

Do Christians Really Need to Go to Church?

Does church membership mean more than simply joining a social group? Does the church have a responsibility to discipline its members—and if so, what does that look like? In 40 Questions About Church Membership and Discipline, Dr. Jeremy Kimble recognizes and addresses the many puzzling questions about the critical role of the church in the life of believers.

Q: What is the most important thing for readers to understand about church membership?

Church membership is not solely about what you can get out of a church. Instead, membership points us toward commitment and mutual accountability. When we join the membership of a local church, we are agreeing to be overseen in our discipleship and oversee others in their discipleship. As such, the idea of membership goes beyond mere attendance and even ministry involvement. At its heart, church membership is about a group of people committed to one another, who will continually oversee and exhort one another toward ever-increasing godliness.

Q: What are some of the biggest challenges the church as an institution faces today, both from the inside and the outside?

Internally, there could be any number of challenges, but I think one major issue the church must face is the inherent individualism that exists in our churches. We do not often have a culture of authenticity and openness in our local churches. Instead, we look the part, fulfill our church duties and attend what we need to, but we never get beyond the surface. A real need exists to get past all of that, and as members, commit to loving, teaching, rebuking and encouraging one another. This involves people who are open and transparent enough to share their lives with others. In this way, we can show love and pursue holiness as a community.

Externally, we see increasing pressure to conform to the standards of the world, especially in certain areas (e.g., sexuality, gender, materialism and so on). It seems in the West that if we continue to pursue faithfulness to God's Word, the disparity between the church and the world will become more evident. Churches will likely have some difficult choices to make in the years ahead, as ostracization seems inevitable. However, this challenge is also a great opportunity for the church to display the love and holiness of God in very manifest ways.

Q: Why is it important to be a member of a local church? Isn't being a Christian enough?

Being a Christian is certainly the key starting point, but joining a church in membership is also crucial for a few reasons. First, church leaders are told to keep watch over their flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4) and that they will have to give an account for the people they oversee (Heb. 13:17). If this is the case, pastors must know who they are overseeing, and church membership makes clear whom they are to oversee. Second, we are told to exhort one another day after day so we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13). Of course, I can do this for any Christian, but it makes the most sense to do this for a particular group of people to whom I am committed. Finally, modern-day church membership adheres to the overall pattern seen in Scripture. Israel, though not the church, was a distinct nation with its own "membership" that was distinct from other peoples. The New Testament church speaks typically of local churches made up of certain people who are committed to one another, exercising a certain kind of authority, fulfilling "one another" commands.

Q: What qualifications of church membership are universal across denominational or doctrinal lines?

While there will be differences of opinion regarding baptism and the timing of granting someone membership status in a church, denominations would generally agree full members of their church be people who are regenerate. If a church is its

membership (i.e. the church is not a building, but a people), this is especially important. There would also be widespread agreement that particular responsibilities are inherent to church membership. Pastors do want to see passive consumers in their churches. There is founded expectation members will be involved in the work of the church and the lives of other members.

Q: What responsibilities does each member have to one another and their local church?

There is great responsibility inherent in church membership. We are responsible to submit to elected leadership, all the while knowing God has granted the keys of the kingdom to the entire membership (Matt. 16:19), thus striking a balance in authority. We must be proactive as members in working for others in their progress and joy in the faith (Phil. 1:25). The entire body of believers must exercise their spiritual gifts for the good of others (Romans 12:3-8) and regularly attend the gatherings of the church (Heb. 10:24-25) so as to edify others and be edified themselves. One could name off other responsibilities as well, noting members should be good listeners to sermons, biblical theologians and devoted to pray for one another. Finally, one must confront unrepentant sin in the lives of their fellow members, in the hopes they heed that rebuke and repent.

Watch for part 2 of this interview, where Dr. Kimble will discuss church discipline.

Learn more about *40 Questions about Church Membership and Discipline* and the other books in the 40 Questions series at .