

## Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church The Importance of Church Membership

- What is the Church? “Those called out” or “an assembly/congregation”.
  - The Church is the community of believers that have been “called out” of their sin through faith in Christ and worship Him corporately (1 Peter 2:9-12).
- What about the Early Church? (Acts 2:41-47)
  - At the beginning of the Church we see the devotion and commitment given by all those in it. They were participating in all of what we are still called to do (Acts 2:42).
  - Belonging to the Church was a distinguishing mark that they were proud to bear. Being numbered among those in the Church (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 16:5) meant something significant. This showed the separation and distinction between someone transformed by the work of Jesus Christ and someone who was still dead in their sin.
  - In Acts 6 there arose a concern in the church and the apostles gathered the “full number of the disciples” to discuss (Acts 6:2). They were told to choose men from “among [them]” to resolve these issues. Godly men “full of the Spirit” were chosen and used as God’s instruments to grow His church (Acts 6:7).
- Why should we desire to be a member of a local body of believers? (1 Corinthians 14:40)  
Membership defines...
  - Eldership: Biblical elders are servants of God chosen and commanded to lead others by a Christlike example (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Based on their lives of godliness and wisdom (not perfection), they are given the responsibility to care for the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-5). Believers are clearly called to submit to the authority God has given them, which is meant to be an advantage to the church (Hebrews 13:17). Their task is to preach the Word of God faithfully in order to build up the Church and call sinners to repentance (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 2:14-19; 4:1-5).
  - Discipline: We are commanded to preserve the purity of the church and to restore sinning brothers and sisters back into the fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Church discipline is reserved for those who live in continual unrepentant sin, but are still enjoying the graces and benefits of being in fellowship with other believers. In order to take the worth of Christ and the severity of sin seriously, we must address sin in the church through the proper channels/authorities (Matthew 18:15-20).
  - The Use of Spiritual Gifts: We are commanded to exercise our spiritual gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Romans 12:6-8). What we have been given is for the service of others in order for God to be glorified (1 Peter 4:10-11).
  - Discipleship/Accountability: We are commanded to go into the world and proclaim the Gospel in order for men and women to receive the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Upon receiving salvation we must also continue to teach others to wage war against sinful passions and live in obedience to God’s Word (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16; 1 Peter 2:11-12). The strength we are given as we grow into the image of Christ (sanctification/holiness) is meant to be used to help one another remain faithful until the end (Hebrew 3:12-14; Romans 15:1-7; Galatians 6:1-5).

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- Fellowship: We are commanded to join together in worship of the one, true God (Hebrews 10:24-25). This participation with one another should be a joy to us. The gathering of Christ's church is the closest glimpse of heaven we can be a part of on earth (Romans 15:5-7).

*“Living out a commitment to a local church involves many responsibilities: exemplifying a godly lifestyle in the community, exercising one’s spiritual gifts in diligent service, contributing financially to the work of the ministry, giving and receiving admonition with meekness and in love, and faithfully participating in corporate worship. Much is expected because much is at stake, for only when every believer is faithful to this kind of commitment is the church able to live up to her calling as Christ’s representative on earth.”*

*(John MacArthur)*