

Is Church Membership Biblical

First we must begin with the proper understanding of a church:

- Church - A visible institution left on earth by Christ which is made up of a congregation of born again, baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.

Many try to justify their own existence as a congregational group by claiming the church to be some invisible, spiritual group made up of all the saved people, however THE BIBLE KNOWS NO SUCH DOCTRINE!!! The biblical word for church "ecclesia" is used 36 places in the bible as plural (churches) and 75 places used in the singular. Other figures are also used for the Church and confirms the one meaning: Assembly, building, body, bride, congregation, company, family, flock, fold, house, lamb, temple, vine, wife and woman. Christ used the word ecclesia 22 times and there can be no question that He meant a local assembly.

It is a distinct principle with Baptists that they acknowledge no human founder, recognize no human authority, and subscribe to no human creed. For all these things, Baptists trace the church back to the New Testament. And while no competent Baptist historian assumes to be able to trace a succession of Baptist churches through the ages, most of them are of one accord in believing that with scarce records and historic data, there are heroic groups of believers in every age who upheld with their testimonies and, in many cases, with their lives, these great outstanding and distinctive principles of the Baptist churches of today.

- 1) YOU CAN GET SAVED AND GO TO HEAVEN WITHOUT EVER BEING ASSOCIATED WITH A CHURCH
- 2) YOU CAN BE ASSOCIATED WITH A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT CALL THEMSELVES A CHURCH WITHOUT EVER BEING SAVED
- 3) THE NEW TESTAMENT MAKES THE ASSUMPTION THAT ONCE YOU GET SAVED YOU WILL VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT TO BAPTISM AND IDENTIFY WITH THE LOCAL CHURCH

WHY DO YOU NEED CHURCH?

- 1) Jesus set it up
- 2) He wanted his people to publically assemble for worship
- 3) The church has the commission to spread the gospel – not individuals

- God's Plan is That We Would Belong to Local Churches

When you begin to look at the numerous texts in the bible that supports a community of believers it becomes clear that God's plan for his church is that every saved person belong to a local covenant community of faith known as a church.

- Church membership is for our own protection and maturation, and for the good of others.

If you view church as some sort of ecclesiological buffet, which you serve yourself and pick and choose what you like without submission to membership then you severely limit the likelihood of your growing into Christian maturity and submission.

- God has a plan for every saved person, and the church is in the center of God's plan for Christians today. But it is remarkable how many people claim to be saved by the grace of God through Christ, yet in the same breath say that they do not have to be a member of a church to be a good Christian.
- Unfortunately, people's perceptions of what "membership" means are often more influenced by culture than by the Bible. When we hear "membership" we immediately think of Sam's club or the YMCA. We think of signing contracts, paying dues, and getting special ID cards.

**MANY DO NOT VIEW CHURCH MEMBERSHIP NOT AS A GOD GIVEN REQUIREMENT AS IT SHOULD BE!
ONE MAJOR PROBLEM IS THAT MANY CHRISTIANS WANT TO REAP THE SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF SALVATION WITHOUT LABOR AND COMMITMENT TOWARD THE LORD'S CHURCH – THAT'S A PROBLEM!!!**

WHAT IS A MEMBER?

Member - An individual of a community or society. Every citizen is a member of the state or body politic. So the individuals of a club, a corporation or confederacy, are called its members. Students of an academy or college are its members. Professed Christians are called members of the church. (Webster 1828)

IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP A BIBLICAL REQUIREMENT? YES!!!

"Member" is a Biblical Word. Three words in the New Testament are translated as "member".

- *oikeios* - oy-ki'-os - a member of a household (Eph 2:19)
- *summetochos* - soom-met'-okh-os - member, sharer, participant (Eph 3:6)
- *melos* - mel'-os - member, body-part (we retain this in English with words like "dismemberment"; Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 6:15; Eph 4:25; 5:30; Col 3:15)

- 1) These three words give us great insight into what "member" means from a biblical perspective. First, it denotes a family connectivity (*oikeios*). This is why Christians have called one another "brother" and "sister" since the earliest days of the Church. These labels aren't Christian jargon. They make a theological statement about who we are as members of God's covenant family.
- 2) Second, it implies active participation, mutual giving and taking, and doing "life together" (*summetochos*). The *summetochos/metacho* word-group is a rich scriptural expression for intimate life-sharing and connectivity. To be a "member" is to be a life-sharer.
- 3) Third, it teaches our union with Christ and subsequent union with one another. "Body of Christ" is not just a symbolic metaphor for the Church. It is a statement about who the Church is in relation to the world.

