

Six Reasons to Join a Church

1. To assure ourselves.

Joining a church does not save you. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. However, joining a church certainly does evidence to the world and to other believers that you have been saved (John 14:21; 15:10, 14; 13:17). In fact, joining a church is a tremendous means to assure yourself that you are saved too. How so? By joining a church we are publicly telling others that we are followers of Christ, and others can hold us accountable, making sure our lives match up with our confession. For example, just think about times when you are downcast, discouraged, and maybe even doubting your own salvation. Other church members can come alongside of you and bear witness to the grace of God they have seen in your life in the past. On the other hand, imagine you are straying from the Lord and flirting with sin. Other church members can once again come to you, challenge you, and exhort you to persevere in the faith and remain faithful to Christ. They can remind you of the commitment you made to Christ and to other believers in the church.

Church membership also guards the church from hypocrisy. We cannot claim to know Christ and yet fail to love one another with our words and actions (see 1 John 4:20). When we join a church other church members hold us accountable so that if needed they can say, “Hey, you say you love Jesus but you are not loving others in the body of Christ.”

However, if someone insists on flying solo, removing himself from the church, then he will miss out on this assurance and accountability. Other church members cannot help him because he has decided to go about the Christian life by himself. Individuals that go this route tend to skip around from church to church, staying at a church only as long as no one begins to press them, holding them accountable for their relationship with the Lord and other believers.

One other thing. Earlier we said that the universal church is made visible when each local church gathers. But if one separates himself from the visible, local church, how can others really verify or testify that an individual is part of the universal church, especially to the world who is watching? So while church membership itself does not save a person, nevertheless, it sure can be a reflection of one’s salvation or lack thereof.

2. To evangelize the world.

What kind of witness do we visibly picture to the world when we gather together as those who are united to Christ and who have publicly committed to one another? It is a beautiful and powerful picture that the gospel is real and it changes people from the inside out. The church is to be mission-oriented, for at its core it is a mission organization. We not only preach and teach the gospel, we not only speak the gospel to each other, but as a church we back up our mandate to reach people with this gospel by our actions. God’s design is

that the world would look on and see those in the church loving one another in countless ways and that they too would trust in Christ and be united to his body.

Additionally, those in the church are to cooperate with one another in order to take the gospel not only to those in their immediate area, but to the nations, particularly to those who have never heard of Jesus. So missions is inseparably connected to church membership as church members come together in order to take the gospel abroad. In becoming a church member you have the privilege of joining in that amazing responsibility!

In short, church membership is how the world knows who represents Jesus and who doesn't.

3. To expose false gospels.

When the world looks at us, as a church, it either sees that we believe a true gospel or a false gospel. It sees this by the words we speak and by our deeds and actions. When we gather together and publicly unite with one another, we do so around the one, true gospel.

It's not that we are better than those in the world; no, we are sinners too. The difference, however, is that we know that we are sinners while the world does not. And we know that we are totally and utterly dependent upon Christ for our salvation, while the world does not.

When we commit to one another in church membership we are committing ourselves to the gospel of the Bible, and we are committing to live in accordance with that gospel in our love for one another in the church. How important it is, then, to covenant with other believers in the local church so that together we can make the truth of the gospel known and so that we can keep one another accountable to this true gospel when we see each other tempted by a false gospel.

4. To edify the church.

One of the major reasons you should join a church is to edify the church itself (e.g., Titus 2:2). By becoming a church member you are committing to edify and build up the other believers you have covenanted with. As mentioned already, we have the tendency to buy into our culture's idea of individualism: Life (or church) is all about "me." But the Bible calls us to the complete opposite mentality. Life is not about us, it's about serving one another in the church. Christianity, in other words, is a corporate affair. We are not to live the Christian life on our own, but with one another and for one another. This means putting aside our selfishness and instead clothing ourselves with the humility of Christ. How do we do that? By committing ourselves to care for, love, and build one another up in the gospel that unites us. God intended, in other words, that those in the church be his disciples in the business of beautifying other disciples (Eph. 5:30; Heb. 10:24-25).

When you become a church member, you are not just committing yourself to edify others, but they are committing themselves to edify you too. Church membership benefits everyone. How important this is when we are going through a very hard time. When we

feel like abandoning ship, our fellow church members come alongside us and keep us faithful. Therefore, church membership is all about building each other up.

Doesn't this completely change the way we think about church? It should. Church isn't all about us. It isn't all about what we get out of it. If this is our mentality, then we will only stick around for whatever parts of church we feel will help us. To the contrary, church membership convicts us of this sin. It shifts how we think about church entirely. It's not all about us. In fact, it's about serving and building up each other. Church membership means we are part of a team. Sometimes we might have to slow down for the purpose of helping others along in the race. But that's okay because the church is not about "me" crossing the finish line, but us, as the body of Christ, crossing the finish line together. Therefore, growing as a Christian is not an individual matter, but a church matter. In fact, the apostle Paul says the very purpose of our spiritual gifts is to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12).

Exercise: read Hebrews 10:19-25 and notice all the "Let us..." phrases.

Consider the reward and transformation that can take place:

Joining a church increases our sense of ownership of the work of the church, of its community, of its budget, and of its goals. We move from being pampered consumers to becoming joyous proprietors. We stop arriving late and complaining that we don't get exactly what we want; instead, we arrive early and try to help others with what they need. We must begin to view membership less as a loose affiliation useful only on occasion and more as a regular responsibility, becoming involved in one another's lives for the purpose of the gospel. – Mark Dever¹

5. To practice biblical church leadership.

There is a biblical responsibility church members have to their leaders, and there is a biblical responsibility church leaders have to their members.² Hebrews 13:17 reads,

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Apart from church membership, church leaders cannot care and shepherd believers as Scripture commands. It is nearly impossible to shepherd someone who doesn't show up to church or who shows up to church but will not commit to the church.

Implication: Church membership is taken seriously. If you stop attending church, we will follow up with you out of love for you as a brother or sister in Christ. If someone stops attending church after we have followed up with them repeatedly, the church is responsible to vote him/her off of membership. In other words, we do not believe in non-attending or absent membership (except in cases where the person is physically restricted to their home). This also means that we are not one of those churches who has

¹ 9 Marks, 169.

² Clifton.

twice as many people listed as members than people actually showing up to church. We seek to keep our membership roll up-to-date and accurate, which we believe reflects active supervision and care for our members.

6. *To glorify God.*

Scripture is replete with instruction and commands to let the world see our good deeds, that the world might glorify God (1 Pet. 2:12; Matt. 5:16). Church membership is key to doing just that. Together we love one another (John 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:18) and bear witness to the gospel in front of the world so that God may be praised (Matt. 5:16). Listen to the command Jesus gave his disciples, disciples who would go out and plant and shepherd churches:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

By our corporate love as an assembly of believers, we bring praise and glory to God.