

WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

- If membership is not directly commanded anywhere in Scripture, why should we encourage people to become members of a local Church? There are several reasons for this, all of which are characterized by giving and not getting.

1.) Purpose of Church Membership:

- To give oneself to the cause of Christ.
- To give oneself to a group of people who together seek to glorify the Lord and carry out His purposes.
- To identify with a local body of believers.
- To submit to that church's leadership.
- It is a willingness to use your spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.
- It is to give sacrificially to that body and to invite accountability.
- It is to demonstrate commitment to Jesus Christ and full participation in His body, the church.

Although church membership is not directly commanded in Scripture, there is a biblical basis for it.

2.) Biblical Basis for Church Membership:

- The biblical evidence for church membership is plentiful throughout the pages of the New Testament.
- Scripture teaches that when a person becomes a believer in Christ, they are automatically and immediately made a member of the universal church which consists of whoever believed.

1 Corinthians 12:13 ~¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

- God wants to take those who comprise the universal church and bring them together into a local body of believers which cares for, ministers to, and serves each other.
- We can look to Scripture and see five evidences for formal church membership.

3.) Evidence from Scripture of Formal Church Membership:

1. Terminology Referring to local Churches.

- Much of the terminology used in Acts to refer to the church fits with the concept of formal church membership.

Acts 6:5 ~ the whole congregation

Acts 8:1 ~ the church in Jerusalem

Acts 9:26 ~ the disciples in Jerusalem

Acts 14:23 ~ in every church

Acts 15:17 ~ the whole church

Acts 20:17 ~ elders of the church

- Although we do not know the process of church membership they enacted, we do know these churches constituted a definite group of people.

2. An Apparent List of Members in the Early Church.

- There seemed to be a list of members, or at least a general accounting of believers in the early church.

Acts 2:41 ~ ⁴¹*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*

Acts 2:47 ~ ⁴⁷*praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

Acts 4:4 ~ ⁴*However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*

Acts 5:14 ~ ¹⁴*And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.*

Acts 6:7 ~ ⁷*Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

Acts 11:21 ~ ²¹*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.*

Acts 14:1 ~ ¹⁴*Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.*

Acts 16:5 ~ ⁵*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.*

- When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church.
- They were identified, numbered, and joined with the local body for mutual learning, service, fellowship, and accountability.

3. The Practice of Church Discipline.

- In the book of Matthew, we see the practice of church discipline and the steps involved in it.
- These steps imply a specific group of people within the church.

- **Matthew 18:15-17** ~ ¹⁵“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. ¹⁶But 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.’ ¹⁷And 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.

 - o Step 1 – go individually
 - o Step 2 – go with one or two more
 - o Step 3 – tell it to the church
 - o Step 4 – remove the person from the church

- Furthermore, we see Paul calling for the removal of a specific individual which implies that it means something to be included in the church.
- **1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 13** ~ *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! ²And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you....¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”*
- This individual would lose the privileges of membership previously given him.
- The formal exclusion Paul refers to here, implies the presence of a formal membership.
- How else could someone be removed if they did not belong in a formal sense in the first place?

4. The List of Widows.

- In the book of 1 Timothy, we see that the early church maintained a list of widows.
- **1 Timothy 5:9** ~ ⁹*Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man*
- Those on the list were eligible for financial support
- The fact that a list existed seems to indicate that there was a list of members kept
- The widows who were put on this list were those widows who were part of that church and had committed themselves to that church.
- While none of these examples are overwhelming concrete evidence of church membership in the New Testament, they do form a compelling argument.