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Church Membership

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CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Many people attend our church and do not, at least for a long time, become members. They have their reasons, all of which seem good to them. Some of them surely are; others are rationalizations of not-so-well-thought-out excuses, suspicions, and uncertainties.

Does it really matter? Is membership not just a technicality, just a formality of human organization? No doubt it has become that in many churches. But, no, it is really more meaningful than that. Here is an illustration of what it signifies.

Someone said, "You can attend a symphony, but if you're going to play in it, you have to be a member." The meaning of membership is a spiritual reality. (Eph. 4:13) It suggests an appropriate place and part in producing the unity and harmony of the whole church. It also relates specifically to growth in maturity, for each member and for the whole body. (Eph. 4:14, 15)

Membership should be the difference between an organization and a living organism. (Eph. 4:16) The whole is not just equal to, but more than, the sum of all its parts. In philosophy this is illustrated by reminding the students that, having dissected a cat, and having carefully preserved all of the parts, the result of putting them all back together again is still a dead cat. The parts may all be there, but life in the cat is a function of the whole animal in its unity.

Programs and even good service⁶ can result from just being together. But the life of the body, even the body of Christ, is a matter of essential togetherness and spiritual unity. (1 Cor. 12:12) Membership symbolizes and signifies this inner life in mutual commitment among the individual "members."

It is the duty of the Christian to become an integral part of a local church body, as

signified and expressed in the meaning of membership. The whole body is "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies." (Eph. 4:16)

Furthermore, the spiritual welfare of some in the church body is affected greatly by the behavior and influence of others, especially those who may be stronger in the faith. It is the responsibility of the "stronger" ones to "give themselves up" and sacrifice some of their "rights in freedom" for the sake of the weaker members. Again, membership symbolizes this sacrificial willingness and acknowledges the responsibility of the strong for the weak. (I Cor. 8:6-13)

Membership is an expression of true stewardship. It implies not only financial support for the work of the church body, but also the giving of one's talents and even of one's self for the welfare of every other member of the body of Christ. (I John 3:16-19)

Milo A. Rediger