TEN MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

MARK 6: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Is becoming a member of a local church just a human invention? Does the Bible teach church membership? Why do we believe that having local church membership is one of the ten marks of a church's health and well-being?

1. WHAT IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Church membership is a covenant. That is, it's a solemn agreement between a Christian and a local church. In this covenant:

1. **The church affirms the Christian's profession of faith in Christ.** By extending church membership to an individual, the church is saying, "As far as we can tell, you're a Christian. We're putting our seal of approval on your claim to follow Christ."
2. **The church promises to oversee the Christian's discipleship.** This comes through teaching, preaching, the elders' oversight, and the mutual building up and serving of the members by the members (see Eph 4:11-16)
3. **The Christian promises to regularly assemble with and submit to the church.** By committing to a church through membership the individual Christian promises to regularly gather with this church and to submit to its authority and teaching.

> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (Heb 3:12-14)*

2. WHY DO WE HAVE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Church membership is evident from a number of passages in the New Testament which teach that:

1. Church members are expected to know who does and does not belong to the church. (1Cor 5; 2 Cor 6)
2. Christians are under the authority of the church, such that if they persist in unrepentant sin, they are to be excluded from it. (Mt 18)
3. Christians are told to submit to their leaders, which means giving up our autonomy and putting ourselves under the church's authority. (Heb 13)
4. Leaders will give an account for those entrusted to their care, which means that they have to know who those people are. (1 Pet 5)

> *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1 Cor 5:11-13)*
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> *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 joyfully and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17)*

3. WHAT DOES CHURCH MEMBERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

The goal of church membership is that every single church member would help the whole church grow to maturity in Christ. This goal comes with significant duties, challenges and benefits:

A. THE DUTIES AND CHALLENGES OF MEMBERSHIP

As church members, we have the duty to imitate and submit to our leaders, to regularly assemble with the church, and to love and serve our fellow members. All of these duties are means by which we grow in godliness and help others to grow.

> *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith… 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. (Heb 13:7, 17)*
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> *And let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:24-25)*

Romans 12:3-18 outlines a number of ways we serve God, our leaders and each other as church members:

- By thinking of ourselves with humble, sober judgment (v3)
- By using our gifts to serve others (v6)
- By living peaceably with all (v8)
- By genuinely loving others with brotherly affection (v9-10)
- By outdoing one another in showing honour (v10)
- By serving God diligently from the heart (v11)
- By rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation and constant in prayer (v12)
- By contributing to each others' needs and showing hospitality (v13)
- By rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (v15)
- By living in harmony with other members (v16, 18)
- By not being proud and associating with lowly people (v16)
- By doing what is honourable in the sight of all (v17)

B. THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Every member of the church is called to overcome divisions and pursue unity in the church in order to reflect the church's union with Christ. When this is done well, church membership – and the regular gathering of the church – should offer a foretaste of the glory of Heaven and a reflection of Christ's love.

> *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Cor 1:10)*
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> *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Phil 2:1-2)*