

# What Does Your Church Require? by Gene McCoy



This is a question frequently asked when I visit people who have shown an interest in our congregation. They are shocked by my reply that we don't require anything for membership.

Before we consider that statement, let's analyze the question. That the question is asked reveals a lot about the sad religious environment that has been created by men. It is tacit acknowledgement, if not resignation to and acceptance of the possibility that there is more than one authority in the matter. Or that God is going to somehow honor our decision about what is true and valid. Some people shop for a church in much the same way they shop for a car or a house. What it comes down to in the minds of many who ask this question is personal preference and selfish interests. What they are really trying to find out is how closely your requirements match their thinking and what they have already decided. Rarely does anyone ask what the Bible says.

There is another insidious implication in this question. The very words "your church" or "our church" should produce a dissonant chord in our ears. These phrases should be eliminated from our vocabulary.

The church belongs to Christ. He purchased it with His own blood. It is, therefore, **His** church. The terms of admission are **His** to determine.

Would I be too "picky" to observe yet another issue this question suggests? If so, you can humor me by at least considering my thought. The word "requirements" can have the connotation of rules or laws. My friend, the church is not a club you can join by fulfilling a set of requirements. There are no dues to pay. No

worthiness to prove. No tests to pass.

In fact, the church is comprised of people who acknowledge their total inability to pay, prove or pass. Perhaps we could say that **this is the requirement!**

Admission into the Lord's church is granted to those who confess they are undeserving, unable, unworthy, unfit, unqualified — completely dependent upon God's grace.

And what can we say about "membership?" If you're talking about an American Express card, membership apparently has its benefits. Whether it's a credit card or a civic club, membership is subject to acceptance — man's acceptance. But membership in the Lord's church is granted by His approval, based upon His acknowledgement of our faith in the blood of Christ. Man has absolutely nothing to say about it. The one whose sins have been covered, washed away, and blotted out by the blood of Jesus in the waters of baptism **IS** a member of Christ's body, the church. Man cannot grant membership in the Lord's church.

Perhaps the only reason our congregation maintains a list of members is for legal considerations. I am not aware of any Biblical injunction that speaks to this practice. If I need to be taught better on this subject, I welcome the correction. But that is another topic for another time.

Now, however, let's offer a response to the question. We are quick to point out that no man is in the position to set any requirements with respect to salvation. God has set forth the terms of pardon in the Bible.

Let's be clear about something else. Salvation and church member-

ship are one and the same — two ways of expressing the same thing. The saved comprise the church. The church is the redeemed of God. When the repentant sinner emerges from the waters of baptism, he or she is a Christian, a member of the body of Christ, the church. It is the Lord, not man, who adds to His church (Acts 2:41).

Faith is what God must see to admit sinners into His Kingdom. Faith in His promises. Faith in the blood of His Son (Rom. 3:25). Faith in the working of God (Col. 2:12).

This faith is expressed, in part, by making a conscious commitment to discontinue a sinful pattern of life characterized by rebellion to God. This is what the Bible calls repentance.

This faith is further expressed when the repentant sinner calls upon the Lord to save him in the waters of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). According to Paul (Col. 2:12), this is where faith in the working of God is displayed. Being baptized into Christ's death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11) is the point of contact with Jesus' blood, apart from which no man is saved.

To require something different for membership in a congregation than what the Lord requires for salvation is a matter of grave concern. Who are we to require anything different? More? Less?

So what do we require? Absolutely nothing! We are content with what God has said in His Word. Nothing more. Nothing less.

God is prepared and eager to give you all of His wonderful grace gifts, not the least of which is the forgiveness of sin and His blessed Holy Spirit. Will you express faith in Him by repenting of your sin and being baptized into His death? If so, He will raise you up in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, give you His Holy Spirit to empower you to live a new life, and do the work of washing away, covering, and blotting out all your sin, saving you by His wonderful grace, which is provided by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.