

Sermon Title: Membership Matters

December 29th, 2019

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Preacher: Pastor David Capistrant

Main Idea: Church membership is biblical and it glorifies God.

It's a common marketing ploy to advertise no long-term commitment. Fitness centers, cable television, internet service providers all do it. They seem to have their fingers on the pulse of culture, as all good marketing agents are taught to. As a culture, we want low-commitment, high-reward services. It's the mark of a consumer culture. Ours is a culture that has us thinking more about receiving than giving, being served than serving, and entitlements than sacrifices.

Think of a membership to the gym. You can go or you can stay home it does not matter to the gym or your co-members at the gym... actually I believe the gym would prefer me to stay home. There is a low level of commitment (pay money). You can sit at home and eat ice cream every day and never have your membership evoked. We all have memberships at other places like O'reilly auto parts, Caribou coffee, and Facebook, twitter etc. What I like about being a member at these places is that it benefits me and only matters when I want it to.

When I say church membership what do you think about? Often we think about our membership at church this same way. We look at it as optional in our Christian life. We see want low commitment and high return from our membership and we do not want it to affect our daily life just when we "like it" or "want it." Church Membership is not like one of these businesses. The church is not a business! It is a people. It would be like me calling my family a business and I am simply a

member. This is closer to what being a member of a church is. It is more like being a family member or a member of body. This is interdependence and commitment.

Let's explore the Bible about this idea of church membership. Let's read the Bible trying to understand how we are to do membership here at Living Hope. Or a more biblical way of saying it how we are to submit to one another as the body of Christ (Eph 5:21).

4 Questions to answer:

1. Is Church membership in the Bible?
2. Why not join a church?
3. Why to John a church?
4. What does a church member look like?

Q1: Is Church membership in the Bible?

Simple answer: **Yes**, it is all over the NT. In the NT we see two types of what we often call church. First, we see that there is a global church or a invisible church made up of all those who profess faith in Christ. But this is only seen in Matt 16, handful of passages in Ephesians and one or two more in Paul. The second understand of the church is spoken of 4 times more! The local church or the visible church. More than 80% of the times you see the word "Church" in your ESV Bible it is speaking about a local body of believes committed to one another.

Sighting 1: There are clear outsiders and thus insiders

It is clear that these local churches where made up of an identifiable group of people. We see that there is a group of people seen as the assembly of the church

and everyone else would be considered outside. We see this in 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 where individuals are excluded from what is seen as the local church. There is even a sign that there was a lists present. There are lists of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9.

Sighting 2: Christian leaders are responsible for specific groups of Christians.

1 Peter 5:2 -3 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock

Acts 20:28 ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Sighting 3: Where do we get the term church member in the first place? Is that a biblical term?

1 Corinthians 12:12 is where we see the metaphor of the Body.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a

single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

When you are saved you are saved TO A PEOPLE.

"'Lone-Ranger Christians' are a contradiction because becoming a Christian means being united to Christ, and union with Christ expresses itself in union with a local body of believers." -John Piper

Notice that God is the composer of the local bodies of Christ.

Q2: Why not join a church?

Before we talk about why you should join the church I need to give 1 reason why you should not join a church.

Join so it will save you. Church membership does not save you! The church is not the kingdom but reflects the kingdom.

There is only one way in which you get saved. That is to believe in the work of Christ on the cross for your behalf. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ please, talk with a believer you know about what it means to get saved.

This might seem obvious but it is important to know that giving, serving, coming to church does not save you. If you grew up in the church and your parents are believers. You are not saved by what you do but what Christ has done!

Church as being like an embassy. As though if we are in a foreign land we have a place in which recognizes and cares for us as citizens, it is not making us citizens but simply saying “yes, he is one of ours.”

Q3: Why join a church?

