

Parenting Tools:

Is Church Membership Necessary



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Is church membership biblical and necessary?

In the New Testament, there does not appear to be any example of a person being a growing believer who is also not a part of a local church. It is almost surprising that there is not a specific NT passage that deals with church membership; however, there are at least three New Testament passages where church membership is implied.

What is church membership? Church membership is when a person joins a church's congregation, making a covenant to agree on biblical doctrine, submitting to the biblical leadership of its pastors, and using your abilities and gifts to biblically serve others in the church.

1. Matthew 18:15-20 – “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. 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. 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.” Implied in Jesus' instruction in the case of conflict between Christians is the idea of an “in” and “out” from the church. In the case of a conflict if there is an unrepentant believer who is not submitting when confronted by the church, then the church's solution to remove him from the church. The implication is that how can he be removed or “put out” from the church, if he was never “in” the church. Church membership is implied.

2. 1 Corinthians 5 (specifically 5:9-12) – In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul address an sexually immoral person who confesses to be a believer. This person, rather than confess and repent from his sin, boasts about it. The solution that Paul gives, in light of his boasting, is to remove him from the church. Verses 9-12 says, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexual immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside, “Purge the evil person from among you.” Implied, once again is the idea of an inside and an outside of the church. Believers who make up the inside of the church are to carry out judgment and discipline in order that corruption does not take place in the church. For as Paul says earlier in 5:6-7, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump... Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened...” Without an inside casting someone outside cannot take place.

3. Ephesians 5:18-21 – “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another our of reverence for Christ. One of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit is worshipping in community. Being filled with God’s Spirit does not result in isolated worship or personal renewal alone, but involved addressing one another and submitting to one another.