

LOVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Mark #5 – Biblical View of Church Membership

I. WHAT IS A CHURCH?

“According to the New Testament, the church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God’s grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone... A few passages in the New Testament seem to refer to the church in the abstract, or universally, but the overwhelming majority of references to the church are to local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to Christ and committed to each other.”

- Dr. Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*

A. The Invisible Church - The *invisible church* is the church as God sees it, made up of every true believer saved by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).

“...God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’” (2 Tim 2:19)

B. The Visible Church - The *visible church* is the church as we see it, made up of those who **profess** belief in Jesus along with their children.

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” (1 Cor 1:2)

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Cor 13:5)

*** The New Testaments consistent witness teaches that our membership in the ‘invisible’ church is to be evidenced by committed membership in a local, “visible” church.**

II. Why Join a Church?

A. To Grow in Christ with Other Believers - *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Heb 10:25)

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Pet 5:1-3)

B. To extend the Kingdom of God

“...redeemed individuals take on certain characteristics as they gather. They become an institution, a society, an establishment, a body. There is organization to them when they gather together. This association is what we call the Church. However...[the Kingdom of God] refers to the place where God’s sovereign rule in principle comes to concrete expression...The Kingdom of God certainly includes what is done in the Church, but the Kingdom of God extends to what is done in one’s family, in one’s vocation, and even in one’s heart.”

-Les Newsom and Brian Habig, *The Enduring Community*, 83.

C. To Expose Misunderstandings of the Christian Faith

“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” (1 Cor 14:23-25)

D. To Glorify God

“If Jesus loved the Church enough to die for it, then we can love it enough to be patient with it.”

-James “Bebo” Elkin

III. New Member Vows

Question #1 - Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23)

This is an unpopular message today, but it is inescapably true. It is also a biblical truth that can be empirically verified! Just look at the world around you, including your own life. The problem not out there, in what someone else has done to us. The problem is in me, and the solution is outside of me, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we admit this fact about ourselves, the Gospel simply will not make sense.

- How does understanding this first vow question help us (ironically) remain committed to the church?

Question #2 - Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

- What are the three ways this question describes faith? Is it more than believing in truths?

Question #3 - Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12)

- Two of the greatest challenges to the church are *nominalism* and *worldliness*. How do we resist this?

Question #4 - Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

“I write so that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:15)

- Does this question deal with the invisible church or the visible church? How do we primarily support the church’s worship and work?

Question #5 - Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Heb 12:14)

We don’t merely strive for the *absence* of conflict in the church, but for the *promotion* of God’s best for everyone! In this vow we’re saying that we will do everything in our personal power to make sure that this is a harmonious, happy, safe and secure family and fellowship of believers.