

1Cor 12.27—Is Church Membership Biblical?

Salvation is Both Personal and Corporate

- I. It's fallacious to think of salvation as a purely personal thing.
 - A. Of course salvation is personal, Gal 2.20; but it's also corporate, Eph 1.22-23. To be personally brought into union with Christ in salvation is to be brought into union with His Body.
 - B. The church is not a collection of individuals with personal relationships with Christ. It's brethren joined to one another in one Christ, 1Cor 12.13; Eph 5.30
- II. The church's unity—a unity Paul denotes in Eph 4.4-5—is not in a uniform creed or denomination. It's in Christ Himself.
 - A. If we have God as our Father and Christ as our Head then we have every other Christian in the world as our brother and sister. If they're in Christ (Rom 12.5; 16.3, 7, 9), then they're family.
- III. If salvation is a corporate reality then it's incumbent upon us to take public ownership of our share in that reality by joining ourselves to the visible and local expression of its incorporation, viz. the church.
 - A. Joining a Christian church by profession is our response to Christ's saving work in our hearts.
 - B. Every believer in the Bible lives in connection with the community of God's people because the Spirit of God is a uniting Spirit, uniting us first to Christ and, in Him, to one another.

The Sacraments Presuppose Membership

- I. The Sacraments are the signs and seals of the covenant of grace which God's made with believers in Christ. And it's as such that they presuppose church membership, 1Cor 10.16-17
 - A. Baptism testifies to our membership in Christ's church and the Supper confirms God's promises to us as members. Baptism says we're in the church; the Lord's Supper says we're of the church.
 - B. The observance of the Lord's Supper is an act of the church, an act which distinguishes it from the world, 1Cor 11.17-34

The Life of the Church Presupposes Membership

- I. Consider the many "one another" commandments in the NT, e.g. Rom 12.10, 16; 15.7; 16.16; 1Cor 11.33; 12.25; Eph 5.21; 1Th 5.11
 - A. We're accountable in specific ways to a particular group of people. But who are they? And how can we know them?

- B. Their membership in Christ's church is the mark by which we identify them as our brethren in Christ, Gal 6.10

The Obligations of the Church's Leaders and its Members Presuppose Membership

- I. God holds elders responsible to serve, shepherd, and care for the flock, Acts 20.28; 1Pet 5.2. But how are they to know their flock?
 - A. Their membership in Christ's church is how they'll know them.
 - B. God governs His church with elders (Acts 14.23; Tit 1.5) and God identifies His church to them by their membership.
- II. This explains the promise of submission in the 5th membership vow. In this vow God points out to the elders the very souls they're to shepherd and the sheep formally submit themselves to them for Christ's sake, Heb 13.17

Thoughts for Personal Application

- I. How does God's view of your relationship to His church compare with your view of it? God saved you into His church. He united you as a church and obligates you within it—some of you as elders, all of you as members. But is this how you see it? And, if so, are you carrying out your responsibilities within the church?
 - A. Elders. Are you serving the flock over whom God has made you overseers? Do you love the sheep? Do you pray for them? Do you shepherd them?
 1. Review your vows and renew your commitment to them. Look around and be reminded who your sheep are.
 - B. Members. Are you keeping your membership vows? Did you take those vows in sincerity? Are you serving one another in love? Is the church your family? Is the church at the center of your worldview as it's at the center of God's eternal plan? And are you submitting yourself, in the Lord, to its elders? Do you honor them for their office? Do you pray for them? Do you love them?
 1. Review your vows and renew your commitment to them. Look around and be reminded who your elders are.
- II. Be thankful God didn't call you to live out the Christian life alone. Of course not all who are in the church are actually in Christ, but the question is, are you? Your commitment to your vows will tell you.