

Membership Matters

Introduction: Why this subject? My observation – the spiritual vitality and overall well being of a Christian is to some degree connected with their church membership...nearly everyone in our area says they are a member of a church... Heb.10.24ff; the urgency of the hour; the many who claim faith in Christ, but show no connection;

Why is this an important subject? Body of Christ – complete

What I'm not suggesting: You must join our church...no pressure tactic; I understand the dilemma of some with work, and health issues; not a submission to the pastor message

What do I mean by membership? It's more than just going through a church's membership requirements

Def. by Steve Lawless – “Membership is a public pledge to find our role in the body, work alongside other members, and hold each other lovingly accountable to faithful Christian living.”⁴

Lawless targets two groups of people in his study: those who attend the church but do not join, and those who have joined the church but are not involved in it. The first group he represents by a fellow named Sterling: “Sometimes they are like Sterling. They are faithful to attend Sunday morning worship. They write a check each week to support the church. Ask them about their church, and they'll gladly tell you, ‘We go to such and such church.’ Yet, they never join.”² The “Sterling” group appreciates the church but does not want it to regulate their lives.

Lawless represents the second group by “Paul” and “John”: “In still other cases, they are like Paul and John. They have signed the membership rolls of the church. What they don't do, though, is *get involved*. Attendance does not lead to action. Church is more about *receiving* than giving, more about *coming* than going, and more about *being served* than serving.”³ The “Paul and John” group will join the church but not

serve it. Each of these groups practices a formalized religion lacking spiritual health and commitment.

My recent encounter with family who talked about the church home and love for it; commitment over the years; what church I asked, “WDBC”!

Biblical Background for local Church membership (based on previous definition)

- No explicit text, but we do find clear inferences
- The disciples, their families & Jesus as a model
- 1 Cor.5 – Expel the wicked person from among you. Exclusion implies inclusion
- Paul addressed many of his letters to churches (churches of Galatia, church of Laodemia, etc.)
- Matt.18.15–17 – Implies gathered people
- Rev.2 & 3 – Local congregations..Jesus tells them to address the sin within their congregation
- Heb.10.24–25

Cheap Substitutes

- “I watch Joel on tv.” Praise God for many tv preachers, but God has called us to fellowship with other believers.
- “I worship God in nature.” Good b/c you should! You are still called to gather with other believers.
- “I just go where the Spirit leads me.” The Spirit does me people, but not every week. We need to be connected to a body, not a free agent body part.
- “All I need is God.” Not according to the Word. God created you with certain needs that can only be met by people
- “I’m connected to the Universal Church not the local church.” Every believer is connected to the universal church, but as you look at the NT you see God working and speaking to local congregations.

The importance of being a member (above definition) of a local church:

- Address those who just want to be a part of the Big C, but not the little c. Most of the times the Bible refers to church is referring to the local church.
- For the completion of the body. We are called the body of Christ, not the body parts of Christ. As such, we must be connected in a deep and ongoing way with one another. The idea of body conveys commitment & connectedness.
- For mutual encouragement
- For an observable witness to the world – in the early church it was known who the Christians were b/c of their commitment to each other. They gathered together on the First day of the week (1 Cor.16);.
- For your spiritual growth – you grow best within a family & church family. God always had his people congregate. The principle is we learn best how to live the Christian life when we live with Christians. Spiritually, we learn best among other believers. The virtues of patience, mercy, kindness, and service
- For the sake of God’s cause. Individuals have some impact on fulfilling the Great Commission; Groups have enormous impact...the Cooperative Program of SBC.
- To show Jesus you are committed to the people He is committed to. Saul persecuted the church (Acts 8.1, 3). When Jesus supernaturally appeared to him in Acts 9 he told he was persecuting Him, not the Christians. Persecuting believers is persecuting the “body” of Christ. Jesus is committed to those local congregations that honor Him & so should we.
- For a covering of both blessing & protection – Heb.10.24f.
 - As the Day of the Lord draw closer, there is an intensification of Satan’s attacks and temptation to sin will increase exponentially. Discouragement and apathy will continually tug at the believer’s heart especially as the Lord’s return gets closer. It is Satan’s plan to pull you away from the source of encouragement, hope and direction. We must bound ourselves with other believers, so we can spur one another along and encourage one another with love.

- We can't read our own soul perfectly. We deceive ourselves and need other people to help us in our walk (Jer.17.9). I could delude myself and even convince my family when I'm in the wrong, but it's much harder when I'm around and interacting with other believers over a period of time.
- Jesus calls us his sheep. Sheep aren't meant to be wandering around on their own between flocks. They live in flocks. When sheep are by themselves they tend to get in trouble, often times unbeknownst to them. They don't necessarily see the danger. Their attention is normally just a few feet in front of them. (A sheep's brain is closest to the human brain.)
- We need to submit ourselves as sheep to a local body of believers for mutual encouragement, protection and examination. It is wise and safe to stay within a flock and near a shepherd
- Acts 20.28, Heb.13.17 & 1 Pet.5.2. Why do sheep need a shepherd. For protection, guidance (watchman) & care Here's the blessing. If you're a member of a local church (flock) and the shepherd is seeking the Lord you have a greater level of God's protection and blessing. There is a general blessing over God's sheep who are being led by a shepherd who is seeking God's heart. Good shepherds provide both protection (watchman) and God's blessing (Jer.3.15, Acts 20.28–31).
 - Understand The opposite is also the case. Consider Israel under false shepherds – Jer.50.6f. If I get out in the doctrinal weeds, succumb to some terrible sin or simply lose my focus on Jesus, you suffer. My life opens up this church to all kinds of spiritual attack. All of our sin impacts the spiritual health of this body, but my sin opens up a huge spiritual hole into this church.
 - If you aren't a member (above definition) of a local flock that doesn't exist for you. You have no shepherd. Jesus is your shepherd, but Jesus has established an order on earth that you aren't walking in currently. You

are a sheep without a flock & a shepherd...you have the Holy Spirit, but you are walking outside of God's established order. W/o membership in a local church You are trying to fend off the enemy by yourself inside your little tent. Whereas members, launch attacks and are secure within the walls of a mighty fortress. You can take on an army of thousand by yourself or join with others and launch the attack.

- This is my observation. People who aren't members of local churches are not as strong spiritually, are susceptible to all kinds of attacks from the enemy and do very little or have spotty success in advancing the Kingdom of God. Whereas, those who are members are more likely to be stronger, aren't defeated as easily and have far greater success over the long haul in advancing the KOG. I'm not suggesting that all members have these characteristics, but they are far more likely to. I'm not suggesting non-members won't have these characteristics, but they're more than likely won't.

- - All believers have some measure of protection, but not all covered by His special protection. There is strength in a body, but very little strength in a disconnected body part.
 - Personal commitment and relationships are key to long term spiritual growth.