

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP—PRACTICE AND PRIVILEGE

1. The Definition of Church Membership, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

A Baptized Christian formally committing oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes and in support of biblically qualified leaders.

Much “church” terminology in the book of Acts fits only with the concept of churches with recognized members.

2. Historical development of formal church membership.

A. Early Church: membership by confession of faith and baptism.
Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:47-48, 16:14-15,31-33.

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.

B. Under the Roman Catholic system of Church Government.

C. The Protestant Reformation—freedom from controlling authority of the Catholic system.

D. The developing mind-set of congregational authority and responsibility.

3. Why Formal Church Membership.

A. Membership provides a mechanism for elevating gospel clarity in a congregation.

B. Membership provides a signal by which newcomers can declare their commitment to a church family.

The relationship principle: You cannot expect closeness to people without yielding some of your independence.

A question: Why would a person attend a church that they did not feel right joining or not care to join?

People who have publicly identified with a congregation usually feel more moral seriousness to help work through a problem than those holding on to their freedom to hit the door and look for greener pastures.

C. Formal Church membership gives congregants a voice in leadership, finances, and doctrinal standards.

D. Church Membership signals the Elders who desires to be under their care and direction.

In a day when commitment is a rare commodity and self-interest coupled with fierce independence are high values, it should come as no surprise that church membership is becoming a low priority to so many believers.

Church membership is implied in the way the New Testament requires elders to care for the flock in their charge, 1 Peter 5:1-5.

The Church needs some kind of formal mechanism to work against cultural resistance to authority.

Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13: Who are your leaders?

4. Why Some Christians do not want to Receive Church Membership.

A. It makes some feel safe from being approached about leadership service.
How will you know if God has equipped you and wants to bless you as a leader if you are formally unavailable?

B. Some are holding on to bad feelings from past churches.
Beware of projecting on new friends the wounds experienced in former relationships.

C. Some want to avoid possible persecution or association with criticism of the church.

Conclusion:

To those of you who are members, thank you for declaring that you are formally committed to this congregation.

For those of you yet to make that declaration, we all eagerly look forward to you applying for membership and formally claiming that you stand with the commitments of this congregation.