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Is Church Membership Biblical?

INTRODUCTION

Most, if not all professing Christians will readily proclaim – “All Scripture is inspired of God and is also profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, instruction, etc.”

We all say that Scripture is our only rule for faith and practice.

We claim that the New Testament provides God-inspired direction for the New Covenant people of God, just like the Old Testament did for Israel.

But where do these writings ever reveal the notion of placing your membership in a local congregation? Where is “local church membership” emphasized?

If “*placing your membership in a local church*” cannot be found in the Bible, how in the world do all the churches end up with one, and why do we get our feathers so ruffled when it is questioned?

Why do we elevate that which has no foundation in Scripture?

The answer: The sad fact of the matter is that nobody really submits himself/herself to the Scripture.

But all of us, to one degree or another, submit ourselves quite well to the traditions and words of men.

Even our so-called church traditions are not above constructive and corrective criticism. Or are they? Should this concern us? The idea of changing cherished traditions takes us out of our comfort zone and leaves us with the stark reality that we have been deceived and misled. Who likes to discover that their belief systems are wrong?

But you might say, "this is what the church fathers taught. The 'majority' that has gone before us have taught this."

If this is your mindset, I'm afraid that you have fallen prey to the spirit that rules inside the walls of Christendom.

We need to be like the "Bereans" and search the Scriptures daily. (Acts 17:11) If the quality of being "*more noble*" was a mark of these Bereans as they searched the Scriptures in their unconverted state, how much more should Christians be characterized by a desire to search the Scriptures daily?

PART 1 - Church Membership?

What Does The Bible Say About Membership In A Local Church?

Even D.M. Lloyd-Jones sensed some of this when he said:

"...Do we manifest the freedom of the New Testament church? The notion of people becoming members of a church, and then, coming to sit down and fold their arms and listen, with just two or three doing everything, is quite foreign to the New Testament..."

Are God's people "*church members?*"

When someone today speaks of joining one's self to a church, or becoming members of a church, what exactly are they suggesting? Are they suggesting that there is more than one church a person needs to "join"? The biblical fact is that once a person is joined to Christ, he is a full participating member of the Church, which is the body of Christ.

I Corinthians 6:19

There is nothing else he needs to join. There is nothing else he can join. There are "parts," but only ONE Church, and organizations are not those "parts," institutions are not those "parts", local church buildings are not those "parts," *PEOPLE ARE THOSE PARTS.*

During the New Testament times, the believers themselves were the church itself and there was only one church!

Believers did not, (at least in the sense we today use the phrase "*become members of the church*"), become members of anything! They did not have to "become a member" of what they were automatically a part of by conversion to Christ.

The events of church history: i.e. – the incorporation of confessions, and creeds, and catechisms, and other traditions of men, have changed that situation.

Jesus said, "And if your right hand offends you, cut it off' and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of the members should perish, and not that your whole body be cast into hell." (Matthew 5:30).

James wrote, "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things" (James 3:5).

Paul said, "...Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness..." (Romans 6:13 ff)

.."For as the body is one, and has many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

"...gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body..." (Ephesians 1:22, 23)

"And he is the head of the body, the church..." (Colossians 1:18).

If you look in any reliable dictionary today and search for the word "member," you will always find these terms that are relevant to our topic:

- 1) a part or organ of the body; a limb, as a leg, arm.
- 2) a person that is part of a society, party, community.

The Scriptures quoted above (and many more could have been cited) show what kind of "member" the Spirit uses in His teachings. In the New Testament, a "member" is a part, or organ of a body. By figure, "member" is a spiritual part, or spiritual organ, of a spiritual body.

This fits the first definition of the word given in the dictionary.

So-called church leaders over time, even up until this very day, will twist the word "member." They will change the Biblical use of "member" as a bodily organ, for "member," as one of a society, community or party. That is why we have "Catholic members," "Baptist members," "Presbyterian members," etc.

The New Testament speaks in many figures. Nothing should be read into a figure that was not there in the first place, let alone, take a part from one figure and replace that with another figure. Each figure should completely stand in its own imagery and action.

God uses many figures to relate Himself with His people. He teaches a tender, near, and dear relationship that He holds to each one of His people, representing them as parts in His figures. Some examples are:

A church of saints (1 Cor. 1:2).
A kingdom of citizens (Eph. 2:11).
A building of stones (1 Pet. 2:5).
A vine of branches (John 15:5).
A fold of sheep (John 10:1-18).
A household of children (1 Pet. 4:17; I John 3:10)
A body of members (Rom. 12:4, 5)

This is not a complete list. There is so much more.

