

Back to the Basics Sermon Series: Church Membership

Church membership is not simply your name on a list with other names filed away somewhere at church. Church membership, if properly understood, is a Biblical concept that can transform your individual Christian life and the life of your church.

Mark Dever is a very successful pastor in Washington D.C. who wrote a book entitled *“Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.”*

Here are Nine Marks of a Healthy Church:

1. Expository Preaching
2. Biblical Theology
3. The Gospel
4. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion
5. A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism
6. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
7. Biblical Church Discipline
8. A Concern for Discipleship and Growth
9. Biblical Church Leadership

Our focus this morning in our Back to the Basics Series is Mark Six, “A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership.”

Mark Dever believes a Biblical understanding of the church membership has been overlooked or forgotten in most modern American churches.

“My own fellowship of churches is a prime example. According to one recent Southern Baptist Convention study, the typical Southern Baptist church has 233 members, only 70 of whom are present at the typical Sunday morning worship service. So where are the other 163 members? Are they all at home sick, in a rest home, at college or on vacation, or in the military? Maybe some are, but all 163 of them? What do such churches convey about Christianity to the world around us? What do we understand this to mean about the importance of Christianity in our lives? And what is the spiritual state of those people if they haven’t attended church for months or even longer? Is their nonattendance really any of our business?” (Mark Dever. [HYPERLINK "http://"](http://www.markdever.com) *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2004, 148).

I agree that A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership is one cure for this local church epidemic.

There are Two Church Memberships in the New Testament: Membership in the Universal Church and membership in a Local Church.

1. Membership in the Universal Church or Body of Christ.

A. This membership is found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. A person enters the

Universal Church or the Body of Christ at salvation at which time the Holy Spirit baptizes that believer into the Body of Christ or the Universal Church.

B. Every member of the Universal Church is a believer: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

C. Membership in the Universal Church is made up of believers from the Day of Pentecost, when the church was formed in Acts 2, to the rapture when Christ comes back of His church.

2. Membership in a Local Church.

A. This membership is found in 1 Corinthians 1:1-2. Whereas a sinner at conversion enters the Body of Christ through Spirit baptism, a person enters a Local Church through Water Baptism subsequent to salvation which identifies that person with a local body of believers. Robert Saucy states how the Body of Christ or the Universal Church is related to the local church: “The one universal church is manifested in a particular locality, yet each individual assembly is the church in that place.” Again Saucy writes that, “The local assembly is the one body of Christ particularized in a certain locality” (Robert L. Saucy. *The Church in God's Program*. Chicago: Moody Press. 1972, 18, 25).

B. While every member of the Universal Church is a believer, every member of a local church may not be believers even though regeneration is a prerequisite for membership. Jude wrote about unbelievers who “crept in unawares” (Jude 4).

C. Even though every believer from Pentecost to the Rapture is a member of the Universal church, membership in the Local Church is made up of believers only at that particular location and time.

There are Three Truths that Should Characterize the Universal and Local Church.

1. There should be Unity: “For by ONE Spirit are we all baptized into ONE body... we have been made to drink into ONE Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). There must be a unity of doctrine and mission. That is the reason every person who joins our church first reads and agrees with our doctrinal statement and constitution.

2. There is a Diversity of members: “For the body is not one member, but MANY” (12:14). Unity allows for diversity in other areas besides doctrine and mission. No two members of your human body are exactly alike. Even your two little fingers are different. The same is true with a local body of believers. Paul addresses this diversity in 12:15-20. The whole body is not an eye nor an ear (v. 17). When someone joins the church, the whole church does not instantaneously become cones of that one member.

Here at Gospel Baptist Church we have on most Sunday mornings about 200 individuals. And no two are exactly the same. Each has his/her unique personality, likes and dislikes, backgrounds, convictions, preferences, and views. Let's take just two areas of diversity.

A. The Diversity of Preaching.

Paul mentions this one in 1:11-12. The Corinthians had different styles of preaching that they liked. One like Paul's teaching style. Another likes Apollos' conversation style. And yet another likes Peter's fiery preaching style.

Today some like the teaching style of David Jeremiah, John Piper, John MacArthur. Others like the camp meeting style. The younger may like the hip Mark Driscoll style.

Each preacher has to be himself. Martin Lloyd Jones in his classic on preaching, *The Preacher and his Preaching*, wrote that each preacher when preaching must "Forget himself and be himself." Each church member should think the same way. We should focus on the Word of God preached not the style of the preacher.

B. The other area of Diversity is Music.

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "it was good. They did something different, though. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"Praise choruses?" asked the wife. "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay . . . they're sort of like hymns, only different," the farmer said.

"Well, what's the difference?" Asked his wife.

