

Church Membership 1

In the New Testament we find the apostle Paul writing to various churches, e.g. the Corinthian, the Thessalonian, the Galatian. In the book of Revelation we have seven churches in Asia Minor addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ. These were all visible churches in a particular locality and clearly identifiable. The term 'church' does not refer to a building but to a people. This is clear from Paul's letter to Philemon where Paul writes about 'the church in thy house'.

The question for us is: Did these churches have a recognisable membership? If so, how was it possible to identify such people?

1 See who are New Testament Church Members

The members were sinners who had been saved by the grace of God, they had trusted Christ as Saviour, were seeking to follow Him, and they were looking forward to His Second Coming – see Acts 2:47, 1 Corinthians 1: 4-10, 1 Thessalonians 1: 2-10.

- (a) These people had a distinct set of beliefs and these beliefs separated them from those who held very different views.
- (b) Their number could be added to – Acts 2:47.
- (c) Their number could be reduced:
 - Wrongly by ungodly or unspiritual overseers (3 John: 9, 10).
 - Rightly by spiritual overseers (I Corinthians 5: 1, 2, 13).

2 The Names of Members should be kept in a Register

In order to facilitate identification of the membership, the only practical step that can be taken is to have a register of all those who have been admitted to the church and have not been removed by excommunication. Some might ask whether keeping such a register is scriptural. We answer:

- (a) God has a 'register' of all His people – see Luke 10:20, Revelation 20: 15.
- (b) In the Old Testament a register was kept of the people of Israel – Ezra 2: 1, 2; 61-63.

- Those whose names were not found in the register were excluded from the privilege of office until it could be established that they had a right to it.
- The principle here is that a record was kept of those who belonged to a particular society.
- This principle runs right through our society. If our government has no record of your name you can only stay a short time as a visitor, otherwise you are here illegally. Unless your name is registered you cannot vote in a General Election.

3 The Church cannot exist without a membership

- (a) In Acts 6 the people chose the church's first deacons – Acts 6: 1-6.
- The people who did the choosing must have had a vote.
 - They were to choose men from among themselves – that means they had to choose from a recognised body.
 - The principle of voting was known amongst the Jews. The Apostle Paul tells us in Acts 26: 10 that he gave his 'voice' against saints of God who were put to death. The word translated 'voice' literally means 'pebble'. The pebble was used in casting votes and Paul is referring to casting a vote to have Christians put to death.
 - Again, we may say that this is a principle that we are familiar with in a General Election. Registered voters decide who should be in power.
- (b) The church cannot exercise proper discipline if it hasn't got an identifiable membership.
- In the Corinthian church a very serious moral problem arose. Paul told the Corinthians to put the offender out of the church – 1 Corinthians 5: 1-4, 12, 13. The offender could not have been removed from membership if the church did not have one.
- (c) If a church doesn't have a membership it cannot call a minister, choose elders or deacons. That would leave the congregation without leadership or direction and the church would not be recognisable as a New Testament church.

Conclusions

- 1 Church Membership is a necessity.
- 2 Church Membership is a great privilege.
- 3 Church Membership is a great responsibility.
- 4 We need to have a membership in our church.

