

What Does Joining A Church Mean

I. INTRODUCTION:

So, you are thinking about becoming a church member...GREAT!

How wonderful! It is certainly a very important decision—it is one of the most important you will ever make in your life. At first, it may seem to be a very simple choice—as they say, a “no brainer.”

However, our heavenly Father only gave us two institutions—the institution of marriage and the institution of church—and He takes both very serious. Outside of the institution of marriage, there is no organization more important and no cause more noble than the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Neither the Lion’s Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Toastmasters, nor the local chapter of a particular worker’s Union can claim the Creator of heaven and earth as its Head. Think about it, our Lord Jesus Christ is called to be the head of both marriage and the church—the two institutions of God.

Furthermore, no earthly organization other than the church is guaranteed a perpetual and eternal existence. Every company that comes along will be replaced eventually by a newer and more relevant model. Not the church—it will last forever.

Indeed, it seems like an easy decision. But, then again, I’m sure you have a number of questions whirling in your mind: How do I know if I’m ready to join the church? What do I need to know before I join? How do I go about joining the church? Is it even necessary to apply for formal membership? What will it matter if I don’t?

Well, I want to help you to answer some of these questions. It is appropriate for you to consider, in advance, the significance of this decision and to learn something about the many privileges associated with membership in the church.

I also want to address a few issues that you may or may not have considered regarding some of the responsibilities associated with church membership. Jesus taught that it is important to “count the cost” of following Him—that is, to consider what is involved in discipleship. What will membership in the church require of you? What will be expected of you?

No doubt, you’ve heard the adage, “With privilege comes responsibility.” In a day when many people approach the gospel as consumers, asking “How can this benefit me?”, it is needful to recover Jesus’ emphasis on servanthood. The most basic question asked by early Christians was not the consumer’s question—“How can I benefit from the church?”—but the question of the servant—“What shall we do?”



WHAT DOES JOINING A CHURCH MEAN

Indeed, there are privileges, and these are certainly rich and wonderful privileges associated with membership in the church. Church membership will benefit you in a variety of ways. But there are also duties that accompany the commitment to follow Jesus Christ in the fellowship of other believers, and it is important that you understand both what you can expect from church-life and what will be expected from you, before you become a member.

Perhaps we should begin by asking the very basic and fundamental question...

II. IS THE CONCEPT OF "JOINING THE CHURCH" EVEN A BIBLICAL CONCEPT?

Now we know that the Biblical church is not about a building, but a people who have been saved and transformed by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word church means "the called out ones."

Twice in the book of Acts, reference is made to a person "joining himself" to the church. The original word translated "join" means "to cement together, to unite" and refers to a formal relationship such as the joining of a man and a woman in a marriage covenant. Therefore from this we can conclude that in some form and fashion the 1st century believers joined themselves together for the teaching of the word, prayer, fellowship and outreach. Even if it was what is called the house church or "the church in the house" as the Scriptures call it, we know that they came together with commonality.

Furthermore, there are statements in the New Testament that make sense only in the context of believers belonging to a certain group—"tell it to the church," "when you are gathered together," "if the whole church be come together into one place," etc. All of these references suggest that the early church was a local assembly with some form of membership or identification with one another.

In Acts 2:47, conversion is defined in terms of "the Lord adding to the church such as should be saved." Obviously, this is referring to those being added to the body of Christ. Christians were being hunted down and persecuted so the idea of a church having the 3,000 new members that were just saved would be a far reach in Bible interpretation. However, even if they scattered in citywide house churches there was a sense of "community" and "body-life" together.

III. WHO SHOULD JOIN THE CHURCH AND WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

Today we not only have "church building" scattered across our cities, towns and rural communities we also have a rising number of house churches. The question is-"How do you know if you are ready to join the church?" If the Lord has done a work of grace in your heart, then you are not only qualified for membership, but called to membership—simply by virtue of His gift of salvation—to unite yourself to His people. The call to



WHAT DOES JOINING A CHURCH MEAN

separate oneself from the world and to identify oneself with others who are truly saved is God's will for every one of His children.

If you have had a salvation experience witnessed by a changed life, love for the brothers, and manifestation of the fruit of the Holy Spirit then you ought to unite with others who understand your experience.

There is a place and responsibility for learning as much as possible about the basic theological convictions of the church or group that you desire to join yourself to.

IV. HOW DOES A PERSON UNITE WITH THE CHURCH?

The ordinance of water baptism marks the entrance into the fellowship of the local church. Why is water baptism necessary for membership with a local church? By this solemn act, a person gives dramatic testimony to those with whom he will live and worship with that he has placed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation of his soul.

Water baptism marks a turning point in the believer's life. It is a decision of burying the old Adamic sinful nature and a picture that you have true repentance from your former lifestyle and embrace a willing submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

V. WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH MAKE IN MY LIFE?

What can I expect? Have you ever noticed that much of the New Testament's instruction for Christian living is framed in the context of local church life?

For example, it is in the epistle to the church at Ephesus that we are exhorted to walk in holiness, love, light, and wisdom. It is in the fourth and fifth chapters of that letter that the apostle Paul gives practical directions for living Christianly in the areas of personal attitudes and behavior, in both the home and at work. It is in the letter to the church at Philippi that he teaches how to overcome worry and to live joyfully and contentedly, regardless of one's circumstances.

What difference will participation in the life of the church make in your life? First and foremost, it will enable you to fulfill God's call to holiness by creating a setting in which it is possible for you to grow in Christ and to receive the spiritual nourishment you need to bear burdens and resist temptation. If it were possible for a person to get these benefits on his own, Christ would have never established the command that we need to meet in fellowship with one another.

There are privileges associated with membership in the church that a person simply cannot get on his own in the world. Consider Paul's argument for unity to the church at Philippi. When Paul urged the Philippian believers to labor for unity he pleaded with

WHAT DOES JOINING A CHURCH MEAN

them on the basis of the many privileges that were theirs because of church life. “If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, fulfill ye my joy that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord.” His point is unmistakable: Great privilege in the fellowship of the saints calls for great effort to preserve the blessing.

Membership in the church also fosters a sense of belonging and identity. Our identity of course comes from our relationship with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. But our fellowship covenant brothers and sisters are our visible examples of Him who is invisible.

When he came to years, Moses chose to identify himself with God’s people. He knew that he was a Hebrew, not an Egyptian. He esteemed the reproaches of Christ greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt; therefore, he joined himself in covenant with the people of God.

It is my experience that such a sense of identity will prove to be a great safeguard against sin. More than once in my life I have been spared from falling into temptation by the simple reminder, ***I am a part of the life of other believers and therefore should not participate in an activity that would dishonor Christ and damage the body of my covenant brothers in Christ.***

The awareness that I have made a commitment to the Lord and other believers establishes a structure that makes it easier for me to be zealous and energetic. It drives me outside of myself and forces me to think beyond the little circle of my personal life and desires. It gives me a sense of responsibility, direction, and significance in life.

Finally, membership in the church carries with it the privilege of fellowship. Paul thanked God for “the fellowship in the gospel” that he enjoyed with the church at Philippi. The Greek word *koinonia* (translated “fellowship”) means “to share in common.”

The covenant relationship between fellow believers in the church is a dynamic of giving and taking—a mutual ministry in which each gives to satisfy the need of his brother and receives from his brother the supply that God has given to him. It is only in the context of sharing in the common life that any believer can grow to full maturity.

What do believers share with one another? They share their knowledge of Scripture, experiences, encouragement, counsel, spiritual gifts, material possessions, and prayers. They participate together as partners in the gospel of Christ. True biblical fellowship is having life in community with the saints—life in covenant with other believers.

VI. WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO ENTER INTO COVENANT WITH OTHER BELIEVERS?



WHAT DOES JOINING A CHURCH MEAN

Membership in the church is a glorious thing because it represents an assembly of people who have made a covenant (or promise) to God and one another to uphold the principles of God's word.

Water baptism is the first act of Christian fellowship—a “sharing in common” with other believers. When a believer is baptized into the fellowship of the saints, he/she is saying by that act, “I, like you, have placed all my hope and trust for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and am picturing that decision through water baptism.

He is also making another confession to his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is saying, “I want to share with you in the mutual ministry of the church. I want to receive from you what God has taught you and to give to you what God has taught me.”

The mutual ministry of the church involves, first of all, subjecting yourself to the input of others into your life.

By the act of uniting with the saints, you are saying to them, **“I realize that I am not self-sufficient. I cannot live the Christian life on my own. I need your prayers and encouragement, your knowledge of His word, the witness of your example, and your godly counsel. I need the “checks and balances” that church life will provide. I want to be accountable to other believers. I want you to love me enough to gently challenge me when I begin to falter, to faithfully admonish me when I stray, and to help me to be faithful to the Lord.”**

Secondly, fellowship involves giving yourself in service to others. At his baptism into the fellowship, the believer is saying, “I want to show my love for the Lord by serving His people. I want to offer my life as a sacrifice on the altar of Christian service. Whatever the Lord has given to me—whether my spiritual gifts, knowledge of His word, material resources, personal time, or experience—I want to invest in the cause of Christ by bearing the burdens of my brethren.”

In a very real sense, membership in the church is a covenant relationship. It is an agreement to take responsibility for one another. Living in a sinful world as we do, we can be thankful that the Lord has given such a precious resource as the communion of saints to help us stay the course of godliness.

Does the idea of “taking responsibility” for the church sound frightening to you? We are living in a day when many people want privilege without responsibility. But it is God that holds us accountable. It is nothing short of God's grace that has blessed us with such priceless blessings as the opportunity to congregate ourselves with His children, sing the precious songs of Zion, and hear the joyful sound of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ.