

WHY YOU SHOULD
JOIN A CHURCH

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by Earl Blackburn

According to statisticians, Christianity is growing rapidly in the United States and in the world. Reports confirming this fact come from different sectors of the globe and are very encouraging. The Gallop Poll reports that many people are becoming Christian. Yet, no matter how much Christianity appears to grow, there is no evidence to suggest a corresponding increase in love for the church, especially in the United States. Individualism is the watchword of the day. People are so wrapped up in their own affairs that the kingdom of God and Christ's churches are neglected. Professing Christians often become so preoccupied with their own problems, trials, and difficulties, that the church is looked upon as being unnecessary, or at least secondary.

As you consider the title of this pamphlet, I would caution you to recognize that church membership is not for everybody. You may not be qualified for membership in one of Jesus Christ's churches! Church membership is only for those who have been truly born again. You must have recognized that you are a helpless sinner before a holy God, and have turned from all your known sins and trusted Christ as your Saviour and Lord. This is salvation. Unless you have been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, which is also called conversion, you cannot become a member of one of His churches. Conversion to Christ is also described in *Acts 2:47* as "the Lord adding to the church."

If you have been converted and are a true Christian, you are responsible to become a member of a true church of Jesus Christ. You cannot have a consistent walk with God if you are not serious about the church of Jesus Christ. Unless you are a member of one of Christ's churches, many parts of the Word of God cannot be applied to your life. That is very serious. The purpose of this pamphlet is to show you seven biblical reasons why you must become a member of a church.

WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN A CHURCH?

1. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. What is this relationship? Christ tells us that He will build (and is building) His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it (*Matthew 16:18*). While on earth, Christ founded the church. It was in embryonic form until Pentecost, when He firmly established it by sending the Holy Spirit to empower it (*Matthew 18:17; Acts 2*). Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it on the cross (*Ephesians 5:25*). He died for the church (*Acts 20:28*). Even to this day Christ protects, nourishes, cherishes, and purifies His church (*Ephesians 5:25-32*). At this very moment He is at the right hand of God interceding for His church (*Hebrews 6:19,20 & 7:25*). God has made Christ the only Head of His church (*Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22, 5:23*) and this church can only be seen as it is visibly expressed in local churches. In addition, according to *Revelation 1:13;20*, Christ is in the midst of His churches; He stands and walks among the candlesticks.

Of all the above listed connections between Christ and His churches, the most important one is the fact that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. To love someone involves loving the things they love, and to love Christ involves loving the thing that He loves the most on the earth: the church! To profess love for Christ yet have no love for the church is a great contradiction. Timothy Dwight, a past president of Yale University, wrote a stirring hymn about the church to express this point:

*I love thy kingdom Lord, the house of thine abode,
The church our blest Redeemer saved with His own precious blood.*

*I love thy church o God: her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye, and graven on thy hand.*

*For her my tears shall fall, for her my prayer ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n, till toils and cares shall end.*

*Beyond my highest joy I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows, her hymns of love and praise.*

Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you a member of a church? If you are not, how can you say you truly love the Saviour when you are not a part of that which He loves the most on the earth?

2. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE OF THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS. Read carefully *Acts 2:40-47*. The scriptural account of the day of Pentecost gives great insight into early Christianity. As Peter finished preaching his memorable sermon, the people were moved in their hearts by the working of God's sovereign Spirit and were converted. Those who received the Word of God and were baptized, joined with other believers. This was the normal and natural thing to do. What did this joining involve? In the first place, it involved continuing under the apostles' preaching and teaching ministry. The new converts did not neglect meeting together for worship and instruction in the Word of God. Secondly, this joining together involved fellowship and sharing their lives with other Christians in the church of Jerusalem on a regular basis. Thirdly, it involved a faithful attendance at the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which is also called the breaking of bread or Communion. Lastly, it involved meeting regularly with other church members for corporate prayer. This is all described in *Acts 2:40-42* and gives great insight into the marks of a true church of Jesus Christ. Have you ever considered what the early Christians did and practiced, and what effect this ought to have on you? Study this passage and consider how you might follow their example.

3. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE OF APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE AND PRACTICE. Read carefully *Acts 13:1-4 and 14:23, 26-28*. As you progress through the history of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, you will find the first Christians actively and fervently serving the Lord who saved them. How were they serving the Lord? In the church! The early believers did not distance themselves from the churches, but became energetically involved in them. As the believers "ministered unto the Lord" (in the church), the Holy Spirit did a wonderful thing. He called out from the membership Barnabas and Paul as the first missionaries.

