

Yes, Local Church Membership Is Essential

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June 10, 2013

Reading Time: 2 minutes

✘ *"I'm a Christian, and I usually go to church. Sometimes I go to Church A and sometimes I go to Church B. The Bible doesn't say I have to place membership anywhere."*
Maybe you've heard this before.

Maybe you've even *said* this before.

Let's think for a moment. Does the Bible really not teach church membership?

Here's the cold hard truth: the Bible *does* teach you need to be a part of a local church.

1. How can elders oversee the "flock" if they don't know who the sheep are? Elders are shepherds, and they are charged with the heavy responsibility of "watching over our souls as ones who will give an account" (Heb. 13:17). Obviously, they need to know to whom they are accountable! It is wrong for Christians not to submit to the oversight of an eldership (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12).

2. How can a local church "withdraw" from an impenitent member if there are no members? People who are openly practicing sin need to be recognized and confronted (cf. Rom. 16:17), otherwise they will destroy the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6). How can you remove someone if there is nothing to remove them from (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1ff)?

3. How can a local church combine its resources without formal participation? How can churches make big financial plans if attendance is flakey? Isn't it reckless to make big plans if resources are not stable?

4. **How can we “stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” (Heb. 10:24-25) if we don’t know who “one another” are?**

5. **How can division within a local church be condemned (1 Cor. 11:18) if there is not an organized group of people to divide?** How can you mark someone as divisive and openly sinful (Rom. 16:17) if they were not previously recognized as being members in good standing?

6. **How can we be aware of the spiritual well being of those “inside” if we don’t know how to distinguish those who are “inside” from those who are “outside” (i.e. 1 Cor. 5:13)?**

When I hear someone say they don’t want to identify with a local congregation, I can’t help but wonder, “*Why?*” Why don’t they want to submit to the oversight of spiritual shepherds? Why don’t they want to build close relationships with other Christians? Why don’t they want the responsibilities that come along with church membership? Why don’t they want to encourage one another? Why don’t they want to build up the church?

Simply put, refusing to identify with a church is *selfish* and *wrong*.

- You’re **cheating yourself** by not placing your soul under the spiritual guidance of shepherds.
- You’re **cheating others** by not building up the family of God.
- You’re **cheating the community** by diminishing the potential impact of the local church to teach the Gospel.
- Above all, you’re **cheating God** by not submitting to His design for local congregations.

Don’t ignore the undeniable truth that the Lord wants His followers to identify with local congregations. Do you think you know better than Him?

**Why are some specific reasons why people refuse to identify with a congregation?
Are there legitimate reasons to leave a local church?**