False teachings and false doctrines can creep in upon us very easily and over time, harden us and make us resistant to reality. As someone has said, *"...There is nothing so absurd that it cannot be believed as truth if repeated often enough..."*

Many false teachings come from twisting the Scriptures and re-fashioning them to our own preconceived ideas that have been handed down to us.

-Peter spoke of those who would "wrest" the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

-Paul spoke of those who would "pervert" the gospel (Galatians 1:7).

-All through the book of Hebrews, we are continually being told to "look carefully" and "not forget".

-John admonishes us to "test the spirits." (1 John 4:1).

-James warns us, "be not deceived" and "ask God for wisdom." (James 1).

-The Gospels repeatedly warn us to "take heed," "watch."

One way many saints can be beguiled is by taking away a part of one figure from its setting and replacing that with another figure. The result could change things dramatically. You could "prove" anything by reading God's Word that way.

"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles" (Matthew 7:16)?

Are sheep set into buildings?

Does a stone bear much fruit?

To ask such questions is but to answer them.

Does a believer have his "citizenship" in a "local church?" Do you place your "sheepship," or "stoneship" inside a "local church?" By mixing figure parts, you could become any of those relationships in your own mind.

The result would be confusing, let alone, misrepresentative.

Do you place "your membership" in a "local church?" This is the teaching and practice that much of Christendom engage themselves in. Yet, do we ever read of a "church member" in the whole New Testament?

Have we read of "church membership?" Such notions are found nowhere in the Scriptures.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a "*church member*."

Before you can become a "*church member*," a "wresting" of the Scriptures must take place, brought about, in some instances, by spiritual leaders who have a bent to gain their own ends.

You must:

- 1)** change the concept of what the ecclesia really is, which is the totality of saints, into a supposed institution (society, community, or party) where "members" *join themselves to*.
- 2)** change or remove "saints" from the ecclesia (church), and replace those "saints" with "members" from out of the body of Christ. A "church member" becomes a mutant, made-up expression.
- 3)** change the Scriptural use of the word "member" (bodily organ), into an altogether different meaning of "member" (a person of a society, community, or party). Again, a societal or party or "church member" is a mutated teaching.

"Paul compared saints as organs within one body. Each organ, though some were more comely than others, must receive like care, for the good of the whole body. The body is Christ (1 Corinthians 12). But, does the Apostles lesson to the Corinthians about tenderness of each bodily organ, teach us also that there are "Baptist members," as opposed to "Methodist members?"

If God wanted His people to be called by other names than He has written, He would have written those other names in His Word also. We are saints, making up the ecclesia, and not "members," making up an organizational, institutional church (party, society, club).

PART 2 - Church Membership?

“Church membership,” or “placing your membership in a local congregation,” is a great fraud that has been cast upon God’s people by so-called spiritual leaders of the institutional/organized church.

It has no basis whatsoever in the Scriptures and in fact, goes contrary to Scripture. It goes against the Word of God.

The sad fact of the matter is that many *“church members”* have a deep seated sense of fear that their salvation is at risk if they don’t “go to church faithfully,” submit to the supposed authority of pastors, or give of their “tithes and offerings.”

Do you think I'm kidding? A “pastor” recently made the following statement in his sermon regarding the “importance of joining yourself to a local church” :

“...He who willfully refuses to have the ‘church’ as his mother, most likely does not have God as his Father.”

Another "bible teacher" said something similar: ***"One cannot be a faithful Christian without being a member of a faithful local church."***

We are also inundated with books galore that lift up and promote the system. One typical book entitled, "What Is a Healthy Church Member?" says the following:

"...For Christians, playing an active part in the local church is not optional. God intends for every believer to contribute to the mission of the local church and experience profound spiritual growth as a result. This book shows church members, pastors, and church leaders what a healthy church member looks like..."

This brethren, is the kind of twisted teaching that is prevailing as we speak.

