

## WHY MEMBERSHIP?

Someone once called a pastor to say he wanted to become a church member. He went on to explain that, while he wanted to become a member, he did not want to be expected to worship every week, study the Bible, visit the sick, or serve as a leader or teacher. The minister commended him for his desire to be a church member, but told him the church he was looking for was located in another part of town. The man wrote down the address and hung up. When he arrived at that address, the man came face to face with the result of his own attitude of not wanting to be involved. There stood an abandoned church building boarded up and ready for demolition.

Eph 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Over the next two weeks, we want to talk about what it means to be connected. After the service today we are having our annual members meeting. Today I want to talk about 'why membership.' Why do we as a church still encourage people to become members. Is there really a difference between being a member of a church and simply being a faithful attender?

### 1. Admission into a new FUTURE

The day you accepted Jesus Christ into your life, you became part of a different kingdom. Paul is writing here primarily to Gentile believers. These were people that would have been excluded from Judaism, from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promises.

However, in Christ we are citizens of the same kingdom. I lived for 10 years as an expatriate in a foreign nation. You cannot become a Kuwaiti, only the male children of Kuwait citizens are granted citizenship. I knew people that had lived there for more than 40 years and still could not become citizens. Being a resident of Kuwait meant that I could benefit from the nation. It was great having cheap gas and not having to pay any tax. However, It was different than being a true citizen since I was always a foreigner. It was never my home because I was never really allowed to be part of that nation.

In Christ, we have found a home. We are no longer expatriates, we belong.

There are many people here today that were born outside of Canada and later became citizens. Lift your hand if you were born outside of Canada. Now, lift your hand if you were born a citizen of a nation other than Canada. What was it like the day you became a citizen of this nation? How did you feel when Canada truly became your home? Was there a newfound sense of belonging?

### 2. Adopted into a new FAMILY

You are not alone. You are not only citizens of a new country; you are members of a new family. How many of you who immigrated to Canada had family that was already here waiting for you? Did that make coming to Canada easier? I am sure it did!

At the beginning of Ephesians, Paul starts by reminding us that we were all adopted into God's family. As great as it is to be a citizen in God's kingdom, it's even better to be a part of His family.

Look at how John described the greatness of being God's children:

1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

There are benefits to being part of a family here on earth. Growing up I always knew that I had a home to come back to. Whether it was being away at university or seminary or when we lived on the ship or later when we lived in Kuwait, I always knew that I had a home to come back to. It was great to live overseas and then return and land at the airport, but it was even better to finally arrive home.

Your family is the place where you belong. They grew up with you and know you. It is where I was raised. It is the relationships that hold a lifetime of memories. It is the place where you can be yourself.

Our church family presents those same kinds of benefits when it comes to our relationship with God. The church is my home. It is the place where I have Christian brothers and sisters to help me to cultivate the characteristics that my heavenly Father wants to pass down to me and see me develop in my life. God has chosen to use other believers to help me accomplish the purposes in my life He has called me to. Your church family is the place you can be yourself.

The church is a place where I can develop deep, intimate relationships that far surpass any that I could have outside the church family. Our common bond in Jesus Christ is a far stronger force than anything else that might connect us with others. God does not want us to be spiritual orphans. It is never His intent that His children would be estranged from His family. So why would any Christian want to try to live out his or her faith apart from the family that God has given to them?

I saw this truth so often when we lived in Kuwait. The church there was truly an Oasis. It was a difficult place to live as a non-Muslim, so there was something about arriving on the church compound that was like coming home. Often people would come from Saudi Arabia, having driven 4-5 hours just so that they could attend a service and have fellowship.

### 3. Added into a local FELLOWSHIP

God has admitted us into a new future and adopted us into a new family, but the way we connect to what God has given is through the local church. Paul uses the example here of a building. We are "built together to become a dwelling in which God lives." This means a spiritual building, but it also means a physical one. In the early church, being a Christian was synonymous with being a member of a local church. Coming to faith meant being added to the group (church family), not going it alone.

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 2:46-47 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 5:12-14 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Paul directs Timothy to put needy widows on list. The word is KATALEGO from where we get the word *to catalogue*. When the early Christians moved or travelled, they would be given letter of recommendation from their church to give to the church they were visiting or moving to. The idea of a Christian who was not part of a local fellowship was unthinkable.

The Christian life is not just a matter of believing. It is matter of belonging, and belonging is a choice that you make. Fellowship begins with belonging, with making a choice to be in fellowship. God wants you to identify, to make not only the choice to be a part of His family but also part of a local fellowship.

The church is not a place for people to gather occasionally for religious services. It is not one more social institution among many others. The church is God's dream for His most cherished creation. There is nothing like the church – no accomplishment, no organization or country or civilization – there is nothing as important as the church. And only the church will survive history to share God's eternity. – John Ortberg

Rom 12:5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Each body part has a purpose, and each member belongs to all the others. The word MEMBERSHIP comes from the Bible, but today has a different meaning. Today it means being part of some club or organization by signing up for this or joining that. But membership isn't about being a part of some silly club, wearing silly hats and having silly signs. Being a member means that you choosing to belong. It is making the choice to belong to a family.

So what is membership? Why do we as a church have a baptism and membership class? By the way, did you know that we currently have 50 people in our 101 class. Why do we encourage people to take the class and become members?

In two weeks we have 20 people who are being baptized in the services, and a few weeks ago we have 5 young people who were baptized at youth camp. Baptism is a public declaration. In being baptized, you are saying in a public way that you are a follower of Jesus. It is identifying yourself as a believer in Christ. It is a public declaration of a personal relationship.

