

A Rationale for Church Membership

Many Christians today still embrace a secular worldview, which ignores accountability and holds ambivalent feelings toward constituted authority. Individualism and independence are still the themes of our culture's mantra.

These Christians interpret the Biblical accounts of the early church and wrongly conclude that the first century Christians were a loosely knit band of spiritual zealots, and that phenomenal church growth was due to a lack of form and authoritative structure. Add to this a 20th century consumerism that selfishly asks, "What's in this for me?" and the end result is an endless "church-hopping" by many Christians and a lack of spiritual roots for themselves and their children. But anyone who understands the New Testament Jewish mindset and their attention to detail would know that structure, accountability and authority would have been part of the fabric of early church life.

While no one can point to chapter and verse to support a mandate for church membership, there is sufficient evidence in scripture that creates a rationale and necessity for it. The following activities and practices of the early church, to say nothing of the inter-relationship of New Testament Christology and Ecclesiology, should illicit the deepest commitment possible by every believer to a local congregation--a commitment in which the believer can grow spiritually and minister fruitfully over the course of many years.

Those activities and practices are as follows:

1. Believers were counted as they were added to the church (Acts 2:41; 4:4).
2. A doctrinal pattern for unity of faith and tradition was enjoined (Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:13-15; Phil. 2:2).
3. The delegation of ministries to individuals and groups of people who were spiritually qualified (i.e., deacons and elders, Act 6:1-7; I Tim. 3).
4. Discipline of those who were unruly and rebellious was to be exercised by the church (Matt. 18:15; Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:1-4; I Thess. 5:14; II Thess. 3:6-15).
5. Letters of commendation were used to introduce believers to other churches (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; II Cor. 3:1; Col. 4:10).
6. Delegated representatives were commissioned for church councils (Acts 15:2-3,22; I Cor. 16:3).
7. Only the most committed involvement was expected in church relationships (Eph. 4:15-16; I Cor. 12).