

Conditions For Membership In The Lord's Church

The Bible speaks of the church in two senses, all the saved (universal, Matt. 16:18) and saints who band together in a certain area (local, 1 Cor. 1:2). It is God's desire that each and every man be a member in the universal church and a local church. In this article we will study the conditions of membership for both.

The Universal Church

The conditions of membership in the universal body of Christ are outlined by the word of God. A comprehensive study of the New Testament will reveal that the condition for being a member in the Lord's body is the plan of salvation. The house of God, which is the church of the living God, is made up of those who have been sanctified, redeemed, and saved (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:2-5; 2:4-10).

In Ephesians chapters one and two, the Bible reveals that those who are reconciled to God are in the one body, the church (Eph. 2:16; 1:22-23). These people who are in this one body are considered by the inspired apostle to be saints, ones sanctified unto God (Eph. 1:1). Likewise, they are said to have redemption and salvation, ones who were redeemed by the blood of Jesus and saved by the grace of God (Eph. 1:7; 2:8-9). Too, we must notice that these people were baptized, which Jesus commanded in order to be saved (Acts 19:1-5; cf. Mk. 16:16). Thus, when one is baptized, he is saved and added to the body of Christ, reconciled to God in the church.

Moreover, notice the example of Acts 2. Peter proclaimed salvation for "whoever calls on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:16-21). He began explaining how one may call upon the name of the Lord with the first step--belief in Jesus as the Christ (Acts 2:22-36; cf. Rom. 10:8-13). Then when asked what to do, he told the people to "repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38; cf. 22:16). Following this, the record says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 22:41, 27). Therefore, the Bible teaches that whenever one is saved by God at the point of baptism, he is also added to the church (counted among the redeemed) by the Lord.

Simply put, the conditions for membership in the church of Christ (universal) are: Hear the word of God in order to have faith (Rom. 10:8-17;); confess your faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-13); repent of your sins (Acts 2:38); be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Membership in the universal church of Christ is not conditioned upon paying money (1 Pet. 1:18-19). It is not based upon the decree of man. It is not by being a member of a local church.

The Local Church

Membership in the local church is also directed by God's word. These conditions are found in example and precept.

First, baptism does not add one to the local church. When one has been added to the total number of the saved, then he is directed by example to band together with those of like precious faith in the cause of our Lord. After his baptism in a different city, Saul (Paul) traveled to Jerusalem and desired to join with the disciples, but they did not accept him right away (Acts 9:26). It took the testimony of Barnabas to convince the brethren that Saul was faithful and worthy of acceptance into the local fellowship (Acts 9:27-28).

From Saul's account we can draw a few conclusions: 1. Paul made an effort to join with a congregation; 2. The church exercised its right of inquiry; 3. Being found faithful he was not refused; 4. Membership in a local church is by mutual agreement.

It should be manifest, but is worth noting, elders of the local church have a responsibility to guide the process of those desiring to enter the fellowship. They have the charge of shepherding the flock over which they have been appointed (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Therefore, it behooves them to reasonably establish the faithfulness of one who seeks to join in the work so as to prevent "leaven" from coming into the body and corrupting it. Brethren ought not to be offended when asked of their faithfulness and when checked out with their previous congregation.

Continued membership in the local church is dependent upon one's faithfulness to the Lord. If a person is found to be teaching error, and will not repent, he should be marked and excluded from the local church (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Jn. 9-11). When a Christian is failing in their God given duties, and will not repent, he is to be withdrawn from (2 Thes. 3:6-14). Again, when one is living in immorality, and will not repent, he is to be

disfellowshipped (1 Cor. 5:1-8).

Let us now note what the conditions of membership are not. As stated above, membership is not by baptism, this only adds one to the universal body of Christ. Membership is not by association with friends and family. Membership is not by assumption, that is, one cannot simply attend long enough to be considered a member.

Conclusion

If we are ones who desire to do God's will and be saved, we will seek to follow His plan as revealed in His word. We will obey that form of doctrine which will lead us to salvation, and thus be numbered among the redeemed, the church of Christ (Rom. 6:17; Heb. 5:9). Likewise, we will band together with other saints in our area in order to promote the cause of Christ (cf. 1 Thes. 1:6-8).

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