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RESTORING THE CHURCH - PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH LIFE

Church Membership

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this lesson is to help the believer see that membership in a specific local church is not to be feared but something that will be beneficial to him in walking out his commitment to the Lord and other members of the body of Christ.

KEY VERSE:

“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” **Matthew 18:19-20**

I. IS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST MEANT TO BE AN EXCLUSIVE GROUP?

When properly understood, it is true that the Church is meant to be exclusive.

- A. The word “church” in the Greek language means “called out ones”. The Church of Jesus Christ is to consist of only those who are called out of the world by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It consists of those whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).
- B. Church membership is exclusive; however, it is also clear that church attendance is to be open to all (1 Corinthians 4:23; James 2:2-4).

II. WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH CONSCIOUS OF THE NUMBER OF THE PEOPLE WHO WERE ADDED TO THEM?

Yes. It is very clear in the Gospel and the book of Acts that the disciples and the early believers were actually numbered and accounted for.

- A. Jesus chose 12 apostles who were named and numbered (Luke 9:1-2).
- B. Jesus later chose 70 others as His own (Luke 10:1-2).
- C. Over 500 brethren saw Jesus in His ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).
- D. Before Pentecost, 120 disciples gathered in the upper room (Acts 1:15).
- E. There were added unto them (the 120) about 3000 souls (Acts 2:41, 47).
- F. About 5000 believed and were added to the church (Acts 4:4).
- G. The number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7).

III. IS IT SCRIPTURAL TO HAVE SOME KIND OF CHURCH ROLL OR RECORDS?

Yes! The Old Testament and New Testament refer to books where names of God's people were kept for records. It would be impossible to fully take care of God's sheep if no one knew where they were or if they really belonged to some local church.

A. OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Israelites have their names in the Books of Genealogy of the Nation. They were numbered before the Lord (Numbers 1-2).
2. The Levites were also numbered before the Lord before they could minister in the priestly offices (Numbers 3).
3. Everyone numbered in Israel had to be redeemed with silver (Exodus 30:11-16).
4. The remnant from Babylon had to be registered in the book in order to minister in the priesthood (Ezra 2:62, 63; Nehemiah 7).

B. NEW TESTAMENT

1. The Church of the Firstborn have their names written in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24).
2. The redeemed of all ages have their names also written in the Book of Life (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12-15; 21:27).

God keeps records! God keeps the names and numbers of the saints in His roll! If God Himself does this, then there should be no problem if finite man does likewise! God knows who is in His book and who is not.

IV. HOW DOES ONE BECOME A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S CHURCH?

There are two aspects to Church membership in the book of Acts.

A. Spiritual membership.

You do not become a member by signing up, taking a pledge or subscribing to a particular set of doctrines. In the early church you had to be added to the Lord, which involved a spiritual experience of coming into right relationship with and under the lordship of Jesus Christ as personal Saviour (Acts 5:14; 11:24). Spiritual membership is foundational to all other experiences in God.

B. Practical membership.

There must be a visible and practical expression of Church membership as seen in the Book of Acts. This is seen in belonging to "the church local". Believers that were added to the Lord were also added to the Church, which is His body (Acts 2:41, 47).

In the New Testament, all members of the universal Church were also members of the local church. Any idea of enjoying salvation or being a Christian in isolation is foreign to the New Testament. Fellowship with Christ precludes fellowship with His body (1 John 1:3, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 1:9).

V. WHY DO SOME PEOPLE HAVE PROBLEMS WITH CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

There are many reasons why some people have rejected the concept of church membership.

- A. Some have a fear of **being hurt**. Because they have been hurt in the past by the misuse or abuse of membership, they are now very cautious about such commitments.
- B. Some do not want to be **tied down**. Because they want the freedom to move and operate without accountability to human authority, they do not see church membership fitting into their plan for life.
- C. Some do not believe it is **scriptural**. Because there are no direct commands concerning membership, they feel that God must be opposed to official membership.

VI. WHAT ARE SOME ADVANTAGES OF PRACTICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

- A. **Fellowship** (Colossians 2:2). Deeper levels of fellowship and family relationships are able to be developed.
- B. **Fulfillment** (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). A greater sense of belonging and worth can develop among members.
- C. **Fruitfulness** (Ephesians 4:16). We have a greater productivity and impact in the lives of other members.
- D. **Accountability** (Galatians 6:1-2). There is a greater sense of accountability and responsibility among members.
- E. **Growth** (1 Thessalonians 5:12). There is greater opportunity to receive consistent pastoral care and oversight.

- F. **Power** (Deuteronomy 32:30). There is a greater release of power as believers bind themselves together for a common goal.
- G. **Presence of God** (Matthew 18:19-20). God promises a greater release of His presence in the corporate assembly.

VII. WHAT IMPORTANT QUESTIONS SHOULD EVERY BELIEVER ANSWER IN REGARD TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Anyone who is a Christian and claims to be part of Christ needs to face the following questions realistically.

- A. Who is over me in the Lord (Hebrews 13:17)?
- B. When I was added to the Lord, in what way was I added to the Church (Acts 2:41-42)?
- C. When I gather together with the disciples, with whom do I gather (Acts 20:7)?
- D. With whom am I allowing God to perfectly join me (1Corinthians 1:10)?

CONCLUSION:

Every true believer in Christ must consider the question of church membership. All of the dynamics of the Christian life must be worked out in the context of others of like faith. The local church is God's vehicle through which He would strengthen and equip His people. To reject the local church is to resist God's plan and elevate ourselves above God. We need the Lord, but we also need each other if we are going to become all that God desires of us.