

# Built Together

## The Biblical Precedent for Church Membership

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” -  
Ephesians 2:22

“I’m convinced that getting this concept of membership right is a key step in revitalizing our churches, evangelizing our nation, furthering the cause of Christ around the world and so bringing glory to God.” -Mark Dever in 9 Marks of a Healthy Church

### “Commitment” Under Attack

When was the last time someone (other than a pastor or counselor or counseling friend) suggested that you depend on other people? We live in a day where the whole notion of commitment to another person is popularly ridiculed and often seen as completely foolish. The way of the world is rugged individualism, independence and strength through isolation.

**What are some ways that you have seen or heard commitment ridiculed? In conversations, formal settings [work, class, etc.], commercials, movies, music, advertisements. Share with the group.**

Many people balk at talk of church membership because they can’t imagine committing to a group of people for anything other than jury duty or sitting next to them in a restaurant. What are your thoughts about commitment. **Note here (for yourself) your knee-jerk reaction to conversation about commitment to a group of people. In general, do you have a good or bad view of commitment to a group of people? Good or bad experiences? \_\_\_\_\_**

**It’s helpful to know and bring before God our own reservations and fears about things that God calls us to do. We want to do this, NOT so that we can hide behind how we feel about things and NOT so that we can say to God *I get a pass at this thing because you know how I feel about that, right?* No, it’s good to consider the challenge and hesitation or anticipation and joy with which we approach new things. That way, we are more likely to be honest and aware of how we need God as we move forward.**

It should be no surprise that commitment to a group of people is under attack in 2011. It’s no surprise because the purposes of God have been under attack by the enemy and wicked men and women throughout time. Scripture describes Satan as opposing the works of God and states clearly that the whole unbelieving world is under his influence and power (Matthew 12:28-29; Acts 13:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:18). Since those things are true, we should understand that the purpose of God to build the church will be opposed.

**This morning, we will spend a few minutes in dialogue about church membership and the Biblical basis for it. Scripture never makes explicit commands to “be a member of a local church.” However, the Bible is clear on the principals it teaches and church membership, handled in a Biblical way is the best way to honor the Lord according to Scripture.**

### Church Membership Defined

Before we move ahead, it’s a good idea to define the key terms we’re using. Definitions:

**The Church:** All those people throughout time who have been called out of the world and bondage to sin and made alive in Christ -called into relationship with God; saved by grace through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, having become children of God, given access to the Holy Spirit, repented from dead works and made members of one another by God's working in them, baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and made into disciples of Jesus Christ .

**(Matthew 16:18; 28:18-20; John 1:12; 14:17; 15:19; Ephesians 2; Hebrews 6:1)**

**Local Church:** the Christian community that meets regularly, where spiritual gifts are developed and used and the regular preaching and teaching of the Scriptures takes place. One local church is distinguished from others by the leadership of specific overseers who shepherd the flock under the Chief Shepherd, put in place by the Holy Spirit.

**(Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 10:24-45; 1 Peter 5:2)**

**Church Membership:** clearly expressed, committed participation and involvement with a particular local church, with support and submission to the mission, vision, goals and leadership of that local church until God calls a individual/family elsewhere or discipline results in removal.

**(Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 1 Timothy 5:16; 17-25; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24)**

Where do we get these definitions? The principles are straight from Scripture. Let's discuss a few:

**(Discuss the contribution of each passage to our understanding of church membership.)**

### The Church

-Matthew 16:18 The Church is built on Jesus Christ, Jesus is the one who is chiefly building "his] church," the gates of hell will not defeat the church

-John 1:12 The family of God (the Church) consists, exclusively, of all who have believed in Jesus Christ

### Local Church

-Acts 20:28 Elders have the responsibility of looking carefully at the life and health of God's people, Elders are given to particular churches by The Holy Spirit

-Colossians 4:16 Unique churches ARE mentioned in the New Testament. Here Paul instructs the one (Colossian) church to share his letters with the other (Laodicean) church

-1 Peter 5:2 Peter instructs the elders/overseers to shepherd the flock in which God has placed them

### Church Membership

-Matthew 18:17 Local churches need to have an "in" list in order for the health of the church to be maintained.(this situation refers to church discipline)

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-1 Corinthians 5:13 *Local churches have membership boundaries; thus Paul can say that God will judge those who are “outside” the church*

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-Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 *Christians have a specific set of elders to whom they look for example and direction*

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### **Benefits of Church Membership**

One marketing analyst has listed this phrase by American Express as the third most popular and profitable catch phrase in American History: “Membership Has Its Privileges.” For decades, that memorable phrase has reminded cardholders that this particular company is good to be associated with. What about the Church of Jesus Christ?

You can probably guess a few of the supposed benefits of being a card-carrying member of American Express. Low fees, exclusive deals, trusted banking, secure payments, et cetera, etc.. How about the Church!? Let’s spend a few minutes noting the amazing benefits of being a member in a church- not just The Church, but a local church.

