

2. The practical provisions of church membership.

A. Connectivity - As already mentioned, being part of a local church gives me a forum to obey the “one another” commands of Scripture.

B. Responsibility - As already mentioned, being part of a local church gives me a forum to discover and use my spiritual gifts in ministry.

C. Accountability - When I become part of a local church, I am not just saying I want to be part of the life of this church, but I am saying that I want this church to be part of my life. I am saying that I want to be part of a group of believers to whom I give permission to speak the truth in love to me.

Can I be a Christian without joining other believers in a local church? Yes, it is something like - being a soldier without an army or a football player without a team. You will not get very far in fulfilling your calling and purpose.

A few years ago, Rick Warren wrote the runaway best seller, “The Purpose Driven Life,” in which he outlined from Scripture how we were planned for God’s pleasure (worship), formed for God’s family (fellowship), created to become like Christ (discipleship), shaped for serving God (ministry), and made for a mission (evangelism).

In Acts 2:42-47, as Luke describes the life of the early church, notice how he describes their activity: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (DISCIPLESHIP) and to the fellowship (FELLOWSHIP), to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles (WORSHIP). All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need (MINISTRY). Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (EVANGELISM).”

The purpose filled Christian life can only be lived through committing to be part of a local church and working to make it purposeful.

“I think that I shall never see,
a church that’s all it ought to be;
but I will work and pray and plan,
to make my church be the best it can.”

A teenager got hold of his role as part of the church when he entered the worship center wearing a cap and was told by an usher to take his cap off in the church. He replied, “I’m not wearing my cap in the church, I’m wearing my cap ON the church”

I hope you can understand that when you join a church, you are not joining an organization, but you are committing to partnering with fellow believers in being the church together!

D. Clarity - A story is told about a believer who was stone cold deaf. Despite this, they faithfully attended and participated in the local church of which they were a member. When asked why they bothered, they said, “I want everyone to know whose side I’m on.”

Conclusion:

“Christians, like snowflakes, are frail, but when they stick together, they can stop traffic.”
- Vance Havner

Don’t you want your life to count? Don’t you want to live a life filled with purpose and significance? Don’t you want to be in the heart of what God is doing in this world? Then get involved in the life of a local church. Make the commitment to join AND to get involved. Beside other believers, you will make a difference in this world and God will make a difference in you.

“Why Church Membership?”



By Dave McFadden

There was a time when the role of the pastor and the place of the church were respected. A pastor was a person who was held in high esteem in the community just by virtue of his position, and the church was seen as an institution to respect. Those days, however, are gone.

The church has fallen on tough times. Sadly, some of the negative perceptions are the church's fault. Stories of sexual abuse by a few ministers and avarice and greed by others have tarnished the testimony of the church. I am convinced that such infractions represent the exception rather than the rule. But such failings among ministers have made the job of truly called men and women more difficult in our day.

Many outside perceive the church as being more concerned about buildings & budgets, nickels & noses, piety & pretense, than people & their problems. Oh, people are still involved in a search for meaning, but while spirituality is "in," the church is definitely "out."

Many today question the relevance of the church. Not just the people outside but also many inside. The church is seen as an institution that puts form before substance, tradition before truth, conformity before creativity, and seems more concerned about following their constitution and by-laws than the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some have even advocated that they need to leave the church to save their faith!

George Barna, the Christian pollster, has written that large numbers of American Christians are disillusioned with the church. He supports this trend and has labeled these church dropouts "revolutionaries," who are on the verge of forcing a decline of the churches in the 21st century. Other prominent writers, like John Eldridge, of "Wild at Heart" fame, agree with Barna. Amazingly, many professing Christians see themselves as part of the universal church of Christ, but do not participate in a local body. Others openly discredit the idea of formal membership in a congregation.

But while many have given up on the church, Jesus has not. The church is still the center of God's work in this world, and if you are going to have a right with God, you will have a relationship with His church.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:25, that Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her. The church is the bride of Christ. Now, just like you cannot have a good personal relationship with me and bad mouth my wife, how can you expect to be right with Christ and disrespect His bride?

This brings us to today's question: "Is joining a local church necessary? Is it even biblical?" Let's see what the Bible says.

1. The biblical basis of church membership.

When an individual is saved, he becomes a member of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Because he is united to Christ and the other members of the body, he is therefore qualified to identify with a local expression of that body. To become a member of a church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes.

We read in Acts 2:41-42 of a local body of believers who met in an organized fashion to study, fellowship, celebrate communion, and pray. And Luke indicates that there was some record of who was part of this group by what he says in verse 41, "3,000 were added to their number." The biblical basis for local church membership is seen in . . .

A) The example of the early church.

The New Testament assumes that Christians "connect" to a local church where they live out their commitment to Jesus. Each New Testament letter was written to a local church or a local church leader.

Just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Timothy 5:9), there may also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5).

In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his church gave him a letter of commendation (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:10; 2 Corinthians 3:1-2).

B) The existence of church government.

The pattern throughout the New Testament is for pastors to oversee the local body of believers. Their duties presuppose a clearly defined group of members who are under their care (Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). When Peter addresses the elders, he speaks of their congregations as "the lot assigned to you" - 1 Peter 5:2 (literal translation). In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, of course, Paul lays out the qualifications for Pastors and Deacons.

C) The exercise of church discipline.

In 1 Corinthians 5:2, Paul called for disfellowshipping a member. To formally exclude someone, you to have previously formally included him. Church discipline would be difficult, if one didn't know who was in good standing and who wasn't.

D) The exhortation to mutual edification.

Scripture exhorts believers to edify one another by practicing the "one another" commands of the New Testament (Hebrews 10:24-25) and using their spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly.

"All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." - 1 Corinthians 14:40 (NASB)

Is a church membership role biblical? It's as biblical as a video projector or a sound system or any other method used to carry out God's work through His church. But one thing's for sure, it is biblical for a believer to identify themselves with a local body of believers.