The great apostle Paul faithfully served the Lord in the church of Antioch for approximately ten years before he was called out to go on his first missionary journey. He grew in grace and developed in spiritual

maturity and giftedness as a member of that local church and when it was God's timing, he was sent out to do a greater task. The remainder of Acts chapters 13 and 14 give an historical description of the activities of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel to those who had never heard it, and an account of the people who were brought to Christ, including the churches that were started. It is interesting to note what the apostle and his party did once they had traveled as far as they thought they should. They turned around, retraced their steps, and sought to strengthen the disciples who had settled into local churches that Paul and Barnabas had previously started. As they strengthened the young Christians, the apostles ordained elders in each local church (*Acts 14:23*).

When the apostle and his party finished their first missionary tour, where did they go? They returned to the sending church of which they were members and to which they were accountable. Once the missionaries arrived back home, they gathered the church together to give a report of what God had done through their ministry (*see Acts 14:26-28*).

All of this demonstrates that everything the apostles did was connected with churches. They did not start neighborhood Bible studies, share groups, Christian coffee houses, university student ministries, mens' prayer breakfasts, ladies' tea fellowships, or any of the extraneous groups that circumvent or are not connected with God's only heaven-appointed institution. Nor did they work with mission boards or other para-church organizations, but with visible bodies of baptized believers, called churches. Every ministry must be connected to and under the oversight of a church or churches, if it is to be truly biblical. As a Christian, do you desire to be biblical and apostolic? Then you must be connected to a church just like the apostles.

4. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE IT IS THE FOCUS AND CONTEXT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES. The end of the 20th century exhibits a startling spirit of unbiblical individualism. Many professed Christians read their Bibles and think only in terms of themselves as individuals. Most fail to realize that the bulk of the New Testament was not written to individual believers, but to local churches. To whom were the books of Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians and Revelation (*see 1:11*), written? Local churches! To whom were the books

of 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus and Philemon written? They were written to leaders of local churches, directing them how to lead and govern their congregations. Even those few remaining books that do not deal directly with local churches have numerous references to churches (assemblies, congregations, bodies, etc., see *Hebrews 10:25; James 2:2; 1 Peter 4:17; 3 John 10*). The New Testament knows nothing of a churchless Christianity.

5. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE OF THE EXACT AND PRECISE NEW TESTAMENT DIRECTIVE. Read carefully *Hebrews 10:23-25*. The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews directs and exhorts the Jewish Christians in his day to “*not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*” (*Hebrews 10:25*). This type of thinking was not new to these Jewish Christians because the idea was rooted in the Old Testament, especially the book of Psalms. The Old Testament phrases found in the book of Psalms such as “house of the LORD”, “His temple”, “the sanctuary of God”, “Your tabernacle”, “the courts of the LORD”, “the house of God”, etc., all prefigured visible New Testament churches (see *Psalms 27:4, 63:2, 73:17, 84:1-4 & 10, 122:1*).

The implications of *Hebrews 10:25* are far-reaching. Those who were on the verge of turning away from Christ and turning back to the world began their departure by staying away from meeting with other believers for worship. The occasional absence increased to frequent absence and became habitual. Soon these professed Christians stopped attending the meetings for worship altogether. With no godly influence upon them or holy restraint keeping them, those who professed to be saved were soon ensnared by their sins and turned back to fleshly ways and false religions. By turning away from Christ and His people, it was eventually shown that they were not truly saved when they first professed Christ. They professed Christ, but never possessed Him or His salvation (see *Hebrews 10:39*).

That is why membership in a New Testament church and regular attendance at all of its meetings for worship, prayer and fellowship are so very important. Once you begin to neglect meeting with the brethren in a biblically ordered church, you will cease to have the godly influence that is needful to help you overcome the world and its temptations. You will not have the brotherly encouragement to continue in the way of

Christ. Your soul will become insensitive to the ways of God and the subtle philosophies of humanistic thinking will dull your mind and pull you further away from the Word of God. Without God's intervention, this will lead to a departure from the living God and a wrecking of faith. The end result will be no salvation, no eternal life, no heaven, and no God. This does not mean that true believers can lose their salvation, but there will be many at the Last Day who professed faith in Christ, yet were never really saved.

“Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together,” says the LORD. How can this precise directive, which is really a *command*, be heeded if you are not a member of a church? It cannot! This command, joined with many others, can have *no* relevance in your life if you are not a member of one of Christ's churches.

6. YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH BECAUSE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST PERSONALLY AND PRIMARILY INTERACTS WITH LOCAL CHURCHES. Read carefully *Revelation 2:1-3:22*. These two chapters deal with the seven churches that were located in Asia Minor, to which the book of Revelation was written. Christ, who is robed in high priestly attire, is set forth in Old Testament imagery as a ministering priest in the temple. Through this Old Testament imagery, the apostle John presents Christ in the context of worship. He is among (and speaks to) each of these churches, which are represented by lamp stands or candlesticks. How does He speak to each of these churches? He speaks to them through the “stars” (i.e. “angels”, messengers or pastors of the churches) that are in His right hand (*1:20*). His control of these church leaders is revealed by the fact that they are represented as being held *in His right hand*, which denotes government and authority. Christ is viewed by the apostle John as standing in the midst of each one of the churches. Though the Saviour is with each individual believer, He is especially present with them as they are assembled with, and a part of, a local church. In His redemptive purposes, Christ interacts primarily with a church and not with any other social or religious organization. He is in the midst of each church. How can you know and receive the fullness of the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ if you are not a member and part of one of His churches, where He is in the midst?

7. YOU SHOULD JOIN ONE OF CHRIST'S CHURCHES BECAUSE OF THE BENEFITS YOU RECEIVE FROM BEING A MEMBER OF IT: benefits that you would not receive otherwise. God has given these benefits to help you grow as a Christian, to protect and keep you, and to encourage you in every way.

What are some of these benefits? One is pastoral oversight, which includes spiritual care for your soul and life, by pastors who are called by Jesus Christ to be His undershepherds (*1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 5:2,3*). These men of God will help you in your trials and difficulties. They will teach and guide you in the Word of God. As they do so, they will be used of God to lead you in Christian maturity and preserve you from falsehood and the Evil One. The church and its God-ordained leaders serve as a bulwark to guard you from apostasy and from going astray. Godly pastors will also assist you in raising your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and be there as counselors and friends when they go into hard times and through difficult years.

Another benefit you receive from church membership is the love and service of fellow members. When you join a church, you not only commit yourself to the church, but the church commits itself to you. Brothers and sisters in Christ will be there to weep with you when you weep, rejoice with you when you rejoice, and walk side by side with you in your Christian life.

The benefits of church membership also include the New Testament church ordinances, especially the Lord's Supper. Everyone has heard of baptism and Communion, but few realize that these are for Christians who are members of churches, and for them only. Baptism is for the new Christian as he enters the Christian life and identifies with the body of Christ, which is membership in a church. Communion is for the believer as he continues his walk with Christ as a member of a church (*see 1 Corinthians 11:17-34*).

Another benefit of church membership is the provision of an arena in which to exercise spiritual gifts. The local church is the context that grooms us unto holy service for Christ. That is why, according to *Ephesians 4:7-15* (especially verse 11), "pastors and teachers" were given to the church. These God-called men must meet the qualifications of *1 Timothy 3:1-8* and *Titus 1:5-9* and are appointed to equip you to serve Christ in the church and in the world. A church is a proving ground. Those who are called into gospel service to go outside the church, must have proven

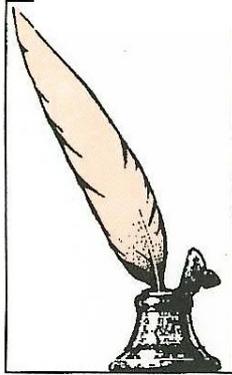
themselves inside the local church. They will have proven that they have the necessary graces and gifts as they busily and sacrificially ministered to other church members. Opportunities for greater service come not to the idle, but to those who faithfully perform their present duties inside this God-ordained context and arena.

How can these benefits become a part of your Christian walk and spiritual vitality if you are not a member of a true New Testament church? They cannot!

In summary, these seven reasons speak clearly as to why you should join a church. Every aspect of the Christian life is vitally attached to a church. Sadly, many professing Christians neglect membership in and assembling with a church of Jesus Christ. When they do so, they founder spiritually and soon make shipwreck of their souls. Trouble and sorrow are their constant companions. Those who bypass the church or merely interact with it on a casual basis, struggle all their lives. Satan and the affairs of the world constantly buffet them and they wonder why nothing ever goes right for them. They are like the ember that is removed from the coals of fire. It will glow and give off heat for a very short while, but soon, because it is not attached to the fire, will grow cold and die out. You cannot expect to prosper spiritually if you disregard and remain unattached from that which God has ordained. Seek out and become a member of a biblical church of Jesus Christ. (Helpful guidelines for finding such a church may be found in the Reformed Baptist Publications booklet entitled *Which Church Should You Join.*) You will find blessing and grace as you become obedient to the teaching of God's infallible Word.

“Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” (*Ephesians 3:21*)

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*“Study to show thyself
approved unto God”
2 Timothy 2:15*

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