

# The Case for Church Membership

**Text:** Acts 2:41-47

## **Introduction:**

1. In a day when many are forsaking the local church, it is vital that we come back to the Word of God on this subject and realign ourselves with God's mind.
2. Aim: To encourage new members coming on board today as well as our existing membership regarding the biblical basis for membership and the spiritual principles that will help us to be fruitful members for God's glory. To challenge non-members to consider what the Lord might have them do in relation to church membership.
3. In this message, we are going to consider the following:
  - The Reasons for Church Membership
  - The Responsibilities of Church Members
  - The Recommendations for Church Members

## **I. REASONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

Let's consider 5 clear Bible reasons why every Christian should be a member of a local, Bible based, Bible preaching church:

### **A. The Local Church is God's Primary Instrument He is using in the Church Age**

1. The overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament is on local, visible, self-governing, self-propagating churches.
  - a. The word 'church' is from the Greek word 'ekklesia' which is made up of two words: 'ek' meaning "out of" and 'kaleo' meaning "to call". The church therefore is a called-out assembly.
  - b. NBC New Members Notes: "Of the 114 times the word "church" is used in the New Testament, approximately 90 times it refers to a local assembly. Even a casual survey of a good concordance will satisfy the reader that in the great majority of the references to the word 'churc', it means a local, called out assembly. This we therefore take as the clearest definition of the New Testament Church. Whatever else it is or does, the church must assemble or it cannot be rightly termed an "eklesia".
  - c. The majority of Paul's Epistles were written to literal, local churches.
    - i. The Church at Rome – "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints..." (Rom. 1:7)
    - ii. The Church of Corinth – **"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the**

- name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” (1 Cor. 1:2)
- iii. The Churches of Galatia – “And all the brethren which are with me, unto **the churches of Galatia:**” (Gal. 1:2)
  - iv. The Church of Ephesus – “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, **to the saints which are at Ephesus,** and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Eph. 1:1)
  - v. The Church of Philippi – “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi,** with the bishops and deacons:” (Phil. 1:1)
  - vi. The Church of Colosse – “**To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse:** Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Col. 1:2)
  - vii. The Church of Thessalonica – “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto **the church of the Thessalonians** *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 1:1)
- d. Revelation written to seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4)
  - e. Christ’s letters in Revelation sent to seven literal, local churches (Rev. 1:11). These were the church of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.
2. The Local Church is Responsible for the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).
  3. The Apostle Paul planted New Testament Churches most places he went (Read Acts).
  4. NBC New Members Notes: “Of course, in New Testament times, everyone that was saved eventually joined a church, unless they died before they had opportunity. We don’t read of Christians who didn’t join churches, just as we don’t read of soldiers who were not part of an army, or of tuba players without an orchestra, or football players without a team. Today; however, we meet many Christians who are satisfied to be jus a member of the “universal” church and not to take up any responsibility in a local church.”

## **B. The Local Church is where Christ’s Heart is**

1. Christ paid for it with His own blood – Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath **purchased with his own blood.**” Note: Paul is speaking to the elders of the Ephesian Church. The local church is in view.
2. Christ builds it – Matt. 16:18 “...**I will build my church;** and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

3. Christ is its Head – Col 1:18 “And he is **the head of the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.”
4. Christ is present in it (Rev. 1:12-13)
  - a. Rev. 1:12-13 “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; **And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man**, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.”
  - b. Rev 2:1 “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, **who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;**”
  - c. Challenge: The local church is where Christ is moving and working. It is where His presence is.

### **C. The Local Church is God’s House (1 Tim. 3:15)**

1 Timothy 3:15 “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in **the house of God**, which is **the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.**” There are three descriptions of the local church in this verse:

1. The house of God – It is God’s dwelling place.
  - a. It is described as a spiritual temple in 1 Cor. 3:17. “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, **which temple ye are.**”
  - b. It is described as a spiritual building, a habitation of God through the Spirit in Eph. 2:19-22.
2. The Church of the living God – this is not a religious organisation connected to some dead idol. It is the assembly of the true and living God!
3. The Pillar and Ground of the truth – this means the local church is:
  - a. **The Propagator of the Truth.** The word ‘pillar’ refers to a column (e.g., like a pillar in the temple). The temple at Ephesus had 127 pillars which supported the roof. The church displays the truth as a witness to a world filled with error. Our job is to be “holding for the word of life” (Phil. 2:16)
  - b. **The Protector of the Truth.** The word ‘ground’ refers to a firm foundation, base, stay or prop.

