

Belonging...Church Membership

Ephesians 2:19-22, Romans 12:5, Philippians 2:1-5

Today we honor and acknowledge our newest members to Family Life Assembly.

People ask about the requirements of Church Membership... is there a class? While not a class per say, today we are going to explore together... Church Membership.

When you become a believer in Jesus Christ and receive Him as your personal Lord and Savior, you become a new person in Christ, you are born again and adopted into the family of God.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV)

I could preach a whole sermon on just (v.22). You as members are the expansion of the church, making more room for the spirit of God to dwell.

In accepting Jesus, you now belong to the universal Church, consisting of all believers all over the world, throughout all cultures, of every tribe, tongue, nation, people, who call upon the name of the Lord.

But what does it mean to be a “Member of the local Church?”

Many people today have a wrong concept of Church membership.

You see, Membership in the Church is not something you have (like a country club), rather it’s something you do.

Many social clubs issue memberships, all you need to do is pay your annual dues, show up at the occasional meeting and enjoy the other members. Sometimes the church is guilty of having the same kind of wrong thinking.

So, what is and why have local Church Membership?

- ***Membership is FIRST belonging to Jesus.***

It is a personal relationship entered into by faith.

It’s not merely accepting a creed or church ordinances or even our 16 tenants of faith but entering into a personal one on one relationship with Jesus Christ the risen and living Son of God.

2 Timothy 1:12 (NKJV)

Paul didn’t just acknowledge some essential truth; rather he entered into a very personal relationship with Christ that transformed his entire life.

- ***Membership is also Belonging to the Body of Christ.***

Romans 12:5 (NKJV)

There is an inter-dependent relationship established when we become members of the body of Jesus Christ and co-members of His Church.

Membership also fulfills one of mankind's deepest longings... "to belong"

As a Church member, you now belong to Christ and to me and I belong to you. We need each other like a healthy body needs all its members.

The local church is God's instrument for nurturing new followers of Christ, seeing them raised to mature men and women of God, equipped for service and invested in the work of the Kingdom.

Some question if Membership is biblical (after all, didn't the new believers at Pentecost all become members of the church that very same day?)

I believe that Church Membership is not only biblical, but is essential for healthy growing churches that glorify Christ. That God directed event on the day of Pentecost was actually what initiated the local church. And for those doubters, if we truly want to hold ourselves to first church standards, we should sell all we have and share with each other, and we should meet primarily in house churches and attend services regularly in the Jewish temple or local synagogue.

The concept of Church Membership is very important and truly scriptural. Jesus was conferring authority upon His apostles, indicating that polity in the church (structure) would need to be maintained when He spoke the words "the keys of the kingdom".

Keys are the authority and instrument used to shut out and to allow in. (Say it again)

Matthew 16:18-19 (NKJV)

The Apostles and Evangelists such as Timothy and Titus used this God given authority to appoint bishops (or pastors) and elders (deacons) in the local church. The qualifications of bishops and their authority are clearly given in Timothy and Titus.

Paul instructs church members that it is wise to obey and submit themselves to their Pastor.

Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV)

People in the community when they talk about church say, 'That church,' Those who visit here at Family Life would refer to the church as 'This church'. But those who are members refer to Family Life as "Our Church / My Church" Being a member is to truly belong, to be joined together.

To be a member is to be a contributor to the work of the Kingdom and not just a consumer.

The Benefits of Church Membership

1. Membership Identifies a person as a believer and part of the testimony of Jesus Christ and his church of the redeemed.
2. Membership Provides a Spiritual family to support and encourage a personal walk with Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2 (NKJV)

Growing and maturing in Christ is not easy, nor is it automatic. There are many pitfalls along the road, set up by the enemy to discourage, defeat and destroy the life and testimony of the believer.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)

God established the local church as a means to overcome and defeat the schemes of the enemy in the life of the believer. We are here to help, support, strengthen, correct, restore and encourage one another.

3. It Gives us a Place to Discover and Use Spiritual Gifts in Ministry

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NKJV)

Too many Churches look to the Pastor for all these gifting's and operations. That's not Gods design.

Pastors are shepherds (protectors) and overseers (managers). Every believer has a gift and is responsible to use it for the mutual edification and growth of the whole body of Christ.

4. It Places the Believer Under Spiritual Protection of Godly Leaders.

Hebrews 13:7 (NKJV)

The Authority and Organization of the Church that God has established is for our protection.

Someone might say, "but I was a member of a church and those in authority went astray. They hurt a lot of people. I got hurt! I'm never going to become member of any church ever again!

Sadly, sometimes even Godly leaders fail (note the leaders fail, **not** God)

Let me ask, does the fact that some parents abuse their children mean that we should abolish the family structure? Should then all children be left to fend for themselves? Of course not!

God knew what he was doing when he established the order and authority of the family.

If a parent abuses their authority, then you deal with the abusive parent and you place the children who have been abused under others who will assume the role of a loving parent for them.