Membership is also a public declaration. It is saying that you are making the decision to join a local church. You are identifying yourself as an active participant of that local fellowship and saying that you want to make that church your home. So how is being a member different from just being a faithful attender? It is similar to the difference between a servant (employee) and a son or daughter.

## 1. PERSEVERANCE

John 10:12-13 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Servants run when there are problems. Sons and daughter stay. In this scripture, the hired hand sees the wolf coming and runs away. They flee when times get tough. At the beginning of the invasion of Kuwait, the military saw the Iraqi tanks approaching and, instead of fighting, they just ran away. They got in their jeeps and headed for the border of Saudi Arabia. Why didn't they fight? Because they were not Kuwaitis. Most of the soldiers were expatriates from other countries. They were paid to serve.

When they saw the tanks approaching they decided that their paycheck was not worth dying for so they ran away. They had little to gain and everything to lose.

An employee bails out when things get tough because he is not committed to the business as much as he is committed to what he receives from the business. What matters to them is their paycheck. If the business falters no problem, they can just quit and get a job somewhere else. However, if you are in the family that owns the business you know that if the business goes down, you go down. Children who work in a family business are often called upon to sacrifice and work even after everyone else has gone home because they have a stake in the business. It is a very different mindset.

Do you believe that Bramalea Baptist Church is your home? One of the tests that is whether or not you stay when times get tough. This church has gone through good times and bad times. It is great to reap the benefits from the church when things are good, but are you willing to hang in there and keep going even when times are tough? That is often the difference between an attender and a member.

## 2. SERVICE

Servants do only what is expected of them. They are expected to show up at a certain time and do their job but when the whistle blows they are gone. Sons and daughters go above and beyond because they understand that running a business sometimes requires more than just punching a clock.

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

A servant mindset says “I am teaching a class. I will decide what to teach and how to teach it.” A son or daughter mindset is recognizing that they are investing into the lives of the congregation and they are eager to help teach what the family believes is important. A servant says “I am just a door greeter.” A son or daughter views everyone who comes into the church as entering their home and sees new people as future family members. They are alert and take initiative.

Servants do not often take the initiative. They simply do what they are told. I saw this truth firsthand when we lived in Kuwait. We would often have large gatherings on our compound. Afterwards, I was always amazed by how messy it was. There was garbage thrown all over the place. It was not until I had lived there for a while that I understood. In Kuwait there are people who clean up after you. If you go to the mall and eat no one picks up their tray and dumps their garbage, they have people that do that. So, when people came to the church they would simply throw their trash on the ground assuming that the cleaners would pick it up. One day I was walking with one of our other pastors to a service. He saw some trash on the ground and picked it up. One of the members of our church came over and said that he should not do that, that it was not his job. He said “No, it is not my job, but this is my home. When people come onto this compound I do not want them to see garbage.” I shared that in a sermon, and from that day I started seeing other people do the same thing.”

How about you? When you walk into this church and see a piece of garbage on the floor do you just think to yourself “someone should really pick that up” – or do you just pick it up? Do you go the extra mile so that everyone who enters this place will have the best experience possible? Do you see this church as simply a place to attend or a home you are part of?

## 3. HUMILITY

Servants do not like to be disciplined. They will often leave when that happens. Sons and daughters stay. They take the correction and submit to discipline.

Hebrews 12:7-8 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Servants don't like discipline. When they face correction, it is always someone else's fault. They do not take responsibility because they are insecure and afraid of rejection. Servants receive their self-esteem from their particular gift and find it difficult to have anyone try to question or sharpen that gift. Likewise, servants are not willing to learn much. They are not teachable because they feel that they already know everything. E.g. people that wanted the Spanish ministry. Servants generally come into the household fully grown.

Sons and daughters, want to learn. They come into the household as children ready to learn. They want to strive for the best with a spirit of excellence. Sons and daughters are ready to take correction because they are secure in who they are. Sons and daughters have puppy feet. They have lots of potential.

I believe that these are exciting days for us as a church. After the 11:00 service today we will be having our annual Members Meeting and hearing reports of what God is doing. The church is growing. Next week is our anniversary and we have an exciting gift we will be giving to everyone. I encourage you to join us by becoming part of what God is doing at BBC!

Recently I read the story about a small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smokies which had built a new sanctuary on a piece of land willed to them by a church member. Days before the new church was to open, the local building inspector informed the pastor that the parking lot was inadequate for the size of the building. Until the church doubled the size of the parking lot, they would not be able to use the new sanctuary. Unfortunately, the church with its undersized parking lot had used every inch of their land except for the mountain against which it had been built. In order to build more parking spaces, they would have to move the mountain out of the back yard. Undaunted, the pastor announced the next Sunday morning that he would meet that evening with all the members of the church who had "mountain moving faith." They would hold a prayer session asking God to remove the mountain from the back yard and to somehow provide enough money to have it paved and painted before the upcoming scheduled opening dedication service. At the appointed time, members assembled for prayer. They prayed for nearly three hours. Afterwards the pastor said the final "Amen." "We'll open as scheduled," he assured everyone. "God has never let us down before, and I believe He will be faithful this time too." The next morning, as he was working in his study, there came a loud knock at the pastor's door. When he called, "Come in," a rough looking construction foreman appeared, removing his hard hat as he entered. "Excuse me, Reverend. I'm from a Construction Company over in the next county. We're building a huge new shopping mall over there and we need some fill dirt. Would you be willing to let us have a chunk of that mountain behind the church? To pay for it we will pave all the exposed area, if we can have it right away. We can't do anything else until we get the dirt in and allow it to settle properly."

The little church was dedicated as originally was planned and there were far more members with "mountain moving faith" on opening Sunday than there had been before!

\*\* Elections – remember to vote! This is not about the economy, it is about the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage and the future of the church.