### **D. The Local Church is Alive (a living organism) (Eph. 2:19-22)**

1. “Groweth” = reveals the progress and development of the local church. What an exciting thing to be a part of what God is doing!
2. Being “builded together” in the local church is a big part of our Christian growth as believers.

### **E. The Local Church is to be joined (Acts. 1:15; Acts 2:41)**

1. It appears the early church had a member’s roll of such. They knew the number of the names (Acts 1:15).

2. The converts on the Day of Pentecost were 'added' to the 120 existing members (Acts 2:41).
3. By becoming a member, you are saying "this is my church. I identify with it. I believe its doctrines and support its stand."

## II. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

Let's consider three core responsibilities of membership:

### A. Be a Faithful Member (Heb. 10:25; Prov. 20:6; 28:20; 1 Cor. 4:1)

The first church is a great model of faithfulness to follow (Acts 2:42):

1. Faithful to Doctrine – "the apostle's doctrine"
2. Faithful to Fellowship – "and fellowship"
3. Faithful to Church Ordinances – "and in breaking of bread"
4. Faithful to Church Prayers – "and in prayers"
5. Faithful to Church Attendance – "continuing daily with one accord in the temple" (Vs. 46). Some complain about attending 3 services a week but the early church met every day!

### B. Be a Following Member (Heb. 13:17)

1. Follow your pastor as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6)
2. Get behind the vision God gives your pastor.
3. Give your pastor the benefit of the doubt. Be more doubtful of the rumour mill than of your pastor! Don't form a judgment about your pastor on an issue without at least first giving him the opportunity to share his perspective. Remember that one of Satan's ploys is to get the sheep disconnected from the under-shepherd God has placed them under so that he can pick them off and devour them.

### C. Be a Serving Member (Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 12:11)

1. We don't work to get saved but we are saved to work!
2. Have the "no task is below me" mindset. Be willing to serve in any area as able.
3. Illustration: Every man working in his place (Nehemiah chap. 3).
4. Seek to use the gift God has given you (Rom. 12:5-8).
5. Not sure where you can help? Come and ask the Pastor!

### D. Refer NBC Constitution on the Duties of Members.

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

The following are 16 Scriptural keys that will help you to be a fruitful church member who is a blessing to others:

### A. Be Loving (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10, 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5)

1. Our love for each other is a big part of our testimony to the lost.
2. Our love for each other needs to increase and grow. We never arrive on this!

3. Remember, this love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Rom. 5:5).
  4. The qualities of this love are listed in 1 Cor. 13:4-7.
- B. Be Humble (1 Peter 5:5-6; Col. 3:12; Prov. 13:10)**
1. Working in harness with others requires real humility. God will often use the local church to bring blind spots to my attention.
  2. Submitting to leadership requires humility.
- C. Be Gracious (Col. 4:6; Prov. 10:20; 16:24; 25:11)**
1. A little grace goes a long way when interacting with one another. Be polite and courteous (1 Peter 3:8).
  2. Remember every church has its share of the “REGs” (Require extra grace).
- D. Be Spirit filled (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18)**
1. Be alert to the uprisings of the self-life. Ask God to keep you at the place of death by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.
  2. Every church member needs to learn to stay dead to things!
- E. Be Others Focused (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:4; 3 John 1:5)**
1. Remember the acronym for JOY – Jesus first, others second and you last!
  2. Come to church with a mindset to be a contributor, not just a receiver.
  3. Be a burden bearer (Gal. 6:2).
  4. Crack out of your comfort zone! Talk to others besides your family and close circle of friends. Look out for visitors. Be alert to those who need a word of encouragement who may be struggling.
- F. Be Forgiving (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13)** Quick to forgive and slow to take offense.
- G. Be Forbearing (Col. 3:13)**
- H. Be Unified (Eph. 4:3)**
- I. Be Hospitable (1 Peter 4:9; Acts 2:46)**
- J. Be Teachable (1 Thess. 2:13)**
1. Willingness to change as God speaks to you through the Word.
  2. Willingness to learn from leaders and fellow labourers as you serve in the local church.
- K. Be Submissive (Heb. 13:17; Eph. 5:21)**
- If we follow the following two principles of submission, it will help the church run smoothly:
1. Submit to pastoral leadership.
  2. Submit to each other.
- L. Be Friendly (Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 4:21; 1 Pet. 5:14)**
- M. Be Joyful (Enthusiastic) (Phil. 4:4)**
1. Be an encourager! Smile!
  2. Be passionate about your church. Value what you have! Embrace the local church God has placed you in, its leadership and members. For some, they come to church but their life is elsewhere and they remain

somewhat detached from the church body. Remember, your social life is not all online!

3. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

**N. Be Knowable (2 Tim. 3:10-11)**

**O. Be Giving & Generous (Acts 20:35; 2 Cor. 9:7; Acts 2:44-45)**

1. Give to the Lord's work (e.g., tithes, offerings, missions).
2. Give to the Lord's people. Note the generosity of the first church (Acts 2:45-46).
3. Have a giving mindset rather than a taking mindset. For some, all they seem to think about is "what is the church doing for me".

**P. Be Realistic**

1. No church is perfect! Why? Because it is made up of sinners saved by grace. The Churches in the New Testament had their fair share of problems. E.g., the church at Corinth, the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2-3), Euodias and Syntyche at Philippi (Phil. 4:2).
2. You may have heard the saying, "if you find the perfect church, don't join it or it won't be perfect anymore!"
3. No pastor is perfect! David Cloud writes, "The church member will never find a pastor with whom he agrees 100%. Think about it. This would be impossible. The only one with whom I agree with 100% is myself, and sometimes I disagree with myself! Recently a pastor told me that he liked my book *The Calvinism Debate*, but he disagreed with one statement. I replied that I disagreed with that statement too, and that I should have made myself clearer!"
4. Note: By this we are not saying that blatant compromise against God's Word is to be tolerated.
5. David Cloud in his book, "Keys to Fruitful Church Membership" writes, "We must keep the big picture in focus. Every church has strengths and weaknesses; to focus exclusively on the weaknesses can cause us to forget the strengths. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says to prove all things **AND** to hold fast that which is good. We must not "throw the baby out with the bath water!" There simply is no perfect situation in this present life. If you leave a church, you should move to a better one, not a weaker one. It is a good practice to count your blessings. What are the things that attracted you to the church in the first place? In spite of the fact that all churches are imperfect, we do not see in Scripture any healthy examples of Christians who neglected the assembly. In fact, those who separated themselves were considered unregenerate (1 John 2:19)." (Pg. 15)
6. Tips from some NBC Church Members
  1. S. Roffel
    - Have a good devotion each day- this will reflect on your church life.
    - Get a BIBLICAL view of the pastor & his role in the local church.
    - Be humble- don't be too big in the picture.

- Defer to the other brother in church related matters (avoid unnecessary conflict).
- Be faithful to all church meetings (regardless of feelings).
- Get involved!
- Go to church with a mind set to give rather than just get.

#### 2. P. Tweedie

- If you are going to be in a ministry for the long haul you need to be sure that's the ministry God wants you serving in.
- Be flexible, you may be needed to help out in several ministries.
- Possibly most importantly, the Pastor may not always act the way you feel he should but don't allow yourself or others to be engaged in trash talking the Pastor (Or any other members for that matter).

#### 3. N. Chaney

- Be the best church member you can be. Serve, even when you may not feel like it, as a ministry and encouragement to others, and have a sweet spirit. Get involved with something, anything! Get to know your brethren, and their families. Then pray for them. One more thought...be prepared to step outside of your comfort zone to be a blessing to others.
- Good quote: "Quit looking for a better church. Make the church you're at better by being a better church member!"

#### 4. D. Chaney

- Love Christ first, be humble, others focused, loving, serving, submissive to authority, teachable, always want to grow, desire to disciple and be disciplined.

#### 5. M. Ringwaldt

- Aim to please the Lord, not self.
- Pray for one another.
- Ask God to give you a heart for people both those within the church and for the lost.
- Be faithful and come with a prepared heart.
- Don't be a spectator - get involved.
- Be willing to work hard, especially doing things that only God sees.
- Support the Pastor and his family.
- Have a team spirit.

#### 6. D. Williams

- Be at church every time the doors are open - such an important thing as your church is your spiritual family.
- Be forbearing – sometimes you can get annoyed by someone, which is life. But we must learn to just forebear one another. Each one is at different stages of sanctification with their walk with God.
- Self-denial (crucified life). Highly recommended before business meetings.
- Look out for one another.
- Weaker brother principle - sometimes you can do something which is lawful but could make a brother or sister to fall. We need to be mindful of one another in this aspect.

- Pray for one another.
- Be willing that you'll not always get your way with ideas.
- I think the biggest thing is... remain in a close and sweet walk with our Saviour and everything else can't help but be sweet. If we start to backslide, we will lose our effectiveness in serving Him

### **Conclusion:**

1. To NBC members – are you striving to be all you can be as a member for God's glory and the blessing and edification of your church?
2. To non-members – is God dealing with your heart about church membership?