

THE MEMBERSHIP OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-18

After He quit the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, Jesus never built but one thing. That was His church. He said, "I will build My church." With reference to the church that Jesus built, it was founded at the right time, during the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; in the right place, Palestine; by the right person, Christ; out of the right material, believers in Christ, who had been baptized in obedience to His command, and were willing to carry forward His work in the world. It was organized by Christ and vitalized by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

A New Testament church is a congregation of baptized believers in Christ, equal in rank and privileges, who are voluntarily united in the belief of what He has taught, and covenanting together to do what He has commanded in perpetuating His ordinances and propagating His gospel to the ends of the earth.

As it has been said: "My church is the place where the Word of God is preached, the power of God is felt, the Spirit of God is manifested, the love of God is revealed, and the salvation of God is received. It is the altar of my devotion, the center of my affection, and the foretaste of heaven. It is the place to go for Christian fellowship, Biblical instruction, spiritual inspiration, and real service. It is a necessary institution, the best teacher of righteousness we have, the friend of childhood, the inspirer of youth, the strengthener of middle life, and the comforter of old age. It concerns conscience, convictions, conservation, consecration and charity. It urges understanding, unselfishness and usefulness. It calls for courtesy, cheerfulness, compassion, courage and cooperation. I am thankful for its comfort, call, challenge and crusade. It claims the first place in my heart, the highest place in my activities, and its unity, peace and progress concern my life in this world and that which is to come."

I. Qualifications For Membership In A New Testament Church. Acts 2:37-47.

1. Regeneration.

Pre-requisites to it:

- (1) Repentance toward God.
- (2) Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have not been regenerated or saved, you ought not to be a member of the church. If you have been saved, you ought not to stay out of the church. Only born-again ones are fit subjects for church membership.

2. Confession.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9-10.

3. Baptism.

This must be personal and voluntary.

"Repent and be baptized."

According to the Acts, the members of the early church had these qualifications:

1. They heard the Gospel by a Spirit-filled preacher. They heard the right kind of preacher preach the right kind of sermon.

2. They were convicted of sin when they heard that New Testament sermon.
"They were pricked in their hearts." "They were smitten in their consciences."
"Woe is me, for I am undone." Man cannot be done over until he is undone.
3. They repented of their sins when they saw themselves as sinners.
4. They had personal saving faith.
"They received His word." They believed on Christ as the Son of God. They were cleansed from sin.
5. They publicly confessed Christ in word, by baptism, and by life.
6. They were baptized upon a profession of their personal faith in Christ.
"Those who heard His word were baptized."
7. They lived the heaven-born life.
"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved." Acts 2:46-47.

II. Duties of Members in a New Testament Church.

A pastor soon learns that he has four classes of members in his church, namely, the reliable, the spasmodic, the unqualified and the unworthy. There are the "once-in-a-whilers," "Up and Downers," "Ins and Outers" and "Old Faithfuls." As to the "Old Faithfuls," if they are not present, there is a reason. They are the ones who assume the extra burdens. Enough of them would make any church great.

Investigations in church administration have shown that, on an average, only ten per cent of the members of a church can be depended upon for any sort of sacrificial service. The spasmodic member presents a peculiar problem. Now you see him, and then you don't. That which is novel attracts him. By directing him to something new one can use his spurts of enthusiasm to advantage.

There are those who are zealous, but incompetent. The pessimist desires to visit the sick; the gossip wants to call on newcomers and new members. Then, there are the disloyal or "almost nevers" who attend on Christmas, Easter and during the revival meeting, but never return for another year. Occasionally, they do come when their children are on the program. They attend only when the mood suits.

Among the duties of members in a New Testament church are the following:

1. Loyalty.
Our loyalty to Christ is measured by our loyalty to His church. It is impossible to be loyal, faithful and true to Christ and indifferent to His church. A true Christian will be loyal and faithful to the church. He will be loyal to the church because:
 - (1) He loves its Founder.
 - (2) He loves its members.
 - (3) He loves its purpose.
 - (4) He loves its principles.
 - (5) He loves its message.
2. Support.
Good church members support their church with:

(1) Their presence.

David said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple." It is right for church members to attend the services of their church. To neglect church attendance is to please Satan, to give satisfaction to Christ's enemies, and to grieve the Saviour.

When church members are faithful in church attendance, they cause others to know that they regard their spiritual welfare as a matter of great importance. Church attendance makes them stronger for another week. It helps the pastor, encourages the brethren, causes others to see that they practice what they profess, and pleases the Lord.

God's children should go to church to see the Lord, to worship Him, to obey His commands, to get Biblical instruction, to receive spiritual inspiration, to have Christian fellowship, to set a worthy example and to help maintain the services of the church.

(2) Their prayers.

Prayer is a duty that every Christian owes to God, to others and to himself. It is also a precious privilege. Prayer is the greatest resource of any life. The mightiest thing any Christian can do for his church is to pray. Prayer accomplishes so much. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." By prayer we harness God's omnipotence to our impotence. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which is outside the will of God. Our success in the Lord's work in the church depends upon our prayers. No praying will mean no results, little praying will mean a few results, and much praying of the right sort will mean great results.

(3) Their purses.

It costs money to run a church although a lot of church members do not know it. Many church members accept the blessings and privileges of the church, but never contribute a cent toward its maintenance. They let others do all the paying and then they boast about how much our church gave last year, and sometimes they find fault about what their church failed to give. But, complaining and paying do not go together.

3. Service.

Good church members always find something to do for their church. They are not content to sit in the pew. Christianity finds very little expression in pew-sitting. Christians should do something for their Lord in person, and not merely take it all out in talking. Good church members are willing to work anywhere they can to glorify their Lord and advance the interests of His kingdom.