

24-September-2023 | Discussion Questions
Church Membership | Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 | 9marks.org (Pr. Mark)

1. How would you prove to someone from the Bible that church membership is necessary?
2. What metaphors for the church do you think are the strongest? Why?
3. Why does our culture fight against the concept of church membership?
4. Based on the sermon and today's lesson notes, what are examples of what church membership looks like in a healthy church?

Lesson Notes: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

1) Church membership is in the Bible.

- a) The Bible speaks clearly about church membership.
 - i) The church discipline passages of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 prove the reality of church membership.
 - ii) Church membership must first exist in order for someone to be removed from it.
- b) Church membership needs to be understood in light of what the Bible says about the church.
 - i) The church is described as the family of God, so membership in a local church looks like membership in a family (1 Tim. 5:1-2).
 - ii) The church is described as a holy nation, so membership in a local church resembles citizenship; we are called to submit to our leaders and to one another as members of the kingdom.
 - iii) The church is described as the body of Christ, so membership involves dependence on one another (1 Cor. 12:21-26).
 - iv) There are more than ninety metaphors describing the church: flock, temple, people, vine, pillar and buttress of truth, lady and her children, etc.

2) Church membership is an individual and corporate necessity.

- a) Anti-institutional sentimentality leads people astray.
 - i) Being a member of a local church is an essential part of being a member of the body of Christ.
 - ii) The idea of a Christian who does not submit to a church is foreign to the Bible.
- b) Church membership is required for obedience to all the Bible commands.
 - i) Christians are called to submit to their leaders (Heb. 13:17).
 - ii) Christians are called to build one another up by speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15-16).
 - iii) Christians are called to submit to one another and address each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19-21).
- c) Church membership is required for a church to exercise authority.
 - i) The church exercises authority by bringing people into membership through baptism, which identifies them with Christ.

- ii) The church exercises authority by affirming members through the Lord's Supper, identifying all those who partake of the one bread as one body (1 Cor. 10:17).
 - iii) The church exercises authority by disciplining members through excommunication in severe cases of unrepentant sin.
- d) Christians cannot exist as the body of Christ apart from a self-conscious commitment to a local church.
- i) Church membership is the only way to fulfill all the Bible's commands about life together.
 - ii) Church membership is the only way for the church to respond to the authority given to it by the Word to announce who is in the church.
- e) The authority of the church to declare to the world who is identified with Christ is rooted in Scripture.
- i) Jeremiah and Ezekiel promised a new covenant wherein God would place His law on people's hearts and forgive their sins but did not answer how we will know who the people of the new covenant are.
 - ii) The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion is an invisible work, so the invisible community of the church must become visible.
 - iii) Jesus gave the Apostles and the church the keys of the kingdom for binding and loosing, which they exercised through baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - iv) The relationship of justification and sanctification is analogous to the church: you prove that you belong to Christ by belonging to a church.
 - v) Christians in the New Testament are united together as the church, loving one another as they loved God (1 John 4:20-21).

3) Church membership is defined as a church's formal affirmation and oversight of an individual's submission to a local body of believers.

- a) The church affirms a believer's profession of faith and oversees a believer's discipleship to Christ while the believer commits to growing in Christ, being disciplined inside of a church's affirmation and oversight.
- b) The relationship between the church and a believer implies that they know one another.
 - i) A church should know what its potential members believe, and potential members should know what the church believes.

- ii) This basic principle can be seen in the exchange between Jesus and Peter: "But who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20).
 - iii) Church membership classes and membership interviews should establish a conversation between the believer and the church.
- c) Church membership is how a line is kept between the church and the world.
- i) Contemporary sensibilities make Christians uncomfortable with this idea, but the people of God have always been distinguishable.
 - ii) Keeping the line between the church and the world clear is a powerful witness that God really does save people, calling them to live as salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16).
- d) Church membership in a healthy church will reflect the very same metaphors the Bible uses of the church.
- i) Church membership in the healthy life of a church should resemble the everyday gospel-centered lives of Christians living for each other.
 - ii) The first-century church is a perfect example of the fellowship that church membership provides (Acts 2:42–47).
 - iii) Church membership is not a lifeless institution reserved for one day of the week; it is a vital part of the everyday needs of God's people.
- e) Church membership matters.
- i) Church membership is biblical, it creates the church, and it is a prerequisite for the Lord's Table.
 - ii) Church membership is how we officially represent the King, declare our highest allegiance, and embody and experience the biblical metaphors for the church.
 - iii) Church membership is how we serve other Christians, follow other Christians, and how leaders lead other Christians.
 - iv) Church membership is what makes church discipline possible, structuring our lives and building a witness that invites the nations.