Likewise, if a church leader has abused their authority and church members were hurt (you were hurt), the solution isn't to abolish the system established by God and become an orphan.

The proper solution is for those who are in authority to deal with the leader who has failed, and take those who were under authority and place them under the care and authority of another who will assume the proper nurturing, caring role of a Godly leader in their lives.

Pastors must be on guard ready to protect the members of the Church.

Acts 20:28-30 (NKJV)

Paul knew there would be wolves in sheep's clothing looking to maim and destroy. False Leaders and fake Christians. Yet, he doesn't eliminate the authority structure rather he exhorts it all the more as it is the means of protection for the flock.

Membership places us under the authority and spiritual protection of Godly Leaders!

5. Membership also Provides Accountability Which is Needed for Growth and Maturity.

We help one another in our accountability by asking church members to submit in making certain biblical commitments in becoming a member of Family Life Assembly.

Acts 2:42 (NKJV)

- Continue steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine.

Notice the importance of doctrine, that it is placed before fellowship.

Today many churches err in that fellowship is placed before doctrine.

Doctrine is less important to those who declare that we should love one another and unite despite our differences in beliefs. Many today seek to unite a large assortment of denominations (Ecumenical); who deny fundamental doctrines of salvation by grace through faith and reject the supreme authority of Holy Scriptures. Essential doctrines such as the wrath and justice of God and the substitutionary blood-atonement of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures and the evidences of the Holy Spirit are omitted.

We become a Christian by believing the only TRUTH, that of Jesus Christ.

We must continue in the TRUTH as the Holy Scriptures and the Apostles doctrine attests.

- Continue steadfastly in Fellowship.

The word “fellowship” in Greek here means communion, or having things in common.

You obviously do not have to be a Christian to have fellowship with others. Unbelievers regularly gather with each other whether by association or organization. (sports/clubs)

Yet, Christian’s fellowship is an entirely different kind of fellowship.

It includes sharing spiritual life, receiving the joy imparted by the Holy Spirit, we worship with praising and edifying activities, we share God exalting testimonies that strengthen the faith of each other. Above all, Christian fellowship is a blessing because of the presence of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:19-20 (NKJV)

- Continue steadfastly in the Breaking of Bread, as we’ve done this morning.

1 Corinthians 11:26 (NKJV)

This is the visible act of communion with the Lord and union together of the believers.

Every time the communion supper is held we are reminded of Jesus body and blood for our redemption. Church members must remember the Lord’s vicarious sufferings that bring healing and salvation. Christ suffered for the sins of many once and for all, that we are sanctified.

Authority for the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper belongs to the local church alone. We remember until He comes.

- Continue steadfastly in Corporate Prayer.

I encourage every member of the church to attend prayer meeting each week because it is a vital part of the life of the church. Things happen when churches pray.

Church members express their total dependence upon the Lord to sustain the church through prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 (NKJV)

We are not prepared and cannot even understand the spiritual warfare without participation in prayer.

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

Through prayer we show our love to the brethren and bearing one's another's burdens.

There is no such thing as a perfect church, for there are no such things as perfect Christians. Joining a church is not to think in terms of what might receive, but rather of what we might contribute.

Theologian and Author, Kevin DeYoung wrote this profound and one of my favorite statements: "The man who attempts Christianity without belonging to the church, shoots himself in the foot, shoots his children in the leg, and shoots his grandchildren in the heart."

There is no substitute for a healthy and loving local church.

Now it gives me great pleasure and honor to present to you those who have accepted this responsibility and are ready to live and work together with us as "Members of Family Life Assembly, accountable one to another."

(New members came forward; each was given a puzzle piece)

1 Corinthians 12:12 (NKJV)

All the pieces are needed to complete the picture on a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece is unique in its shape, size, and color. Our individual differences are not a weakness, but actually strength in the Church. Each of us combined together makes a beautiful picture. The testimony of Jesus Christ.

If all the pieces were the same, it would be a boring picture.

1 Corinthians 12:17 (NKJV)

Every part is necessary to the whole.

1 Corinthians 12:18 (NKJV)

One piece is not more valuable than the other. Each plays a specific role and fills a divine purpose. We can't say we don't need a certain piece.

1 Corinthians 12:19-21 (NKJV)

We must see the value of those around us and each of us needs to do our part.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NKJV)

What statement does a single piece make? What picture does it make?

One of the reasons the world is frustrated with church is because often they only see a fragmented, broken, disgruntled, backbiting, and gossiping picture.

Our unity paints a picture that attracts others to Christ! Jesus said they will know you are my disciples by the love you show for one another.

When they see and hear us worship together, we show them a glimpse of heaven. One of us can't convey all the attributes, beauty, love, and compassion of Christ.

The Apostle Paul says it takes all of us to do it.

1 Corinthians 3:6 (NKJV)

We are truly effective for the Lord when we stay connected. Our strength comes from being joined together.

Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJV)

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Romans 12:10 (ESV)

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Today we honor these new members, come and welcome them into our Church Family.