

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER

by Walton Weaver

Introduction:

1. The important of the church in God's plan: Eph. 3:8-2 (in God's eternal purpose); Acts 20:28 (purchased with Christ's own blood); Eph. 5:1, 23, 25 (loved it, gave self for it, Savior of the body); Eph. 1:22; 5:23 (head of it); Acts 2:47 (all saved are added to it).
2. With this kind of importance placed upon God's church, it is surely of great importance to know if membership in it is necessary, and, if so, how one becomes a member.
3. We are at this time speaking of membership in the one body of Christ of Eph. 4:4, the church that the scriptures cited in # 1 above are describing. This is the body of the saved throughout the whole world, or the church in the universal sense.

I. WHERE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP BEGAN, Acts 2.

- A. Church had its beginning here, in the city of Jerusalem, Matt. 16:18; Mk. 9:1; Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-4, 41, 47.
- B. This was the "beginning" according to Peter, Acts 11:15 with 2:1-4.
- C. Peter preached remission of sins in the name of Christ for the first time on this occasion, Lk. 24:47-49 with Acts 2:38: "repentance for the remission of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem," and "repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins."
- D. What was happening to those who were being saved under this new plan? Ans.: "and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (NASB). The KJV says they were being added "to the church." At that time the church consisted of the apostles plus the 3,000 who were baptized according to v. 41. This was "their number" to which the NASB is making reference.

II. WHAT MAKES CHURCH MEMBERSHIP NECESSARY?

- A. That church membership is necessary is often denied: "The church won't save you," we often hear. "One can live just as good a Christian life out of the church," we are told, "as he can in the church."
- B. But remember, to say that church membership is not necessary is to make the body of Christ a non-essential. To so reason—
 1. Makes the death of Christ a non-essential act since he loved it, died for it, and purchased it with his own blood, as already seen.
 2. Means one is saved without the blood of Christ since the church was purchased

with Christ's blood, Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25. Can one be saved and not be one whom Christ has purchased? See Rev. 1:5-6

3. Means that one can be saved and not be in the body of the reconciled, and therefore not reconciled to God, since the church is made up of those who have been reconciled to God and to each another by Christ's blood, Eph. 2:13-16.
- C. Unless one is ready to accept such consequences, he must not take the position that church membership is not necessary.

III. TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE CHURCH IS, IS TO UNDERSTAND THE NECESSITY OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

A. What is the church?

1. The church is the called.
 - a. Those called out of darkness, 1 Pet. 2:9.
 - b. Those called into the fellowship of Christ, 1 Cor. 1:9.
 - c. Those called to peace in one body, Col. 3:15. On this peace in the one body see Eph. 2:14-6 already introduced.
2. The church is the reconciled, Eph. 2:13ff. again.
3. The church is made up of those who have been justified, Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor, 6:11; 12:13.
4. The church is the body of Christ, Eph. 1:22-23.
5. The church is the family of God, 1 Tim. 3:15.

B. In view of what the church is, the following questions must be considered.

1. Can one be saved who has not been called out of darkness? If the answer is "no," and this is the only true answer, then one cannot be saved outside the church because this is what the church is. Remember, when one is delivered, he is translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13).
2. Can one be saved who is not in the fellowship of Christ? If "no," as this most certainly is the case, then he cannot be saved outside the church, because this is the meaning of the church, i.e., those who are in the fellowship of Christ.
3. Can one be saved and not be among the justified or those who have been reconciled to God? Then he cannot be saved and not be in the church, because these are the ones who make up the church as the one body of Christ. Eph. 2:13f.
4. Can one be saved who is not in the family of God? If "no," as surely is the case, then one cannot be saved and not be in the church, since the church is the "house [family] of the living God." 1 Tim. 3:15.
5. Can one be saved without the blood of Christ? If "no," then consider this: the blood of Christ is the means of reconciliation, and the body of Christ is the

sphere or place. Eph. 2:13f.

6. Can one be saved and not be joined to Christ as head (Col. 1:18; 2:19)? If “no,” please answer this question: how can one be joined to Christ the head without being in his body? Is it not the body that is joined to the head? No member of your body can be joined to your head unless it is a part of your body. So it is with Christ.

IV. WHAT MAKES ONE A CHRISTIAN MAKES HIM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH.

- A. We are now in a better position to understand that what is involved in being saved is precisely what makes one a part of the body of Christ, the church.
 1. One is born into the family of God (Jn. 3:1ff.), but the family or house of God is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). God has no children outside of his family.
 2. As one is delivered from sin he is translated into the kingdom of God’s Son (Col. 1:13), which is the church (Matt. 16:18, the terms “church” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably in these verses). In both Col. 1:13 and Matt. 16:18 the word “kingdom” is used in the sense of sphere or location. In this sense the kingdom and the church are the same.
 3. What brings one into Christ where redemption and forgiveness of sins is found (Col. 1:14) also brings him into the kingdom, body, or church. See Rom. 6:3-4 and Gal. 3:26-27 with 1 Cor. 12:13).
- B. From these considerations it is clear that one is not saved by one set of conditions and made a member of the body of Christ, the church, by another set of conditions.

Conclusion:

1. Christ adds people to the body of the saved, the church, as they are being saved (Acts 2:47). One does not “join” the church, the Lord adds him to it. The church is the saved, and as one is saved he is added to that number by the Lord.
2. Would you become a part of the body of Christ by being saved today? Then do what the 3,000 did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41) and let the Lord add you to that number (Acts 2:47).