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THE HERALD

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Church Membership

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What does it mean to be a member of a local church? And, does the Bible teach church membership? Let's take those 2 questions in reverse order and see what God says.

The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Colossians 1:18). A person becomes a member of the universal church by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 1-3). When that happens, unless they are saved in some isolated place where there is no local church, that person should also be a member of a good local church. Those saved when the church began in Acts 2, engaged in 6 primary activities:

1. They met to hear the word of God – “and they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).
2. They met to fellowship – “and fellowship” (Acts 2:42, 46). What does that mean? It meant that they got together to share their spiritual gift (Romans 1:11; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10). Someone has said that our fellowship can either be like a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes. The marbles bang into each other and are in the same bag, but there's really no sharing of the same colors or same designs. They just happen to be in the same bag. On the other hand, the grapes get all squashed together and when

pressure comes on the bag, they bleed into each other and get all gooey and mashed together!

3. They had communion and prayed together – “in the breaking of bread and in the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Communion was not an option for them. Do you consider it an option? If so, you need to review what Jesus said in John 13:13-15). When we get together to pray on Wednesdays, we are following the pattern of the first church. Look up the word “prayer” or “pray” and notice how many times it is commanded and notice the context. It was written for churches.
4. They learned who the authorities were and what their responsibility was to them (Acts 2:43; cf. Hebrews 13:17).
5. They became a forever family in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:44). As a result, they cared for each other. Review the many “one another” verses in the Bible and read Acts 4:32-5:11.
6. They sang and bore a good testimony to the people (Acts 2:47). One time, I went to see a man who visited. I asked him why he was looking for a church and, eventually, I asked him what he is looking for in a church. His words have become etched in my mind. He said, “I'm looking for a church to which I would be excited to invite others.” Are you excited about what is happening at OGBC?

Or, do you isolate yourself and complain about what is not happening?

Now, look back through those six activities and ask yourself: “Am I doing these things as a Christian?” That first church at Jerusalem provides a great model for us. It was the universal church and a local church all at the same time. The only time that has happened.

Pastor John Piper has written this about church membership:

Membership in a local church involves commitment to worship the Lord corporately, edifying brothers and sisters through mutual exhortation and service, cooperating in mission, and holding each other accountable to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord as a witness to the truth of Christ in the world.

So, let’s think about the first question introduced above; “What does it mean to be a member of a local church?”

Being a member of a local church, which is the will of God, involves two primary spheres. First, there is the blessing of being a member of a local church. The blessings of local church membership include a spiritual protection which the Lord gives to those who are in the Body of Christ (1 Peter 3:18-22; Eph. 4:11-16). It includes being a part of a forever-family because all who are in Christ will remain together eternally (Rev. 19:9; 20:4-5). Membership in this family also includes the blessing of accountability. We are accountable to each other for spiritual growth and development (Matthew 18:15-21; Rom. 15:14; Eph. 5:21). This is a good thing which God has designed for our benefit. Consequently, there are real spiritual benefits to being a member of a local church where one is shepherded, counseled, encouraged, confronted, and equipped for service to the Lord. Even when church discipline is necessary, this is a benefit. It is a benefit because church discipline is a search and rescue operation (Matthew 18:12-13). Its goal is to see

reconciliation and restoration to fellowship.

Once again, Pastor John Piper has written this about being a church member:

Covenant church membership is a wise and helpful path for those who desire to walk together in obedience to the Lord and in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27). This becomes evident when we consider how the New Testament teaching on church government and church discipline relate to mutual accountability and thus to the concept of covenant membership. The New Testament teaching about church government and church discipline would be meaningless if some form of commitment to mutual accountability in a body of believers were not expected. The New Testament teaches that the local church has elders or overseers who have special responsibility to equip (Ephesians 4:11) and care for (Acts 20:28) and teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) the members. The New Testament teaches that the members are to respect (1 Thess. 5:12f.) and be submissive to (Hebrews 13:17) these leaders, but not to treat them as infallible (1 Timothy 5:20) or in the place of Christ (Matthew 23:8-12). They are servants, not masters (Luke 22:26), and their leadership comes from their divine call to serve (Acts 20:28), not from their desire to rule. Their leadership does not replace the congregation of believers as the body who also weigh in on matters under the Lord (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4; Acts 6:3; 15:22). This whole picture of called leaders, and people who affirm that leadership, assumes the existence of “church membership” that consists in a corporate life of mutual accountability. Leadership and submission have no meaning where there is no commitment to accountability (that is, to membership).