But worse than that, it is not only twisted teaching; it is the kind of teaching that is promoting idolatry! Yes; actually promoting idolatry! In one message that I heard recently, the “pastor” said this:

“There is no other institution on earth like the local church. It is to the local church that our greatest devotion should be freely given. Devotion to the local church should be

number one in your life **because devotion to the local church is devotion to Jesus Christ!**

Brethren, anything in life that you put over and above Jesus Christ is plain and simple – idolatry and that includes devoting yourself to your church doctrines, your church creeds, your church rituals, your church leadership, your "church membership" or, let alone, "devoting" yourself to a false, man-made doctrine of an "institutionalized local church system.!" This is idolatry!

And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God 2 Cor. 6:16

Little children, guard yourselves from idols! 1John 5:21

Wherefore, my beloved, flee from the idolatry 1Cor. 10:14

Let all who serve an image be ashamed, Those boasting themselves in idols Psalm 97:7

...And they served their idols; which became a snare unto them... Psalm 106:36

And like it or not, this is exactly what is occurring in today's institutional local church system.

Some of these "bible teachers" are way out of line, but just like as in the days when Jesus Christ walked the earth, it is the so-called "spiritual leaders" who will decry and will denounce anyone who challenges their man-made customs and traditions, because they claim their territory is divinely appointed. Thus, they make themselves hardened to correction; hardened to the cultivation of a teachable spirit. They make themselves virtually unapproachable.

Furthermore, when you get right down to it, would it surprise you at all to learn that the proclamation of the "*necessity of church membership*" is possibly just a ruse?; a great deception?; a smoke screen?; a diversionary tactic used by "church leaders" to sustain their own image?

Could "church membership" not even be the issue at all, but rather maintaining control, power, authority, and the weekly flow of money? Remember: control, power, authority, and money blind those who possess these worldly trappings.

Church leaders, during any age, cannot stand to have their false control, false power, false authority, and free money stripped from them, and will live until they die, defending their delusions. That's why when "leaders" are challenged about the un-scripturalness of "*church membership*," they become excessively officious, "ministerial," defensive, and ultimately, unapproachable.

Human nature verifies that all churches and its unbiblical hierarchy seek personal disciples that will become members of their particular belief system. If you “*become a member*” of their local congregation, then you are expected to adopt the beliefs and practices of that particular group. It also means that you will invariably give financial support, generally through tithing. It also means that you recognize and will support the so-called authority figures of the organization.

For “*church leaders,*” “*bible teachers,*” “*pastors,*” etc., to admit they are wrong and change their practices will in many ways destroy the system they have built (along with themselves) because “church membership” is built upon nothing less than a house of sand.

Is it any wonder why “church membership,” coupled with “church attendance,” is being shoved down the throats of Christians in spite of the fact of no Scriptural justification?

It’s the carnality and the natural mind of man that attempts to bring God down into a realm that will enable them to see God according to their belief system that they have set up.

Jesus said in John 10:7, “...**I am the door of the sheep**...”

Did Jesus Christ teach the “The Door” is the church organization that you become a member of? Are you convinced that “The Door” to life and grace is through your church membership or affiliation? Has your church come before Jesus Christ? When you read the words of Scripture, you will not read that non-profit corporations are “The Door” to life, grace, truth, forgiveness, or anything!

The church is not an organization.
The church is not a club.
The church is not a place for worship.
The church is not a denomination.
The church is not a building.

The church is a purchased possession bought and paid for with the sinless blood of Christ. If we who call ourselves Christians attempt to modify or redesign any part of His church, we make ourselves equal with Him.

He and He alone has the authority of ownership; authority to add, subtract, or keep in place that which He established. He has declared that His word will not change.

He declares that no man can lay any other foundation for the church than the one He has already established. If we change the frame or form that He through the apostles gave it by adding our own rules and regulations, we pollute the pure Scriptural example. We are saying that we are qualified to further define God’s Word; that God

didn't finish His Word because man's clarification is necessary. We must not presume to take upon ourselves the task of correcting God.

There are many false teachers, spiritual overseers, pastors, etc., who push aside the Holy Spirit, the Teacher and Guide to all truth. These people have been a thorn in the side of the church from the beginning. They always want to add or clarify or change something. They claim to be working on behalf of God but always create division within the body with their so-called spirit-led insights. No professing Christian should exchange the revelation of God's Spirit for the babble and the hot air of men.

