

MEANINGFUL MEMBERSHIP – Part 2

“You can remain on the rolls of many churches and never show up or give. You can remain an “active” member in other churches by being a CEO Christian : Christmas and Easter Only. You can even be a revered member in a number of churches by giving a nice sum to the church each year, even though you never lift a finger in service or ministry.

But please understand. That type of membership is not biblical membership. That approach to membership is man-made, man-centered, and man-maintained. It is totally contrary to what the Bible teaches. It has no place in our churches.

Biblical church membership gives without qualification. Biblical membership views the offerings as joyous giving. They are no strings attached. Biblical church membership serves and ministers as a natural way of doing things. Biblical church membership is *functioning* membership.

Again, let’s return to 1 Corinthians 12 to grasp this concept more fully. When Paul was using the metaphor of the body to speak of the church, he did so for two primary reasons. First, the body is a unified whole. Likewise, the church is to be unified in its mission, purposes, ministries, and activities.

Second, the body is not only unified, it is made up of many parts. Each of these parts is supposed to function. The foot is to walk. The hand is to grasp and to hold. The ear is to hear. The eye is to see. The nose is to smell.

We who are church members are all supposed to function in the church. The concept of an inactive member is an oxymoron. Biblically, no such church member really exists.”

- Thom Rainer (President of LifeWay), *I Am a Church Member*

Twelve Reasons Why Membership Matters

(The following is adapted and expanded from Jonathan Leeman’s book ***Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*** from Crossway, 2012).

- 1) **It’s _____**. Jesus established the local church and all the apostles did their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Christians today should expect and desire the same.

See notes from last week – Intro

- 2) **The church is _____**. To be “a church” in the New Testament is to be one of its members (read through Acts). And you want to be part of the church because that’s who Jesus came to rescue and reconcile to himself.

Acts 1:15 – a group numbering about 120 ...

Acts 2:41 – a massive addition to the church takes place ...

Acts 2:44-45 – A group called “believers” functions together by ...

Acts 2:46 – Regular communal worship is now augmented by small groups meeting in homes ...

Acts 2:47 – The group keeps growing ...

Acts 4:4 – Within months, the number has swelled ...

Acts 5 – The whole church continues to meet ...

Acts 6 – The church chooses deacons to solve a significant issue that threatens unity ...

Acts 8 – The church endures persecution ...

Acts 9 – Opposers and oppressors come to faith ...

Acts 8, 9, 10 – New churches are sprouting up in Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea

Acts 11 – The church realizes it is for the nations, not just the Jews ...

Acts 13, 14 – Paul’s first missionary journey takes him to Derbe, Lystra, Iconoium, and Pisidian Antioch ...

Acts 13, 14 – On Paul’s second missionary journey , he plants churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus ...

Acts 18-21 – Paul revisits many of these churches to strengthen them ...

As the church develops and spreads, these themes become clear:

- 1. The church is identified and unified around a common confession: Jesus is Lord! (2 Cor 4:5, Acts 17:3, John 20:31, Rom. 10:9, 1 Cor. 15:1-5, Eph. 1:7, 1 Pet 1:3-12)*
- 2. Christians are united to individual but interconnected churches.*
- 3. Christians collectively identify themselves as “churches”.*
- 4. When formally assembled, churches have spiritual authority.*
- 5. The first step of the Christian/church process was baptism.*
- 6. Christians were commanded to be distinct from the world.*
- 7. The life and authority of the church shaped the lives of its members.*
- 8. Christian leaders were given responsibility for specific members.*
- 9. Members of churches were to submit to specific leaders.*
- 10. Christians (collectively) were to exclude false teachers from their fellowship.*

Clearly, to be a Christian was to belong to a church. People believed, repented, and were baptized into a fellowship of other believers known as the church. Looking to Christ as Lord means being united to God’s people.

Analogy:

- 3) **It’s a pre-requisite for _____.** The Lord’s Supper is a meal for the gathered church, that is, for members (see 1 Cor. 11:20, 33). And you want to take the Lord’s Supper. It’s the team “jersey” which makes the church team visible to the nations.

What are the ‘borders’ of a true church?

Who determines who is on which side of the ‘border’?

How is this ‘border’ marked?

Who should be able to receive the Lord’s Supper?

- 4) **It's how to officially _____**. Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and therefore a card-carrying Jesus Representative before the nations. And you want to be an official Jesus Representative.

From *Church Membership* by Jonathan Leeman:

"A Local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to officially affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances"

Jesus and the kingdom: In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus mentions "church" ___x and "kingdom" ___x. Paul's letters mention "church" ___x and "kingdom" ___x.

Jesus talked about the kingdom. Paul talked about church. Why?

Israel → Church and the "keys to the kingdom"

Matthew 16:13-19 (ESV)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Jesus a) established the church (which is its members), and b) gave it the authority to continue building itself by receiving or denying members based on two questions:

1. Is this a right confession about Christ?
2. Is this a true confessor of Christ?

By declaring (not determining or deciding) on earth who is a kingdom citizen, the church thus represents heaven and Christ.

The next time we see Jesus referencing the church is in Matthew 18. There we see the authority spoken of in chapter 16 now put into action.

Matthew 18:15-20 (ESV)

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Again, the expressions of authority and representation are present.

Like an ambassador or an embassy, we represent Christ!

Closely related to this . . .

- 5) **It's how to declare one's** _____. Your membership on the team, which becomes visible when you wear the "jersey," is a public testimony that your highest allegiance belongs to Jesus. Trials and persecution may come, but your only words are, "I am with Jesus."

From baptism, to Lord's Supper, to weekly worship, we declare our allegiance to Christ and our relationship with the Church.

"What company is so obliged to worship God as those who have been not only created but redeemed? What group is so concerned with the task of proclamation of God's Word and evangelism as those who have themselves been saved through hearing the Word? What body will be so involved in making visible signs – in baptism and the Lord's Supper – of God's saving action in Christ? From the ministry of the Word to the management of the church's own affairs, what other group is so charged with responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ?"

- Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*

- 6) **It's how to embody and experience** _____. It's within the accountability structures of the local church that Christians live out or embody what it means to be the "body of Christ," the "temple of the Spirit," the "family of God," and so on for all the biblical metaphors (see 1 Cor. 12). And you want to experience the interconnectivity of his body, the spiritual fullness of his temple, and the safety and intimacy and shared identity of his family.

The church is a body ...

The church is a family ...

The church is a temple ...

NOTES: