

Article Summary

Commitment is rare in the church today. It is not uncommon for Christians to move from church to church without ever submitting themselves to the care of pastors and never committing themselves to a group of fellow believers. While Scripture does not contain an explicit command to unite formally with a local church, the biblical foundation for church membership permeates the New Testament. So why join a local church?

therog@att.net

 **JEREMIAH 20:9**
MINISTRIES

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- ✚ **For Accountability-** Local church pastors are charged by God to shepherd believers and provide for spiritual well-being. Submitting to this care and authority is done through church membership. Scripture teaches that believers are to submit to their elders. **Hebrews 13:17** says, “Obey your leaders, and submit to them.” “Who are your leaders?” Every believer ought to know to whom he must submit, which, assumes clearly defined church membership.
- ✚ **For Assurance-** While a person should not feel he needs to join a church in order to be saved, he ought to join a church to be certain that he has been saved. Christians, those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will naturally gravitate towards other Christians and will desire to be with them, to learn from them, and to serve them. A person who professes Christ but feels no desire to be among his believing brothers and sisters is not a healthy Christian.
- ✚ **For Blessing- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** speaks of a blessing through “**appreciating**” and “**esteeming**” of the servant of God as they bless the people of God through their ministry and oversight.
- ✚ **For Edification-** Joining a church will help Christians counter their sinful individualism and teach them the importance of seeking to serve and edify others. Christians attend a local church so they might have opportunities to serve others and thus to serve God. Christians should be eager to serve within the church to edify others through teaching, serving, and exercising spiritual gifts.
- ✚ **For Encouragement-** In order to encourage (the strong) and strengthen (the weak), Christians should also join a local church to help leaders in that body better minister to them (**1 Cor. 8; Rom 14**).
- ✚ **For Evangelization-** The gospel can best be spread through collaborative efforts. Throughout the history of the church great men and women have attempted great things on their own and have often been successful. But more often, great things have been accomplished through the collaborate efforts of Christians working together. If we are to reach this world with the gospel message of Jesus Christ, we must share our efforts with other believers.
- ✚ **For Example-** In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (**Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5**). New believers joined together with others believers in a local assembly where they devoted themselves to spiritual activities (**Acts 2:42**). The New Testament letters were written to churches or leaders of churches. In Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of formal

church membership: “the whole congregation”, “the church in Jerusalem”, “in every church”, “the whole church”.

- ✚ **For God** (whose idea it was to birth the church)- **Acts 2** and **2 Corinthians 2:6**, the local church is usually spoken of as having a definable number of people. In Paul's conversion, Jesus set forth the church as his body by asking Paul, “**Why do you persecute me?**” Christ has so identified himself with the church that he is at work building it. It is his work, it is his body.
- ✚ **For God's Glory-** We can bring God glory through the way we live our lives. God is honored when we are obedient to him. He is glorified when his people come together in unity and harmony to find assurance, to evangelize the world, to expose false gospels, and to edify one another. God is glorified in and through the local church.
- ✚ **For Gospel Integrity-** As we interact, labor, fellowship, and serve alongside other Christians, and as we observe the lives of other Christians, we will see what biblical Christianity looks like. The more we see genuine Christianity, the more counterfeits will be exposed.
- ✚ **For Growth-** Scripture exhorts believers to edify other members by practicing the “one-another's” of the New Testament (**Heb. 10:24-25**) and exercising their spiritual gifts (**Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11**). Edification can only take place in the context of the corporate body of Christ. This assumes believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly (church).
- ✚ **For Restoration-** Church membership gives pastors authority to restore the believer that may fall into sin. **Matthew 18:15-17** details four steps (one to one, two to one, before the whole church, remove from membership) for dealing with members who have fallen into sin. Jesus instructs leadership to meet with those who have fallen into sin and encourage them to repent and walk in obedience. Without membership, you become isolated from restorative grace.
- ✚ **For Witness-** You should join a church as a witness to non-Christians in order to demonstrate what it means to live as a sinner whose heart has been redeemed by the grace of God.

When it comes to church membership, much is expected, but much is at stake. For only when every believer is faithful to this kind of commitment is the church able to live up to her calling as Christ's representative here on earth. To put it simply, membership matters.