



Membership in Jesus' Church

What does membership look like in Jesus' Church? Is it signing a Church membership commitment card? Is it promising to submit to the leadership or Senior Pastor? Is it committing to tithe 10% to the Church, and give offerings on top of that? Etc.?

Listen to how Paul describes membership:

1Co 12:14 For the body is not one **member**, but many.

1Co 12:15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

1Co 12:16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

1Co 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

1Co 12:18 But now hath **God set the members every one of them in the body**, as it hath pleased him.

1Co 12:19 And if they were all one **member**, where were the body?

1Co 12:20 But now are they **many members, yet but one body**.

1Co 12:21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

1Co 12:22 Nay, much more **those members of the body**, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

1Co 12:23 And **those members of the body**, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

1Co 12:24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked:

1Co 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that **the members should have the same care one for another**.

1Co 12:26 And whether **one member** suffer, **all the members** suffer with it; or **one member** be honored, **all the members** rejoice with it.

1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and **members in particular**.

1Co 6:15 Know ye not that your bodies are the **members of Christ**? shall I then take **the members of Christ**, and make them **the members** of a harlot? God forbid.

Rom 12:4 For as we have **many members** in one body, and **all members** have not the same office:

Rom 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and **every one members one of another**.

Eph 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: **for we are members one of another**.

Eph 5:30 For **we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones**.

Summary:

1. There are many members in the body of Christ.
2. God sets or specially places the members in the body for His purposes.

3. Everyone has a different part to play in the body.
4. We need every member He sets in.
5. The members are to care for one another.
6. We share the life experience of each member.
7. As members of the body, since it is the body of Christ, we are members of Christ.
8. We, as members, are all connected to one another.

So, if this encompasses the majority of what the bible has to say on “Church Membership,” where, in these verses, do we get the notion of “Club Membership,” where anyone would sign on a dotted line and commit to any particular set of Church standards, practices, or policies? It simply is not there.

So what is membership about?

I believe we are seeing membership, in the metaphoric context of the human body, so we will see the interconnectedness and essential nature of each individual part and all parts connected to Christ who is the Head of that body. Membership has to do with connectedness and support.

And, I believe we are seeing membership on two levels:

1. Level one, the worldwide body of Christ, all mystically connected to one another by virtue of our salvation in Christ and connected to Christ who is the Head of His body. This would include the many denominations, traditional, institutional, house church, or those who have received the finished work of Christ in their lives no matter what brand or flavor of Church they attend.
2. Level two, the localized expression of the body of Christ. More specific, more specialized, and a more personalized level of relationship, connected around shared values and insights in Christ, and a specific vision from Him to bring forth into the earth in their local area.

So, how do we relate to the localized expression? What does membership look like on this level? This is where I think the discussion becomes somewhat tenuous, but nevertheless important in its definition.

I’m going to try my best to read between the lines, and draw out what I think God is trying to express through Paul and apply it on the local level.

We live in a day where, in any given metro city, there are hundreds if not thousands of Churches. They are of every brand, style, approach, and agenda. Some are more biblical in nature and some less. Let’s assume, for theory sake, that all of these Churches represent places where genuine believers in Christ gather. So, how does one even begin to settle on where they will gather, or what will form the core beliefs and values of their Church?

I think the answer is somewhat veiled in one little statement in Paul's discussion of membership:

1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and **members in particular**.

Rom 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and **every one members one of another**.

Eph 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: **for we are members one of another**.

Eph 5:30 For **we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones**.

Do you see it there? I believe he is implying that there is to be a divine sense of "membership" or "calling to connect" on the local Church level. If the nature of Church is to be connectedness, and we recognize that just our connectedness to Christ alone seems insufficient, in and of itself, to justify the formation of a local fellowship, especially in our day, then it seems to me what we are seeing is that Jesus Himself will place within the hearts of those He is calling to gather together, a sense of "His" purpose for their forming a Church, that "Something" that is uniquely in Him for them. Of all the burdens of the Lord, and the many emphases of His Spirit, it seems very much that He forms His Churches (localized expressions of His body) around particular things He desires for them to agree on, connect with, and enter into.

Often, without having this fully defined within ourselves, we seek out a Church that evidences that "something" He is working with in our lives, and for us that becomes "our Church."

Notice: 1Co 12:18 But now hath **God set the members every one of them in the body**, as it hath pleased him.

This is a God thing. **God sets people in**. It is His work in His people.

If He is the Head, and the head of a person is the seat of vision, rationale, goals, desires, and purpose, and if Christ, as the Head, desires to form or emphasize a particular purpose that is important to Him, then it seems very reasonable that He would speak similar things to individuals, bring them together, and encourage them to work with that which He has called them together for, and for which He "Sets them in."

Thus, on an individual level, membership would become a connecting to and identifying with, that specific "something" Jesus is desiring to form and fashion a people towards. This being the case, those coming to any given local Church are going to walk in, spend some time familiarizing themselves with what that unique "something of Christ" that is at work within that fellowship, and will either identify with it or not. No harm if they don't...likely they will find it somewhere else.

I believe one of the things each fellowship is wise to do is to discuss among the initial gathering, what they feel called to form, by way of an understanding of Christ's purpose for a Church, and if they are sufficiently agreed and on the same page together,... because I can guarantee you this, if they don't do this, and keep this definition at least somewhat clarified in their minds and in their midst, they will find visitors either disrupting, distracting, or damaging the flow of His Spirit in their midst, and ultimately will cause the fellowship to splinter or have those visitors eventually leave wounded and feeling rejected.

I believe each fellowship should take a greater period of time to articulate what they feel Christ calling them to “member one another” around, and then let visitors know this is what they are being called to.

Of this I’m sure, if a part of what Paul is talking about is unified connectedness and agreement in Christ, if folks gather together who intensely value the Traditional Model of Church and others are positive Christ is displeased with this model and is dismantling it, those who value the Traditional Model will be offended by those who don’t value it. If endemic to “membership” is the “membersnness in Christ” then this is not going to take place where such divergent perspectives coexist.

In a perfect world, where the Church had never strayed from the original foundations and doctrines laid by the first apostles, all that would be necessary, in the formation of a Church, is agreement that Jesus Christ is savior and lord, but unfortunately 1850 years have gone by since they first formed the Church and so much error has crept into Jesus’ Church, that a simple definition of connectedness as “I believe in Jesus,” will not be sufficient to create unity and harmony in the modern Church. It is inevitable that Christ will access the inner ear of different individuals in our day and attempt to lead them to form those gatherings of believers that help turn the ship of His Church back towards His original purposes for Church. As such, this will inevitably be manifested in different approaches the individual believers will either appreciate or not appreciate, based on what they have seen in God, and will form the varying types of Churches in the earth.

Therefore, I encourage each Church fellowship to spend time defining and articulating what they hear in Christ for the formation of a Church, write it down, and keep that before their minds. While they may never completely reach the end of the development of that definition, at least initially it will serve them well to have at least done their best to clarify what they feel called to in Church formation, and then look to Him to form and fashion it as time goes by.