Does Church Membership Matter?
Scripture: Acts 2
Code: BQ10511

“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

This was really a church, nothing more and nothing less. Its life was completely defined by the devotion to those spiritual duties which make up the unique identity of the church. Nothing outside the living Lord, the Spirit, and the Word define life for the church. This church, though not having any cultural elements of success, no worldly strategies, was still endowed with every necessary component for accomplishing the purposes of its Lord. The church will still be effective in bringing sinners to Christ when it manifests the same key elements of spiritual duty that marked this first fellowship.

The three thousand who confessed faith in Christ and were baptized in verse 41 are the **they** who showed the genuineness of their faith by continuing. Despite the hate, ridicule, and persecution they suffered, they remained faithful. That is a mark of genuine salvation. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.” The true branch will abide in the vine (John 15:1–4). The good seed will not wither and die under persecution (Matt. 13:3–9, 21). In contrast, the apostle John writes of false believers, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19).

That the church should be composed of saved individuals seems axiomatic. Sadly, however, many churches today are made up largely of unsaved individuals. Amazingly, some even try to design a church where non-Christians can feel comfortable. This can’t be the goal in a church that is devoted to holiness and righteousness in all areas of life. Such a church will be unpopular with sinners. In this first fellowship, all the professors were possessors.

The content for the church is clearly to be revealed truth. God designed the church to be a place where His Word is proclaimed and explained. Paul mandates such a priority all through the Pastoral Epistles, where he described the ongoing process to Timothy when he wrote, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

A commitment to **the apostles' teaching** is foundational to the growth and spiritual health of every church. Peter wrote, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). To the Romans Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

A believer should count it a wasted day when he does not learn something new from, or is not more deeply enriched, by the truth of God's Word. The early church sat under the teaching ministry of the apostles, whose **teaching,** now written on the pages of the New Testament Scriptures, is to be taught by all pastors.

Scripture is food for the believer's growth and power—and there is no other. The church today ignores the exposition and application of Scripture at its peril, as the warning of Hosea to Israel suggests: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). The church cannot operate on truth it is not taught; believers cannot function on principles they have not learned. The most noble are still those who search the Scriptures daily (cf. Acts 17:11). They contain **the apostles' teaching.**

Fellowship is the spiritual duty of believers to stimulate each other to holiness and faithfulness. It is most specifically expressed through the "one anothers" of the New Testament (cf. Rom. 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2, 25, 32; 5:21; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thess. 4:9, 18, 5:11, 13; Heb. 3:13; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:9, 10; 5:5, etc.). The basic meaning of *koinonia* (**fellowship**) is "partnership," or "sharing." Those who receive Jesus Christ become partners with Him and with all other believers (1 John 1:3). That fellowship is permanent, because our shared eternal life is forever. The joy associated with it, however, may be lost through sinful neglect of its duties.

For a Christian to fail to participate in the life of a local church is inexcusable. In fact, those who choose to isolate themselves are disobedient to the direct command of Scripture. Hebrews 10:24–25 charges believers to "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." The Bible does not envision the Christian life as one lived apart from other believers. All members of the universal church, the body of Christ, are to be actively and intimately involved in local assemblies.

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