

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 62 What Does Church Membership Mean?

Editors Note: This lesson was not originally included in the corpus of work that Pastor Christensen prepared under the overarching title, **Questions We Want Answered**. He prepared it separately for a church membership class. The editor thought it was of such helpfulness that it should be included in this book

*Scripture: Ephesians 2:13-22; 3:9-12, 16-19, 20-21*

Believe it or not, some people do not believe in church membership. The reason why I have chosen to say believe it or not, is because the people I have in mind are Christian people. They are people, to use Paul's definition of a Christian, who worship God in spirit, rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Philippians 3:3) Oh, it isn't that they disagree with the concept of the local church. They know enough about Scripture to know the church has both a universal and local setting. They know that nine of the thirteen letters in the New Testament were addressed to believers living and worshiping together in specific places.

What they do not believe in is membership in a formal sense. The kind of membership where you attend an instruction class, give your testimony before others, are voted upon, and finally received into membership before others. They feel the whole thing is too structured and restricts their freedom to go and come as they please. They feel they are able to serve Christ just as well without having their name on the church roll. Beside, it doesn't say anything in the New Testament about formal church membership.

The object of our study this morning is to suggest that membership in a local church has meaning that every Christian should seriously consider.

#### **I. MEMBERSHIP MEANS THAT I BELIEVE ENOUGH TO JOIN:**

Paul described Ephesian people as having been without God. (2:12) Now they who were afar off were made nigh by the blood of Christ and their lives were built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and the prophets. (2:20) We are all the time hearing about what is wrong with the church, but there is a great deal

that is right about the church. The church is right because when it is what it should be, it reveals Jesus Christ.

I have found this so in my own life. It was through the church I learned about Jesus who could be my sin-bearer, savior, satisfier and sovereign. Church membership is a way of better identifying with what is being said about Christ in a given place. It is saying to a watching world, "I believe in that message, I believe in what is being said in that place about Jesus Christ." My motive is pure at that point. People join churches for all kinds of reasons, but this does not negate the fact that there are those who join for the right reasons. Clearly, faith does not function in a vacuum. We strengthen the witness of a local assembly when we add our voice in membership to the common confession already being heard.

## **II. MEMBERSHIP MEANS THAT I AM GRATEFUL ENOUGH TO JOIN:**

While it is true that the church is an organism deriving its life from outside of itself, it is also true that the church is an organization. It is an event. It takes its place in the time and space world. It is made of people. We are all indebted to what these people have done for us. They have constituted the Lord's interests in this world through the centuries. They have fought for sound doctrine which has brought the message to the generation in which we live. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:9 that all men may see what is the fellowship of the mystery and in verse ten, that these things might be known by the church. We can be grateful that the church has been the means of preparing the person who brought the good news about Christ to our lives. The challenge of churchmanship is much enhanced when we are willing to be grateful.

## **III. MEMBERSHIP MEANS THAT I AM DEPENDENT ENOUGH TO JOIN:**

One of the qualities that a person shows when joining a local church is that of dependence. It is not only a display of strength in spiritual matters, it indicates need. Paul wrote to Ephesian believers, *"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man."* It is the way of the Holy Spirit to strengthen in the inner person and to do it corporately. There is food which is served when people meet in fellowship which is served no where else. The Bible knows nothing of the lone wolf Christian. It would seem to me that visible membership is a way of expressing one's need for what the ministry and fellowship of Christians have to offer. It is interesting for

me to note that we join without hesitation other organizations when we have a need.

#### **IV. MEMBERSHIP MEANS THAT I AM COMMITTED ENOUGH TO JOIN:**

Faith is an invisible activity. It cannot be put on a scale and weighed or measured with a slide rule. Yet, there are ways by which people know we belong to Christ. It seems reasonable that one of these ways is how we stand along side others who love the Lord. Paul admonished believers that Christ was to receive glory in the church. (Ephesians 3:21)

Surely, church membership is a sign to the world that we are identifying with Christ. In fact, it is one of the things that the world expects of a Christian. Christians who are like islands floating around very often give the impression that the church is not worth joining and serve to strengthen the feeling the unbeliever already has.

Secondly, the witness in the community is strengthened when the membership is broadened. I am frequently asked by people how many members Hope Church has. When it is known that the church is almost ten years old and we have a membership of less than a hundred people, I am certain that not much of an impression has been made. For some reason, membership roles are quite important to community life. Joining the church is one way to say that something is happening here that is worthwhile.

Thirdly, joining the church is a way of encouraging other members. It is a way of saying that I am not here just to receive, but to give. It is a way of saying, "I want to be part of the team." It is not the universal or invisible church that builds buildings, buys land, conducts Sunday School and sends missionaries around the world, it is the local church which does that. The work of Jesus today, humanly speaking, is dependent on the effectiveness of the local church. Every true believer, thankful for his membership in the church universal, should give witness to that by affiliating with a local church, seeking to work in the closest relationship possible to fulfill the Great Commission.

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