

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

I. INTRODUCTION-

- a. The Lord's Supper... is a church ordinance ...that the Lord Jesus gave to His church to observe on a regular basis.
- b. Four times in this passage... Paul talked about the church at Corinth ... "coming together" as a congregation... as a church family... to observe the Lord's Supper.
- c. Today... many professing Christians...see joining a local church... and being a member of a local church... as unnecessary and unimportant to the Christian life.
- d. But... according to the Word of God... nothing could be further from the truth.
- e. There is no such thing in the New Testament...as "lone ranger" Christianity.
- f. According to the New Testament... the Christian life is intended to be lived in fellowship and in partnership with other Christians in a church family.
- g. The New Testament teaches that one of the first things a person is to do after they are saved... is to publically profess their faith in Christ by joining a local church family... and being baptized in accordance with the Scriptures...under the authority of that church.
- h. Being active and involved in the life, work, worship and fellowship of a local church...is not essential to salvation... but it is essential to living an obedient, growing and useful Christian life.
- i. It is in the context and fellowship of a local church... that the Lord's Supper is to be observed... by those who have trusted in Christ.

- j. Today I want to talk about the importance of church membership ... and why it matters that every Christian be an active and involved part of a local church.

II. THE QUALIFICATION OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP-

- a. Anyone who has truly trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord ...is qualified to be a member of a local church.
- b. A local church has the responsibility to ensure... that only those who are truly saved... those who have truly trusted in Christ... are allowed to join the church as members.
- c. This does not mean that we do not want lost people to come to church... we want lost people to come to church!
- d. We want lost people to come to church so they can hear the gospel ... so we can witness to them... so we can welcome them... reach out to them... and love them with the love of Christ.
- e. But when it comes to joining our church as a member... we are to do all we can to ensure that only those who have truly trusted in Christ as their Savior and Lord... are allowed to join.
- f. But while God is omniscient... even the most diligent and careful local church is not.
- g. To quote a parable of Jesus ...sometime what looks to us like a wheat ... a truly saved person... turns out to be a tare... someone who is not saved.
- h. The reason the church needs to do all it can to ensure that only those who are truly saved are allowed to join the church... is because it is a very dangerous thing for an unsaved person...to join a church.
- i. It is dangerous for the person... and it is dangerous for the church.
- j. Today multitudes of unsaved church members... think they are saved because they have joined a church.

- k. An unsaved church member... is one of the hardest people to win to Christ.
- l. On the day of judgment... multitudes of unsaved church members will be shocked to learn that they are lost.
- m. Also...for centuries Satan has used unsaved church members to infect the church... with apathy, indifference, unbelief, useless conflict, contention and false doctrine.
- n. The Bible also teaches that membership in a local church is a privilege ... it is not a right.
- o. The Bible gives a local church the authority to dismiss unrepentant church members ... those whose unruly, undisciplined, disruptive actions brings harm to the witness and unity of the church.
- p. The authority for a church to do this... comes from the Lord Jesus Himself.
- q. *Matthew 18:15-17 (NKJV) "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."*
- r. The Apostle Paul instructed the church in Corinth to dismiss a member who was involved in an immoral relationship... until he repented.

(Qualification)

III. THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP-

- a. Joining a local church... and being active and involved in a local church... is an important way that believers publically confess their faith in Jesus Christ ... and publically identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ.

- b. To join a local church is to formally commit oneself to being a part of an identifiable, local body of believers... who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes.
- c. Those purposes include... worshipping and praising God... which is the first purpose of the church... receiving instruction from God's Word ... serving and edifying one another through prayer, encouragement and the exercise of the spiritual gifts God that God gives to believers... participating in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper... proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost... and fellowshiping and enjoying the Christian life with other believers.

(Qualification... Purpose)

IV. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP-

- a. It is true that the Bible does not contain an explicit command to formally join a local church... but joining and becoming involved in a church after one is saved is one of those truths that is so obviously demonstrated in the New Testament that it does not have to be explicitly stated.
- b. The New Testament makes it clear that God intends for every believer ...to join and be a part of a local church family.
- c. In the early church... coming to Christ meant coming to the church.
- d. The idea of a person experiencing salvation... without then joining a local church ... a local body of believers...is foreign to the New Testament.
- e. In the early church... when individuals repented and believed in Christ... they were baptized and added to the church.
- f. In Acts 2...on the Day of Pentecost the Bible says that the 3,000 people who were saved were baptized and added to the church... and in the days following as people were saved they were added to the church.

- g. The letters of the New Testament were originally written to local churches... and those letters of the New Testament that were written to individuals... were written to men who were leaders in the local churches.
- h. The New Testament letters demonstrate that the Lord expects those who believed in Him ... to join and be active and involved in a local assembly of believers.
- i. In the New Testament when a believer in the early church ... moved to another city... his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church.
- j. The New Testament makes it clear that the first followers of Jesus Christ ...without exception ... to a person... joined themselves and became members of local churches.
- k. The organization of church leadership that is found in the New Testament ... also establishes a basis for church membership by believers.
- l. When a person becomes a member of a church... they come under the care, ministry and oversight of God-called ministers that God has placed in that assembly.
- m. While good Pastors and Deacons will care for those who are outside the church...and while we may take on certain responsibilities outside our church family.
- n. The primary responsibility of Pastors and Deacons is to give godly spiritual leadership to their church... and to care for those believers who are a part of their church family.
- o. God intends for every believer to be blessed, cared for and to benefit from the ministry of a Pastor and Deacons... but if you are not a member of a church family...then you cannot have that benefit as you could and should.

- p. I am glad to help people who are not members of my church if I can... and I am glad to be involved in ministry and things outside my church if I can.
- q. But as the Pastor of this church...my primary responsibility is the care and the well-being of the members of my church.
- r. I am your Pastor... and you are my people... you are my responsibility ... it means something to be a member of a church.
- s. Some today count their favorite TV preacher as their pastor... they don't think they need a local church.
- t. But when they get sick... or when they have a need... do you think that TV preacher come see them in the hospital or pray with them?
- u. It means something... to be a member of a church... to be a member of a church family.
- v. The call of the New Testament for believers to mutually encourage one another... to serve one another... to pray for one another... to edify one another... can only take place in the context of a local church family.
- w. The directive of the New Testament for believers to use their spiritual gift and talents to edify and build up the church... can only take place in the context of a local church family.
- x. The teaching of the Bible that believers are to bring their tithes and offerings to the storehouse... to God's House to support God's work... can only be fulfilled in the context of a local church family.

V. CONCLUSION-

- a. The Bible teaches that when a person comes to Christ... the Holy Spirit of God comes to live within them... the Holy Spirit is our Helper and Guide through the Christian life.

- b. The Holy Spirit will always lead a Christian to find a church ... o publically profess Christ by joining that church... being baptized... and becoming involved in the life of that church.
- c. Christians who fail to join a church... who fail to be active and involved in the life of a local church... who become indifferent and apathetic toward the church... are not following the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
- d. Maybe you have convinced yourself that church membership does not matter... that it is not important... that it is not necessary... nothing could be further from the truth.
- e. The church is the Bride of Christ... what you think about the church ... is a reflection of what you think about Christ.
- f. If you love Christ... you will love His church... and you will give His church the very best you have.
- g. Salvation... church membership.