take our position under the leadership and authority of a particular Pastor!

We should declare ourselves to be part of a group who expect to be watched over and cared for by a Pastor or Pastors.

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And we should find our place in the organic whole as a body part—a member—of a local body of Christ.

That is God’s plan for us as believers and for this His local Church and others of His local Churches!

That’s what we mean by membership! All of those aspects of membership are rooted in the truth that the local Church is an expression of the entire Church!

Part of what it means to belong to the body of Christ is to belong to a body!

Let me close by urging you to pray and to think this through for your own life. The New Testament knows of no Christians who are not accountable members of local Churches in the sense that we have just seen.

“Lone-Ranger Christians” are a contradiction because becoming a Christian means being united to Christ, and union with Christ expresses itself in union with a local body of believers! It seems to us that in the New Testament, to be excluded from the local Church was to be excluded from fellowship with Christ. This is why the issue of membership is so important!

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? Have you publicly declared your willingness to be shepherded and to be led by the leaders of a local Church? Do you see yourself and your gifts as an integral part of an organic ministering body? Do you show by your firm attachment to Christ’s body, the Local Church, that you are attached to Christ?

Church membership is a blood-bought gift of God’s grace! Christ died for the Church!

More than most of us realize, it is a life-sustaining, faith-strengthening, joy-preserving means of God’s mercy to us! I urge you not to be cut off from this blessing!