The promises, which one makes to become a

church member, spells out the second sphere of what it means to be a church member, namely, responsibilities. This begins with our statement of Faith. Each believer (a person who is born again by personal faith in Jesus) agrees to the summary statement regarding what the Bible teaches. There are 12 major Bible doctrines to which we agree. This forms the core of our promises to the Lord and to each other. Of course, this isn't all the Bible says, but it is a basis upon which we can relate to one another as members of the body of Christ and as members of a local church. The initiation as a member continues with trine water baptism. It is the outward symbol of a person's inner change and the sign of commitment to the Lord and to the local church. From that point on, there are 4 fundamental promises which each member should strive to do and progress in. Much, much more is included, of course, in the New Testament, but here are 4 areas that every Christian should carry out regularly.

1. Faithful attendance (Hebrews 10:24-25).

This includes attendance at special services such as communion and business meetings as well as regular Sunday morning and Sunday PM and other mutually agreed upon meetings. Water baptism shows entry into the local church and communion demonstrates continuance as a member in the local church. Because of the importance of prayer in the corporate life of the church (Acts 4:23-31; 12:5; Eph. 6:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:1), we strongly urge regular attendance at the midweek prayer meetings.

2. Financial support (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

We recognize that giving financially is a personal matter between the church member and the Lord. We provide each member (or family) with offering envelopes to help in this weekly reminder. Also, we keep records of weekly offerings, mainly for the benefit of the member (who receives an annual written summary of giving activities, based on what is traceable through the offering envelopes). While we cannot

tell people how much to give, we encourage them to give faithfully and generously, in proportion to how God has blessed them (read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). As a good "rule of thumb" (based on pre-Mosaic Old Testament examples), we encourage members to at least tithe (10%) of their gross income (Genesis 14:20; 28:22). See also Malachi 3:8-12.

3. Fruitful use of your spiritual gift for others (John 15:8; Romans 12:4-8; Colossians 1:10; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

The local church is described in the New Testament as a body, with each member functioning as a vital part of it. We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers every true Christian, and gives them spiritual gifts that He expects them to use for the purpose of expanding and encouraging the local church. Therefore, every church member should be involved in at least one of the many ministry activities available in our local church.

4. Witnessing to others (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Col. 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

This is the bottom line. All of us are to tell others about Jesus. How are you doing? The local church provides training and opportunities. As a church, we can assist one another in this most important, fundamental responsibility.

If you are not a church member, we strongly urge you to follow the instructions of our Lord regarding every believer's involvement in the local body of Christ. If you are a church member, but are not functioning as one, the elders are concerned (Heb. 13:17). We are concerned because it is "unprofitable" for you. Someday, all believers will give an account to Jesus for what they have done while in this mortal body (2 Cor. 5:10). Now is your opportunity to do what the Lord has instructed so that you hear, "Well done," on that day. Anything less will result in loss of reward, and regret. If you are a church member striving to carry out your God-given gift and responsibilities, we thank you. We praise God for His faithful people who seek daily to obey His word and honor His great name. Thank you, Jesus, for building this church!

FUNNIES

Questions to Ponder:

- Why is the third hand on the watch called the second hand?
- If a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how would we ever know?
- Why do we say something is out of whack? What is a whack?
- Why does 'slow down' and 'slow up' mean the same thing?
- Why does 'fat chance' and 'slim chance' mean the same thing?
- Why do 'tug' boats push their barges?
- Why do we sing 'Take me out to the ball game' when we are already there?
- Why are they called 'stands' when they are made for sitting?
- Why is it called 'after dark' when it really is 'after light'?
- Doesn't 'expecting the unexpected' make the unexpected expected?
- Why are a 'wise man' and a 'wise guy' opposites?
- If work is so terrific, why do they have to pay you to do it?
- If all the world is a stage, where is the audience sitting?
- Why do we wash bath towels? Aren't we clean when we use them?

Grandparents Answering Machine:

"Hello, please leave your message after you hear the beep. Beeeppp....

If you are one of our children, dial 1 and

then select the option from 1 to 5 in order of arrival so we know who it is.

If you need us to stay with the children, press 2.

If you want to borrow the car, press 3.

If you want us to wash your clothes and iron them for you, press 4.

If you want the grandchildren to sleep here tonight, press 5.

If you want us to pick up the kids at school, press 6.

If you want us to prepare a meal for Sunday or to have it delivered to your home, press 7.

If you want to come to eat a meal here, press 8.

If you need money, press 9.

If you are going to invite us to dinner, or, take us to the theater, start talking, we are listening!!

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible. The little girl said, 'When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah'.

The teacher asked, 'What if Jonah went to hell?' The little girl replied, 'Then you ask him'.