1. For your affirmation of your faith

- a. Joining a church does not save you but it serves as one of the ways you can have assurance that you are saved. Having the God-ordained congregation and leaders proclaim to the best they can tell that you are a member of the church of God! Becoming a member in the local church is not a new to Christianity or an add-on to your membership in the global church of God. Becoming a member of a local church reflects and attests to your membership in the universal household of the living God! It is not saving but it is a reflection of our salvation to the people of God.
- b. If there is no reflection how are we to know we have it?
- c. One main reflection is our love for the body of Christ –
 - i. 1 John 4:20 *If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

2. To serve and evangelize
 - a. Coming together to make the gospel visible! I love that old song that they will know we are Christians by our love!
 - b. Join a church to serve.
3. To know who you are accountable for
 - a. The Christian life is not all about you! Back to 1 Corinthians 12 and see the essential nature of dependence on one another.
 - b. You might have been able to fight sin in your Christian walk by yourself but others in the church need your help!
 - i. Let's look at Hebrews 3:7-14
 1. The Holy Spirit says we are not to harden our hearts. We are called not to be harden by sin's deceitfulness.
 2. This is where we need one another in verse 13 to exhort each other every day! That we do not fall away from the living God!
 3. Sin can harden us! Sin is deadly and a dangerous enemy!
 4. We must help each other overcome sin. I love what John Owen famously said: you must always be killing sin or it will be killing you."
 5. The need for membership can also be seen in the "Let us" passages in Hebrews:
 - a. Hebrews 4:14 – let us hold fast to our confession
 - b. Hebrews 4:16 – let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - c. Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith

d. Hebrews 10:24 let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

4. To know who you are accountable to
 - a. To help the elders know who they oversee.
 - b. As a member you look to the other members of your body to keep you accountable to your commitment to Christ. When we have a defined church membership we know who is watching our live and doctrine.

Q4: What does a church member look like?

1. Promotes relational unity within the church

- i. Ephesians 4:1-3: “Then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

2. Submits to the spiritual leadership of the church

- i. Hebrews 13:17 gives this clear command to Christians: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” (cf. I Th 5:12-13) Among other things submission to leadership means honoring the direction of the mission of the church, praying for them, speaking graciously of them and being accountable to them.

3. Engages consistently in corporate worship

- i. Hebrews 10:25 commands the believers that they should not forsake “meeting together, as is the habit of some.” In Acts 2:42 this picture of the early church is painted as an exemplary model for us: “they [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” As believers we ought to prioritize and devote ourselves to the corporate gathering of worship and see it as an essential aspect of our membership and discipleship in a local church.

4. Utilizes their gifts for the building up of the local body

- i. Membership in a local church is the opposite of a consumer mindset: “What do I get and what goods and services do they offer me?” It is a servant mindset: “How can I use my gifts to advance the mission of the church and edify the body?” I Peter 4:10 clearly lays out this mindset: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” The question of serving in a local church is never ‘if’ but ‘how’ and ‘where.’

5. Matures and maintains an honorable witness to Christ

- i. Believers, as part of the church, are called to be ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). We are called to represent Jesus to a watching world of unbelievers (I Peter 2:11-12). This is exactly what Jesus calls us to in Matthew 5:14-16: “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on

its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The body of believers is to act as a light pointing to The Light of the World. One essential way we do this is by continually and increasingly conforming to the character of Christ (II Peter 1:5-8; Titus 2:10)

6. Supports the mission and ministry of the church financially

- i.* In order for some who are called to devote themselves full-time to ministering to the church family, there is a financial need that members are called to meet (Galatians 6:6; I Timothy 5:17-18; I Corinthians 9:14). The example of the early church shows us that we ought to care for and meet the financial needs of those in our midst (Acts 4:32-35). If we are going to minister the Gospel to the world, especially to the unreached peoples of the world, then we will have to use the wealth He has given us to spread His worship (Psalms 67:1-3). As believers our understanding of the sacrificial love of the Savior should lead us to sacrificially support the mission and ministry of the church (II Corinthians 8:7-9).

7. Multiplies themselves through making and maturing disciples

- i.* At the end of His life Jesus was clear on the calling of all churches and the Christians who comprise them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with

you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20). This isn’t a calling only for the “super spiritual” or “paid pastors,” it is for all who claim the name of Christ, because to be a disciple of Christ is to be a disciple-maker.

Q5: What are the requirements of membership?

- a. Old Swedish Free church question for membership “Are you saved? Are you happy?”
 - i. There needs to be both profession and fruit
- b. Journey as a church together.
- c. At Living Hope:
 - ii. Attend Membership Matter’s Course
 - iii. Fill out a testimony and sit down with a few elders.
 - iv. Elders listen to gospel profession and then recommend you to the congregation for a vote of admission into membership.
 - v. Welcome to the family!

Big Idea: Church membership is biblical and it glorifies God.