

What is Church Membership good for?

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This month we will be inducting new members into the most honored body the world has ever known: The Church of Jesus Christ. The initiation fee for this club is so high that no human could ever have paid it, God himself had to pick up the tab. The benefits of the club never expire. The fellowship of the club is unmatched; you receive intimate access to the Lord himself ([John 17:23](#)).

With such benefits, you would think that Church membership would be held in infinitely high esteem. But for many reasons, people seem to think less of membership than ever before. If you are one who looks upon church membership lightly, then I invite you to reconsider.

When we hear the word membership, we immediately think of a club. A member pays dues, comes to meetings and fulfills the obligations of a club member. When you move, or no longer have time for the club you simply withdraw your membership and move on.

The bible says membership is much more intimate. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ([Ephesians 5:29-30 ESV](#))

To be a church member means we are a member of Christ's body, just like your finger is a member of your body. His blood runs through us. His Spirit animates us. His will moves us. He feels our pain, cleanses us when we get dirty, nurses our wounds, and cherishes us with pride.

Leaving the church is not simply leaving a club. When you walk away, you dismember yourself from the body. Jesus and the rest of the body sorely misses you, and bleeds after your departure. You cut yourself off from your only source of life and nourishment. Like an amputated hand, you will slowly bleed out, wither and die.

I hear you complaining already. "My, he's being a bit dramatic. I am a member of Christ, I just can't find a local church that I like. I am a member of the universal church, but just not of any one in particular."

I want you to understand that being a part of the universal church without submitting to a local church is not possible, biblical or healthy.

First, it's simply not possible. To imply that you can be part of the greater community without first being part of the smaller is not logical. You cannot be part of Rotary International without

also being part of a Local Chapter. You cannot be part of the universal human family without first being part of a small immediate family.

Second, it is biblical. Every letter in the New Testament assumes Christians are members of local churches. The letters are addressed to local churches. They teach us how to get along with other members, how to encourage the weak within the church, how to conduct ourselves at church, and what to do with unrepentant sinners in the church. It commands us to submit to our elders, and encourages us to go to our elders to pray. All of these things are impossible if you are not a member of a local church. (See 1 and 2 Corinthians, James, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter for references)

Asking where the bible commands you to be a church member is like asking where the USGA rulebook for golf insists you be a human. The whole book is addressed to the church.

Finally, living without Church membership is unhealthy. Independence, the desire to choose for yourself what is right and wrong is at the very heart of sin. You need the humility lesson of submitting to flawed elders. You need the encouragement of sharing victories with your church. You need the fellowship of sharing sufferings with your church.

You need to know that we are all in this life together, and we will not walk away from you just because you let us down or we disagree. We build each other up into the image of Christ, no one can make it alone.

I encourage you to rethink the importance of church membership. Our fellowship may be an affliction, but we are a glorious affliction. And we will walk into glory together.