1. *Commitment to God’s People Leads to Many Blessings (Genesis 12:3; Numbers 23:20)*
2. *God shepherds us (leads, spiritually feeds, and protects us) and speaks to us through church leaders (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17)*
3. *We experience many realities of the Kingdom of Christ in the local church (Matthew 16:16-19; 18:17-19)*
4. *We grow as we observe and are observed by broken and redeemed people (Galatians 6:1; Philippians 4:3)*
5. *We receive encouragement from the believers with whom we most associate and fellowship (1 Thessalonians 5:11)*
6. *Some growth only comes through endurance with difficulty; the hardest part of church membership. (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; James 1:4)*
7. *There are joys that we only experience when we endure certain hardships*
8. *In committed membership with the local church, we witness the progress and growth of our leaders and each other (1 Timothy 4:15)*
9. *In the local church, we get to benefit from one another’s spiritual gifts! (Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:12-16; 1 Peter 4:11)*
10. *When we stay committed to a group of Christians, we do not lose heart in times of difficulty (Hebrews 10:24-25)*
11. *When we stay committed to a group of Christians, we do not have an inflated view of our own worth but rather see our part in the larger Body (Romans 12:3)*
12. *The church is a group of people in your geographical region who are standing together for the truth in life and teaching and service (1 Timothy 3:15)*
13. *At any given moment, the people in a local church are all thriving or experiencing hardship in many various areas of life. That means that we have many opportunities to be encouraged by or encourage others who we know well and love -at any given moment! (2 Corinthians 1:4)*

14. *The local church is a breeding ground for Christian discipleship. If you want to grow and grow by helping others grow, the local church is a great place to make disciples. (Matthew 28:18-20)*
15. *The local church is very literally being built together as a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22)*
16. *Local church commitment and membership brings joy to followers of Christ (Philippians 2:2)*
17. *Local church commitment and membership brings glory to God (Philippians 2:15)*

What are some others?

18. \_\_\_\_\_
19. \_\_\_\_\_
20. - 1000. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Hindrances to Membership**

Membership in a local church has its privileges! Unfortunately, most of us have unexamined and immature areas in our lives in which Christ does not yet reign. If we don't give ourselves fully to the Lord's work and ways, we can short-circuit our own growth and sabotage all the benefits of the church in our lives. Authors and counselors Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp offer this list to help Christ-followers gauge our willingness and ability to participate in the life of the local church. They say:

"How much does your life currently allow you to develop relationships that are deep enough to help you grow and change? What are some common obstacles that hinder redemptive relationships from developing in our lives? Consider the following list and ask yourself if any of them apply to you." (p. 71, [How People Change](#))

- The busyness of life, keeping relationships distant and casual.**
- A total immersion in friendships that are activity -and happiness- based.**
- A conscious avoidance of close relationships as too scary or messy.**
- A formal commitment to church activities, with no real connection to people.**
- One-way, ministry-driven friendships in which you always minister to others, but never allow others to minister to you.**
- Self-centered, "meet my felt needs" relationships that keep you always receiving, but seldom giving.**
- A private, independent, "just me and God" approach to the Christian life.**
- Theology as a replacement for relationship. Knowing God as a life of study, rather than the pursuit of God and his people.**

"When the apostle Paul was discipling new believers, he repeatedly reminded them that there was help in Christ and in Christ's people...Paul tells them that they are part of something bigger than themselves...[God] intends us to be people who are moving toward each other in community. He removed all the barriers so that we can be people who hope, love, worship, and serve together. It is very important to him. It is impossible to read [Ephesians 2:14-22] and come

away with the idea that Christianity is a ‘just me and God’ religion.” Timothy Lane & Paul David Tripp in How People Change

**Let’s discuss these together. Make a note to yourself to revisit this list alone with the Lord or with your family and close Christian friends/mentors as appropriate. Don’t let fear or sinful thoughts about the Church keep you from one of God’s great blessings in your life!**

God wants followers of Christ to be engaged in the life of the local church! There are so many benefits to participation and committed membership! Let’s continue seek the Lord humbly, fully aware that Christ alone gives us the change we need and He is building us into a place for God to dwell by the Spirit. He’s building us, himself! Not alone, but together.

**For further study:**

- <http://www.9marks.org/what-are-the-9marks/membership> - a great website about marks of a healthy church – this specific page refers to membership
- <http://tinyurl.com/googlebks9marks> - link to the Google Books (authorized) preview of the book: 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Mark Dever
- <http://tinyurl.com/jharriscommittoachurch> - a short answer to the question “why should someone commit to a church?”
- <http://www.insearchoftruth.org/articles/autonomy.html> - a page with Biblical rationale for local church autonomy
- <http://www.puritanboard.com/f25/edit-scriptures-support-local-church-membership-8736/> - an interesting dialogue between a few pastors and leaders about church membership
- <http://theblueridgechurch.com/whyilovethechurch> - a blog entry about the Church
- <http://theblueridgechurch.com/beliefs> - what we believe; where we stand
- <http://theblueridgechurch.com/mission> - the purpose God has for our church family
- <http://theblueridgechurch.com/objectives> - what we do as a church to achieve our mission
- <http://theblueridgechurch.com/story> - the background story of BRCC
- <http://tinyurl.com/mhip351a> - Reference for the American Express quote