

MYTH: I don't have to commit to a church as long as my relationship with God is healthy.

I've been going to our church for, I don't know, maybe 12 years. Recently, not too long after the new pastor came, they started a "new membership" campaign, trying to get everybody to formally join.

I don't get it. I don't understand why the sudden change. Membership has never been a big deal before. You just came and participated. Now the big emphasis is on signing something called a membership covenant. I've heard talk that if you don't officially join, you won't be allowed to do certain things around the church – teach, serve communion, etc.

Well, so be it. Because I'm not doing it. It's just a piece of paper, a formality. Besides, in my heart, I know I already am committed. And what's the bottom line anyway? Isn't it your own relationship with God? Isn't that what it's all about? Individuals walking with God – loving him, getting to know him, serving him?

I've got a lot of friends who are Christians who just don't do the institutional church thing anymore. It's gotten to be too much of an organization. A big religious system. Who knows? Maybe this is a good time for me to join them. I'll do a version of what my brother does. He pulled his kids out of the public schools and is home-schooling them. Yeah, maybe I'll "home-church" myself.

– Peter

What do you think about Peter's questions? Notice that he begins with the assumption that a Christian can be healthy spiritually without a vital connection to the church. Is this a faulty premise? Is meeting together with other believers an optional activity?

- ❖ In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared, "I will build my church." Interestingly enough, this is the only entity that our Lord ever vowed to establish. Does it make sense that those who claim to be followers and servants of Jesus would be disinterested in his singular great passion? Doesn't it strike you as odd that a Christian would be completely uninvolved in Christ's one and only construction project?
- ❖ First Corinthians 12 is the famous passage that uses the metaphor of a human body to describe this mystery called the church. Christ is the head, and we (individual Christians) are various body parts. The analogy couldn't be clearer. A healthy body is intact. Its parts, or members, are joined together, and they work together, doing whatever the head directs.
- ❖ Write out a list of reasons why you should and should not get involved in your local church. Run the list by some trusted Christian friends.
- ❖ A severed arm will die if not reattached to the body. The same consequences hold true in the spiritual realm for those believers who remain aloof from the church.

- ❖ Many people officially, formally and publicly join groups left and right without even thinking twice. Membership in the NRA or Ducks Unlimited, shopping clubs, bowling teams, book clubs, hunting clubs, country clubs, health clubs, etc. Why the reluctance on the part of so many to officially join a local church?
- ❖ Church historians note that it is only within the last 100 years that people of faith have spoken of “going to” this church or “attending” that one. For the previous, 1,900 years of church history, believers used the terminology “I *belong* to this church” or “I’m a *member* of that one.” Why the change? What does it indicate? Do you “go” to church? Or are you a “member”?
- ❖ Ask God to show you what your gifts are. Then take a step of faith and use them to build up your church.
- ❖ As Rick Warren has so wisely noted, every team has a roster, every club has a membership, every army has an enlistment. How much more important is it for a local church to have a clear, unambiguous sense of who’s on board, who is with us, who can we call upon and count on to help us in our great task?
- ❖ Not an official member of MPC? Sign up to join today! Your actions will strengthen you and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ.

George Barna (Archives: Unchurched People, 2000).