Just like the Pharisees who came before them, these so-called spiritual leaders seek to elevate themselves by enslaving others; by taking away the liberty which is ours in Christ. These modern day Pharisees add heavy burdens to the shoulders of God's flock; burdens too heavy to be carried. But the yoke of Christ intended for us is easy and the burden light.

We are God's building, as Paul puts it, and God doesn't need any phony substitutes.

How often have you heard the phrase, "go to church?"

If it's not a building, then you can't go to it; you must be part of it. Christians are part of Christ's body, the church. The church is not a material structure to "join ourselves to," but rather a spiritual house.

Christ or the apostles never intended to use resources meant to take care of the family of God on elaborate temples or cathedrals or for that matter, a simple building. Not one cent was ever spent in the entire New Testament to build any structure, church building or seminary.

As a part of the true church, you must live and walk in the true faith of God.

Church is who you are, not a place to visit, and certainly not a place to sign up for membership!

This is one of the great truths that the vast majority of "church members" have not grasped to this day. The so-called "*place of worship*" has no bearing whatsoever on the *act of worship*. In today's post New Testament, post apostolic era, in order to hold together the "church system" that men have developed, there **MUST** be a place of worship, and "*church members*" must gather themselves together at that place so that the "works of men may be seen." And now, this in turn is called a "**worship service.**"

Untold pressure has been placed upon many Christians with Scriptures being quoted out of context and tender/uninformed consciences being manipulated through false guilt and shame. Some pastors and bible teachers will often repeat an unbiblical phrase or

concept many times throughout the message in order to drive home their particular point, yet no one would ever question the theological accuracy at all.

For example, you will hear many times during a message, a pastor saying something along these lines,

“...Here in this letter, the Bible clearly indicates that the Apostle Paul is writing to the members of the church in the context of the gathered church as they are meeting for corporate worship...” or “their corporate seasons of worship.”

WHAT !

“Context of the gathered church?” “Corporate worship?” “A Meeting?” “A worship service?” “Corporate seasons of worship?”

These types of words and phrases are no where mentioned in the Scriptures, yet they are repeated over and over again and instilled in the mind of the listener until it automatically turns into Scripture. Also, at this point, many quotes from a churches Confession of Faith are now intermingled and used to buttress these so-called *biblical teachings*.

This is a very common tactic used by many pastors in many churches. They are unfounded, unbiblical assumptions that are read back into the text. There is nothing in the New Testament about a "church service," or a "worship service," or "corporate worship," or "corporate seasons of worship," etc., etc. That is a non-biblical, post-apostolic evolution that has crept into the halls of Christendom.

In fact, just by way of an aside, any reputable Bible teacher knows for a fact that the word “c-h-u-r-c-h” is not to be found in the original Scriptures. It was a deliberately inserted English word that was used by the KJV translators and has been with us to this day. The King was very crafty indeed. (But that’s another article for another time.)

When you read the Epistles, it is apparent that the Spirit of God is not trying to get us to be more faithful to attend church services!

Remember that when these letters were written, Christians did not even have so-called "church services" or **church buildings**, for that matter!

"Church" is not now, and never was a physical building to congregate in to worship God.

When you say the word "church", what comes to mind? Do you think of your particular denomination or the building with its pulpit, platform, pews, and hymnals? Imagine. Many of today’s church goers confuse the building with the church.

What a vision. Can you see it? Christ returns and millions of buildings rise to meet him in the sky while all of God's children wave goodbye. Don't laugh!

If someone asked you directions to your church, what would you tell them?

Remember this Scriptural truth that we often forget: "Howbeit the Most High dwells NOT in temples made with hands." Acts 7:48

A lot in our religion is predicated on the notion, *"you must meet at your church location for worship services,"* or *"you must place your membership in a local congregation."*

Yet few ever ask, "Where does God's Word reveal the need for this practice?"

We must remember that human traditions are not neutral and Jesus said that they come from false religious leaders and over time take on the force of law (Mark 7:5-13) and God's Word is made of no effect.

Conclusion

Why haven't you heard this before? Why hasn't this aspect of the Scriptures been shouted from the rooftops, and echoed from pulpits across this land? To even ask such questions is to answer such questions.

Unfortunately, for many in positions of church leadership, they feel that they have invested too much money, time, and education in doing it wrong, to now turn and walk away to do it right. It's easier to justify or ignore your conscience in regards to the Truth of the matter. After all, what will they do with their lives and all of these buildings? It's too late now to change, isn't it?

