

Church Membership

The importance of personally committing yourself to a particular local church

Let's just consider one passage (though a lot more could be said). First Timothy 3:15 describes the local church as "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Let's examine each description of the local church.

(1) The local church is the family of God. If you consider yourself to be a Christian, you should consider yourself to be a part of the family of God. What is the family of God? The Apostle Paul says the local church is the family of God. Understanding the *local church* to be the family, or household, of God, what Christian would want to live life without being part of the family of God? Why would a Christian want to be only *loosely connected* to his family? You must be committed to a local church because the local church is your family.

(2) The local church is the church of the living God. God owns the local church. He started it, builds it, energizes it, grows it, and purifies it. Dead idols have their assembly of worshippers, and God has His – it is the local church. You should commit yourself to what God is doing. He is building His church – the local church.

(3) The local church holds up God's truth for all to see. It is the "pillar of the truth." Through baptism, the Lord's Supper, authoritative preaching, humble listening, regular attendance and personal accountability in a local church, the truth of God is held up for all to see and receive. The local church is God's means of holding up the truth for all to see. Commit yourself to a local church so you can "see" the truth and so you can be a part of displaying God's truth to the world!

(4) The local church is the foundation of the truth. As the "support of the truth," the local church provides stability for God's truth. The local church, alone, is able and responsible to defend the truth, proclaim it, and live it out. See Matthew 18:15-17 where Jesus explains one particular way the local church can support the truth like no other ministry or institution. Commit yourself to a local church so you can be a part of God's plan for preserving His truth.

This may be the first time you have considered how God's program for saving people, growing Christians, glorifying Himself, and proclaiming His truth is centered around the local church. Don't lose sight of this! Don't just dip your toe in to see if you like the water! Jump in! The local church is the family of God; it's the church of the living God; it's the pillar and support of the truth! This is why you should make a personal commitment to a local church.

The importance of making your commitment known to the leadership and members of a local church

Some might say, "I am committed to this local church, but I don't need to go through any formal membership process to make my commitment known." Others may say, "I think everyone knows I am committed to them. I don't think I need to formally join a church." This reasoning won't do. Let's see why.

(1) Your shepherds need to know you are committed, and you need to know your shepherds are committed to you.

Shepherds have responsibilities toward those in the church, so they need to know exactly who is a part of the church. What are those responsibilities? For the sake of time, I will list just two.

First, they are to shepherd you. Consider these passages:

1 Peter 5:1-3

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

In light of these passages, every elder/shepherd must ask, “Who is the flock?” Would the elders consider you a part of the flock? Make sure you are being shepherded!

Second, they are to watch over your soul. Look at this Scripture.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

For whom will the shepherds give an account? For you? Are you a part of this church? The shepherds need to know. Do you want the shepherds to give an account for your soul as God intends?

Make your commitment known, not only for the sake of your shepherds, but also for the sake of the other members of the body.

(2) The people in the church need to know you are committed to them, and you need to know the church is committed to you.

Why do they need to know? They need to know because they have responsibilities toward those in the church. They must identify “those in the church.”

Galatians 6:10

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Even when it comes to “doing good” you are responsible to prioritize some people over others – those in your “household” (local church) – over those who are not in your church. Let’s look at a few examples of responsibilities toward members of a local church that require members to recognize their mutual commitment to one another.

First, when a brother or sister in the local church is “caught in a trespass” (or, sin), others are responsible to restore the person in the spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1). According to Galatians 6:2, this is the responsibility to “bear one another’s burden.” It’s hard work that members of the “household of faith” do for one another.

Do you want others to restore you when you are caught in a sin? If you do (I hope you do!), you must make sure other members of the body know you are a part of the church. Do you want to help others who are caught in a sin? If you do (I hope you do!), you must know if the person is a part of the body. You can’t help everybody, but you must bear the burdens of those in your family (your “household,” Gal. 6:10).

Second, when one member of the body weeps or rejoices, you are to weep and rejoice with him. In 1 Corinthians 12:25b-26 Paul speaks of how God has “composed the body” with the goal “that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” God wants all the members of the body to care for one another – to be like a tight-knit family – but it would be impossible for you to care for all Christians everywhere in the way Paul is describing. You must know who is a part of the body and who is not. Others must know you are part of the body so they can weep with you and rejoice with you and love you fervently like family!