When Christ left the earth, He didn't really leave. He actually chose to manifest Himself differently, through the Church--His Body--by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

- As odd as it sounds, if people want to physically experience Jesus, they are to look at the Church. A member, in this understanding, is a body-part of Christ THE CHURCH IS TO BE A PICTURE
- Someone who is a member of a church recognizes their "body-part-ness" and strives to be the best body-part they can be, recognizing that they are just a small part of an integrated whole. In spite of human imperfection!!!
- This is a very different understanding of membership than Sam's Club or the YMCA!
- Membership also places upon us inescapable obligations: an obligation to make our church and its work first in our lives; and obligation to use our time and our talents for the glory of God; an obligation to the work of the church with our presence, our talents, our influence and our means.
- Churches are never stronger than their membership and a membership of worldly, careless, negligent Christians will prevent a church from accomplishing much for the Lord.
- Every church's need is for every member to be consecrated, trained and enlisted in active service. Each of us is obligated to be the very best member possible under the leading of the Lord.

OBJECTIONS TO MEMBERSHIP

"I don't need to take a class or sign on the dotted line to be a part of the church; it's really about a heart commitment, not a membership," The church is corrupt; it's just about money or a pastor's ego," or "I love Jesus, it's the church I have a problem with." "When you organize the church it becomes "legalistic" and loses its power." Today's church is full of hypocrisy and imperfection...

- In our rebellious society fewer and fewer are willing to submit to the "GOD GIVEN" authority in the local church. Subordination is a requirement not only to the Lord but also each other in the church. It is an act of rebellion and a denial of the accountability we hold toward each other to forsake the assembly.
- The early Christians were to show proper respect to those in leadership position, and to submit to their spiritual instruction, so long as it was administered in accordance with the precepts of the Saviour and the Holy word of God.
- The obligation to obedience does not, of course, extend to anything which is wrong in itself, or which would be a violation of conscience, but making a mountain out of a mole hill only causes people to stumble.

- **The doctrine is, that subordination is necessary to the welfare of the church, and that there ought to be a disposition to yield all proper obedience to those who are set over us in the Lord;**

Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

1. It means that you realize that you're not only called to Jesus but called *into* a ecclesia (congregation or community).

**We don't believe people are saved by God through becoming CHURCH members. We understand when God saves, he ordinarily, naturally, and necessarily draws us into community with other Christ-followers. We are saved *into FELLOWSHIP* of THE Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of all others who share in that divine life. CHURCH.

2. It means that you're recognizing you're weak, and you therefore need the support of other Christian who hold you to commitment and accountability in support your weakness.

I don't know anyone's heart, but I sometimes wonder if people fully understand how weak they are and how much they desperately need every tool God has given them for their sanctification and growth in being a part of the church

3. It means that you're choosing not to treat the church like a consumer product.

**Sometimes people choose to not become members so that they can hold the church at arm's length. They want an "out" if something were to go wrong, if something offended them, or if someone displeased them. In essence, they want to treat the church like a product that they can return if they don't find it useful or helpful.

**Membership in a church takes that "right" away. You're forced to deal with issues from the inside rather than easily running away. You've made a commitment, and backing out becomes much harder. Conflict, disagreement, and hardship can now be tools used by God for the growth and maturation of you and the strengthening, edifying, and purification of the church.

4. It means that you help lead and guide the church and enjoy the benefits the Lord has commanded

**Actively vote and participate in the decisions the church is to make for God. Partake of the Lord's Supper which he has directly commanded us to do

**The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. The purpose of discipline is to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church. Ministers must instruct the officers and congregation in discipline and jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and courts of the church. Scriptural law is the basis of all ecclesiastical discipline because it is the revelation of God's holy will. Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures

5. It means that you're engaging in discipleship.

- Choosing to submit to Christ and His teaching.
- Willingly placing yourself under accountability.
- Guarding yourself from sin and temptation in a greater way.

6. It means that you want to be a fully committed part of the vehicle God has created to change the world.

Preach the gospel - The local church is, in Christ, the hope of the world. Becoming a member is entering into the deepest possible commitment to the most important enterprise in the world. How amazing is that!?

7. It means that you're willing to promise God and fellow Christian to commit yourself for the sake of others.

GOD INSTRUCTED US TO BE IN A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER AND THAT'S BIBLICAL

Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

- It is a privilege, NOT a right, to be a part of the church. I did not give myself this right. I did not earn this privilege. This honor was bestowed upon me by Christ and THE church, specifically Grace Missionary Baptist Church, where I presently hold membership and whose authority I willingly submit to in honor of my Lord Jesus Christ!

HOW WOULD YOUR CHURCH BE IF EVERY MEMBER WERE JUST LIKE YOU?