

Church Membership, Is It Important?

By Dr. Robert Ball¹

In our day of rampant consumerism, church membership has taken on some erroneous connotations. It seems in many cases people shop for a church much like they would shop for a coat or a new car. The criteria seems to be based on what makes them feel good or on what meets a perceived need in their lives. Neither of those are biblical reasons for church membership. What exactly is church membership all about? Let's see what the Bible has to say about the subject.

The first and most important aspect of church membership has to do with the church's universal nature in Christ. Jesus established His church at Pentecost, in Jerusalem, after He ascended back to heaven. Acts 2:1-13 describes how the disciples were gathered in one place when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. In that moment, in that place, the dispensation of the church age was begun. From that time to today, any man or woman who by faith confesses their sin and accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, becomes a part of the universal church, often referred to as the body of Christ. Today Jesus is saving out of the world, out of every tongue and every tribe across the world, a peculiar people unto Himself. All who are saved by faith in Jesus are part of His church. The point here is simply this, all who are truly saved by faith in Jesus Christ are a member of His universal church. The apostle Paul said, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). If you are saved, you are part of Jesus' church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That being true, how does the local church fit into the picture of what the Bible paints for us in Acts 2? The answer, the local church is simply an expression of the whole. It is not possible at this time for the universal church, all the redeemed in Jesus Christ, to congregate together in one place every week for the purpose of worshipping God together. So, we meet with Christians who live near where we live. When we read the New Testament we see the same pattern as groups of Christians met together in their towns and villages as part of a local church body. In every town where the apostle Paul introduced the Gospel, people were saved and a local church body was born. The local church was born out of the natural desire of Christians to congregate together to worship God. It is completely unnatural for a person to profess to be a Christian and not belong to a local body of believers. It is inconsistent with all we see in the New Testament for a person to say they are saved and yet not be a member or part of a local body of believers.

It is here I want to share with you three reasons a true child of God should be an active member of a Bible teaching church.

1. Christians need to be under the teaching of a God-called teacher/preacher. Paul told the young preacher Timothy, "Preach the Word, be diligent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). It is the clear hearing and understanding of the Word of God that conforms us to the image of Christ in our lives. We as Christians cannot live in accord with God's Word if we do not know the Word. Paul said to the church at Rome, "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). The human mind can only be transformed to Godly thinking when it is filled with the Word of God. It is the Word of God that permeates our thoughts which the Holy Spirit will use to produce an active obedience in our lives. There is no conformity to the image of Jesus in our lives if there is no study and knowledge of God's Word, and that is a fact. A lack of

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knowledge concerning God's Word is the exact reason there are so many immature Christians in the world today.

2. A Christian should be an active member of a local church has to do with accountability. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10.25). The truth is, we need one another. We need the fellowship, the encouragement, the mutual accountability to holiness. We need to hold one another accountable before God, to live a life that testifies of Him. There is no such thing as a lone-ranger Christian in the Bible. It was Solomon who said, "As iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27.17).

3. A true child of God should be a member of a local church body because it is in the local church where our spiritual gifts are exercised for the glory of God. Paul said, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit" (1 Corinthians 12.7). Every born again child of God has at least one spiritual gift, received from God at the time of salvation. Spiritual gifts are given to the redeemed to be used to profit all in the body of Christ, the church. Specifically, our spiritual gifts are to be used in the local church for the profit or edification of all.

The inescapable truth is that if you are saved, you should be a member, an active member, of a local church body. If you do not have a local church home, pray and ask God to show you where you should be. A church home is not about entertainment or even the way you feel after you have been there. The real test is, how does a church handle the Word of God? Does The Word of God have the center place in the life of the church? Find out where God wants you to be, join the church, and serve for God's glory.