It all depends on how serious their love and commitment is to Christ and His Word.

Sad to say, it is plain to see that for many, they are serious all right; except for the fact that their love and their commitment is to the "church fathers" and to their words and practices.

"...Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, this people honors me with their lips; But their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men." Matthew 15:7-9

As someone has so rightly and potently said, "...It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it."

How true.....how true!

Brethren, the time for sitting in pews, listening to the one hour monologue, and thinking this is somehow "fellowship" or that it constitutes "*being gathered at a worship service*" is long over. God is merciful in our stages of ignorance and is patient as we grow.

But Christ never intended His people to be treated this way. He wants them to move beyond immaturity and grow up into mature men and women of God who rest confident in the leadership of the Holy Spirit more than men or services or listening to one hour monologues week after week.

He wants them to find their security **in Him alone**, not in men and religious programs. When poor, deceived Christians follow the pathways of men, that is, clinging to "*church membership*" and "*church buildings*," they become blinded to their own condition and they fall prey to the danger of actually embracing a worldly mind-set that cleverly creeps in through the guise of spirituality.

Though no such practice took place in Scripture, the traditions of pews, pulpits, steeples, altars, stained glass, elevated platforms, and of course, the professional clergy, continue to this very day. So accepted are these traditions that even the building is known as the Church. Christians believe that the building is the house of God and call it so. No thought whatsoever is ever given to Scripture on this matter or it would have been clearly seen that each of God's people is His house. (Hebrews 3:6; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20; II Corinthians 6:16; Romans 8:9; John 2:21; etc., etc.) They would have known that God does not dwell in temples made with hands.

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

God is still in the business of not only building His True Church, but also delivering His True Church from a Babylonian captivity of religious bureaucrats and controlling spirits.

Be aware though, that to take the step toward truly following the New Testament pattern for when, where, how, and why the believer's came together for fellowship, will invoke Satan's anger like nothing else. Against THIS church, he can't win. But if he can keep you from becoming part of the true church, he can keep you spiritually impotent for a lifetime.

You will learn very fast just how little interest indeed many of your supposed Christians friends have in God's Truth.

Remember; Jesus Christ, the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the followers of Jesus Christ were hated and despised by most of the religious teachers and spiritual leaders in His day. Do you think that anything has changed regarding this in today's churches? Yes. It's gotten worse!

There will be those who seek to hold you back; those from your family, your church, and those among your friends.

They will accuse you of heresy, of joining a cult, of abandoning your friends, and family. It will get plenty rough before it gets better.

Your choice to live by God's Word will reveal enemies and persecution from sources you never dreamed of. You will be mocked, lied about, slandered up and down, left and right, especially by those in so-called "positions of church leadership." This is all that these people know how to do. The very people who are supposedly in the best position to inform their congregations of the truth of this matter, turn out to be the very same people who will destroy and silence you.

The day "church leaders" start to deal honestly with the Truths that we have briefly looked at, will be the day that many will quit their jobs. So don't hold your breath.

Just remember to count the cost. If they hated Him, they will hate you also. God will be with you. He will sustain you. So be patient and remain faithful. It will all be for your good in the end. You can do all things through Him.

Keep in mind that this clay vessel we call flesh is but an ugly scaffolding, a necessary evil, which will be taken down and done away with when this temple of God, His Church, is finally finished and we are all "conformed to the image of His Son."

"Who shall separate us from the love of the Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

According as it is written; For thy sake, are we being put to death all the day long, we have been reckoned as sheep for slaughter.

Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquering through him that hath loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor messengers nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

Nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8: 35-39

You will make it through the trials that lay ahead of us all. "God will supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory."

God does indeed have a membership, but that membership is UNTO HIM, not to some corporate structure that people can go to once a week for a so-called "worship service!" Such activities are contrived by the defiled minds and hands of men.

Can you just imagine Christ going to the state to seek papers of incorporation and a tax free status?

No such entity recognizes "*the voice of the True Shepherd*" who alone is the Head of His own unincorporated body.

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You might also be interested in the following brief article as it relates to this issue. It examines a recent blog post made by a pastor in which his main concern had to do with people who skipped church. He says that "*skipping church is a really bad idea and spiritually dangerous.*"

Click the direct link below to read how this is dealt with and exposed.

["AS THE CHURCH BURNS"](#)

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