Third, Matthew 18:15-17 outlines the process of lovingly reproofing other members of the body. Ultimately, when a so-called brother refuses to listen to the loving reproof coming from the whole church, he is to be put out of the church.

1 Corinthians 5:11-13

...I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, ...not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders?... Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

The Apostle Paul told those in the church at Corinth to remove the unrepentant man from the church. They were not to forbid the man from coming to the church services, but rather treat him like an unbeliever (of course, unbelievers are allowed to come to church services – see 1 Corinthians 14:14-25).

But, how could they remove the wicked man from them and still allow him to come to their church services? They had to make it clear that he was no longer a part of the church even if he did come to church meetings. In order for the church at Corinth to carry out these responsibilities, and in order for you and I to carry out responsibilities such as this, we must know who is a part of the church and who is not.

Fourth, members of the body are to have mutual, fervent love for one another.

1 Peter 4:8-9

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

This fervent love in the body prevents sin. It also motivates people to show hospitality to one another. We saw previously that Peter definitely writes in a local church context. Peter speaks in 5:1-3 of the “elders among you” who are “exercising oversight...over those allotted to your [the elder’s] charge...proving to be examples to the flock.”

In order for you to fulfill these responsibilities toward others, you will need to know whether they are a part of the church or not. How will you know if they don’t make their commitment known?

How can we make this work?

How can you make sure the shepherds know you are committed to following their leadership? How can you find out if the church overseers will consider you a part of their flock and commit themselves to fulfilling their responsibilities toward you?

How can you make sure other members of the body know of your commitment to them? How can you find out whether others in the church consider you a part of the body?

You could meet with each shepherd individually to tell him. Then, you could have every family in the church over to your house for a meal to tell them of your commitment to them and find out if the commitment is mutual. Obviously, this is not practical. We would never have the time for something like this unless our church were really, really tiny.

Perhaps you could send a group email to the whole church and ask for a response from each individual to find out if the commitment is mutual. If everyone did this though, it would be a disaster! There may be unbelievers who would want to be members not knowing what membership even means. Each person would have to make sure the person understood the gospel and the meaning of membership. This simply would not work.

Membership at Christ Community Church

We have formalized a process for membership to assist us all in making known our mutual commitment to Christ and one another. First, the membership application will ask you to express agreement with our statement of faith, constitution, the gospel, and some basic, Scriptural commitments to others in the local church.

Second, we have a membership class which allows us to explain where the church is headed, who the leaders are, the various responsibilities of leaders toward you, and your responsibilities toward the church.

Third, we will give you an opportunity to verbalize your commitment to the entire church, and the church will be given the opportunity to verbalize their commitment to you.

The Benefits of Church Membership

What a joy it is to be a part of the local church! It is the best place on earth!

First, you enjoy spiritual accountability from those that know and love you. Members are responsible to love other members of the body fervently, and this includes gently helping each other live in a way that pleases Christ (1 Pt. 4:8-9; Gal. 6:1-2).

Second, you enjoy material and physical support from others in the body. Members are responsible to love each other in practical ways – meeting each others' needs (Rom. 12:13; 1 Jn 3:17-18).

Third, you receive strength through the prayers of others. Church members are responsible to “pray for one another” (Jam. 5:16).

Fourth, you receive teaching, counsel, and prayer from shepherds who are committed to caring for you.

Fifth, you profit greatly by bringing joy to your leaders as you fulfill their desire for people to commit themselves to the church and then make their commitment known to the body.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Sixth, you are right in the middle of God's plan and purpose for biblical ministry – the local church! “I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

A special appeal from the elders at CCC to regular attendees:

Please commit yourself to the members of CCC and make your commitment known through membership. Do it for the sake of the your brothers and sisters who are eager to commit themselves to you. Do it for our sakes. We desire to shepherd you faithfully and lovingly. Do it ultimately for the glory of Christ. Make your commitment to Christ's body known! If you have questions, please contact us.

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