The farmer explained, "Well, it's like this. If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a hymn.

If, on the other hand, I were to say to you, "Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, Martha, Martha, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the COWS, the COWS, COWS, COWS, are in the corn, corn, corn, they're in the coooooorrrrrnnnn." Then, I repeated it three times, that would be a praise chorus.

Wouldn't you know it, that farmer's little church had a visitor from the big city church that same Sunday. He went home to his wife and she asked him how it went.

He said, "Oh, it was okay, except they don't sing choruses--they sing hymns."

She asked, "What's a hymn?"

He said, "Well, it's like a chorus, only different?"

She said, "What do you mean?"

He explained, "Well, if I said to you, Martha, the cows are in the corn--but say it like this:

Oh Martha, dear, Martha hear the words of my mouth, Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear

to this glorious truth;

For the way of the animals who can explain; there in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God's sun or his rain, Unless from the mild corn they are fenced;

Yea those cows in glad, rebellious delight, Have loosed their shackles, their warm pens
eschew, Yea goaded by minions of darkness and night, They all my sweet corn are now
destined to chew.

Martha, look to that bright day when earth is reborn, And I shall not see those cows in my
corn.

That would be a hymn!

Some believers like Southern Gospel Music such as the Bill Gather Homecoming Series.
Others like Bluegrass. I have a preacher friend who thinks that Bluegrass be will the music
in Heaven. Others like Traditional. Their radio does not move from WHPE. Still others like
CCM. I like Casting Crowns and Third Day as well as the Gathers and Bluegrass and the
great hymns of the faith.

3. Even though there is Diversity, we must Serve One Another. Paul writes to this very
diversified church in 12:25, “that there should be no divisions in the body; but that the
members should have the same care one for another.”

Church Membership is a Commitment to Serving One Another in a Local Body of
Believers. We do not join a church to be served but to serve. Let's look at the first example
of church membership in Acts 2 and to what they committed themselves.

1. Church Membership is a Commitment to the Teaching of God's Word: “And they
continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine” (Acts 2:41-32).

A. Peter had just preached a very doctrinal sermon where he quoted Joel 2:28-32 and
explained what the passage meant concerning the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Next Peter
quoted Psalm 16:8-11 and explained how this passage predicted the resurrection of Christ.
Finally, Peter quoted Psalm 110:11 and explained that this Psalm referred to the ascension
of Christ to the right hand of God. Then at the end of his sermon, Peter applied it directly
and painfully to his audience: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that
God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ” (2:36).

*B. Paul commanded Timothy and ever other pastor and church members in 1
Timothy 4:13,* “Give attendance to reading (the public reading of Scripture), to exhortation
(the public application of the Scripture), and doctrine (the public teaching Scripture which is
to be read and applied).

2. Church Membership is a Commitment to Fellowship or Service to One Another.
We Baptist love fellowship. We have Fellowship Buildings in which we eat Fellowship
Meals. But real fellowship is more than eating together. Real fellowship is the essence of
the more than 30 “one another” commands in the New Testament. For example, “Love one

another” is found seventeen times; “encourage one another” four times; “forgive one another” four times; “serve one another” three times (John Hammett. *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005, 234).

Look how these first church members loved and served one another in verse 44-45. One of our leaders here at Gospel told me just this past week that one of the reasons he came to Gospel was because he had never seen a church who had such a generous spirit.

Church membership is not a spectator sport or a non-contact sport. On some Thursday evenings, I play basketball with some of the young guys in our church at Brantly Malone’s house. They are in their 20s and 30s. Someone asked me if I were not afraid someone might get hurt. I relied, “Yes, that is why I try not to get too rough with them.” Sometimes we get banged up. But we keep playing. Serving the Lord is a contact activity. Sometimes you get hurt trying to help people. But you get up and you keep serving because church membership is a commitment to serve not to be served.

3. Church Membership is a Commitment to Worship.

A. The essence of worship is giving according to Psalm 29:1-2.

B. The essence of worship is giving according to the example of the first church members. What had these first church members given to the Lord? They had given their **time** to the Lord to come and be taught. They had given their **spiritual gifts and talents** to the Lord to serve others. Some used their spiritual gift of teaching. In Acts 6, others used their gifts of helps to help the widows. They all gave **financially** to the Lord in worship and to help the needy.

Jesus was committed to building His Church according to Matthew 16:18 where He said, “I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Jesus proved His verbal commitment with His actions. “Christ loved the Church and GAVE Himself for it.”

Church membership is our commitment to “edifying or the building of the church” which Paul instructed the local church at Corinth to practice in 1 Corinthians 14:12. Our commitment will promote unity, will be exercised among diversity, and will be demonstrated by feeding on the Word of God, serving each other as we worship and give to the Lord.