

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

GBC EQUIPPING HOUR | OCTOBER 6, 2019



Introduction

PURPOSE: Determining what biblically warrants a given congregation formalizing their church membership, as it becomes a springboard for genuine church growth.

I. What We Are Talking About

- A. List of Names: Just the sound of those three words is foreboding. But Scripture does not necessarily take it in such a grim light. The *ultimate* list of names is actually the “Book of Life” (Revelation 20:12) which is a positive, not a negative. Short of that, the Bible does furnish a list of names in various historical backdrops in both the Old Testament (Nehemiah, chapters 7-12) and the New Testament (1 Timothy 5). Nothing terribly new here.
- B. Agreed Upon Parameters: Yes, technically speaking you could ask each person coming through the door, “do you agree with our doctrinal statement?” and “are you willing to work with our local church structure?” However, it is much easier to have this done all at once in a simple formalized church meeting.
- C. Mutual Accountability: In an age when autonomy is king it takes self-initiative to ask someone, “how is your walk with the Lord?” with a willingness that she can ask you the same question in return. Church membership in so many ways sets the pace for this.
- D. To Some Degree, Routineness: Sameness does not have to mean stagnation. Like being married to the same person, you learn to grow with your soulmate and grieve with him/her as well. This is where “Our Town” replaces “Saturday Night Fever.”

II. Proceeding with Caution on Something Not Outright Commanded in Scripture

- A. Fact: The church is never commanded to literally apply ink to paper to formalize a list of who is a “member.”
- B. Past Mistakes:
 1. The “one size fits all” fallacy.
 2. The “I’ve got insurance” fallacy.
 3. Setting unhelpful precedents.
 4. Perfectionism.
 5. Romanticism.
- C. Things Not Directly Commanded in Scripture: Easter, Christmas, age-focused or gender-focused programs, modern plumbing, heating and air conditioning, parking, roofs, lighting, windows, lawn care, church marquee, website and (reluctantly) the coffee kiosk.

III. The Church –Gazing...While Taking Three Steps Back

- A. Longevity: For two thousand years Christians on the whole have weathered persecutions, loss of property, exile, deep disappointments, and internal fractures. And still the risen Christ as our flagship goes before us.
- B. A Simple Structure Built on the Great Commission: As Christ’s ambassadors we are the closest thing people could have to the Lord literally walking among them.
- C. Two Ordinances: Communion and baptism, both centered on the cross, to be practiced until the Lord returns.

IV. Lessons from Israel

- A. Good Leaders: It is a colossal undertaking to both raise up and keep employed faithful godly men to lead the church. Truly God does this work through heaven-sent knowledge and his empowering. Examples: Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, etc..

Though the raising up of God's man is God's work, it nonetheless requires a huge amount of patience and forbearance on the part of the pastor/elder and on the part of the congregants. Our tendency is to dwell upon the negatives (Numbers 13:25-32); all the while we may be called to do double duty, carrying a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other (Nehemiah 4:15-18).

- B. Bad Leaders: In the Old Testament bad leaders have come as a result of the people looking away from God (see 1 Samuel 8 and 2 Timothy 4:3). So God merely gave them the desires of their heart with all the hard consequences packed on. Bad leaders also come from the leader himself getting tired of the Old Book, seeking the fast track to fame and acceptance (see 1 Samuel 13-15 and Jeremiah 23).

- C. No Leaders: If both pastors and congregants take their hands off the plow given to them (i.e., local church responsibilities), rocks, voids and gravity soon take control. No knowledge is replaced with false teaching.

And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives, according to their number, from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them. ²⁴ And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.

²⁵ **In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

– Judges 21:23-25

Membership Matters Course Outline:

- Introduction
- Local Church as a Growing Structure
- Local Church for Building Up a People
- Vital Leadership Roles
- Examples of Accountability in the NT
- More Examples of Accountability in the NT
- Failed Systems of the Past
- (Thanksgiving Break – No Equipping Hour)
- *Trellis and the Vine* Book Review - Part 1 of 2
- *Trellis and the Vine* Book Review - Part 2 of 2