



Why Declare Membership at a Local Congregation?

This question recently came up in some of my Internet studies with online friends. The question centers on whether or not it is necessary to be identified as a member of a local congregation. The Bible doesn't have a process whereby one may "join" the church such as are followed in the denominational world. However, the Bible does authorize individual Christians to be members of local congregations (1 Corinthians 12:27). So there must be some way for Christians to be members of local congregations. And there is.

Let me state up front that for someone who is not a Christian, to become a member of the church of Christ, one must be added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). Upon baptism, provided the individual lives within the local community, it is right and proper to assume the individual to be a member of the local congregation. This was the general practice within the New Testament (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Our question is more appropriately asked when a person moves from his home congregation to another. Must that individual place membership with a local congregation? Let's note some reasons why the answer to this question should be "yes."

First, the individual Christian ought to declare membership in a local congregation to assure the leaders that he is subject to their authority. Hebrews 13:17 states, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The rulers of the local congregation have a responsibility to watch for the souls of individual Christians. Individual Christians have the responsibility to make their job easier by submitting to their judgment. There should be no doubt as to the status of the individual

Christian in relationship to the rulers. However, if someone does not declare membership, this creates doubt and uncertainty in the minds of the rulers as to whether they have the appropriate authority. Why? Because rulers only have authority over members of the local congregation; they do not have authority over those who are not members of the local congregation. If the individual Christian seeks to please God in obeying Hebrews 13:17, he will declare membership in a local congregation.

Second, the individual Christian ought to declare membership in a local congregation to let his fellow Christians know that he is there to work with them. The church is to be involved in doing the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). And each individual contributes to that work as he has ability (1 Peter 4:11).



The local congregation is thus expected to do the Lord's work (2 Corinthians 9:8, Colossians 1:10) and the individual is expected to do his work heartily (Colossians 3:23). Without declaring such membership, other members wonder whether or not one has the intentions of involving oneself in the work of the local church, and thus, in the

work of the Lord as well. Declaring one's membership with a local congregation, let's that congregation know that one is available and ready to do the work that needs to be done in the local church. Declaring membership exhibits the "heartiness" that the Lord desires us to have regarding his work.

Finally, the individual Christian ought to declare membership in a local congregation to indicate his full fellowship with the local congregation. Fellowship isn't merely having a meal together or playing games together. Fellowship is participation within the activities of the congregation, regardless what those activities may be (Acts 2:42). We have fellowship when we study God's word together in our Bible classes, when we

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A Divine Demonstration

S In John chapter 18 we find Jesus in the garden with His betrayer approaching with a band of soldiers and officers from the chief priests. Jesus is accompanied by the remaining disciples. Judas, His betrayer, knew where to find Him, he had been there many times himself. As they were approaching, Jesus asked a simple question of them. He said "Whom seek ye (v. 4)?" The answer came, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus did not run and hide or fight like a common criminal (there was nothing common about Him). Instead, He identified Himself as the one they were seeking. He said, "I am he (v. 5)." When Jesus uttered these words there was a reaction that, in my mind, has no explanation but the miraculous. The text reads: "When therefore he said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6, ASV).

The Word of God spoken by Jesus caused a reaction. The soldiers and officers did something that they had no intention of doing. They "went backward and fell to the ground." He demonstrated three things in that garden (1) that the word He had spoken was true, (2) that He had a choice (3) that He was the master of the situation.

Jesus Demonstrated that His Word Was True

Jesus actually assisted the soldiers and officers in making a positive identification of Him there in the garden. These men knew that Jesus was "a man approved of God ... by mighty works and wonders and signs (Acts 2:22). Even though many did not acknowledge Jesus as Messiah the multitudes recognized it. They said, "When the Christ shall come, will he do more signs than those which this man hath done (John 7:31)?" So when the men fell backward at Jesus' answer they knew they had found the right man. Jesus confirmed His word just as He did when He went with the apostles (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

Jesus Demonstrated His Choice

For most cases in which a man is arrested the subject is rushed by the officers and subdued by force. Such was not the case here. Jesus subdued the soldiers and then submitted to them. He had said: "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John 10:17-18).

The scene in the garden demonstrated that Jesus did have control of His own life. No one took it from Him, He laid it down; he gave it (Titus 2:14; Heb. 12:1-2) in an act of obedience (Philippians 2:6-8; Heb. 5:8-9). His love for us is seen vividly in this selfless act.

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worship God in our assembly, when we visit the nursing home together, or when we support a particular work with our finances. The individual Christian should want to have full fellowship with other Christians (1 John 1:7). Without declaring membership at a local congregation, an individual's intentions aren't fully known. However, when one declares membership one indicates full fellowship with the local congregation.

The individual Christian certainly has the God given right to faithfully congregate with a particular congregation of his choice (Acts 9:26). However, it is also God's desire for a Christian to be a member of the local church (1 Corinthians 12:18). Combining those two facts together with the above reasons we can conclude that it is biblical and necessary for the individual Christian to declare membership at a local, faithful, congregation of his choice.

Kevin Cauley

Sermons and Study Topics

Week of 12/19/04

Morning	Beatitudes—They That Mourn
Scripture	Matthew 5:3-10
Evening	Asian Churches—Smyrna
Scripture	Revelation 2:8-11
Sunday Morning Bible Study	The Book of Hebrews
Wednesday Evening Bible Study	Studies on the Cross

Weekly Record

Week of 12/12/04

Sunday Class	61
Sunday A.M.	81
Sunday P.M.	53
Wednesday	58
Contribution	\$1541.61
Budget	\$1778.13

A Divine Demonstration (cont.)

Jesus Demonstrated His Mastery

Throughout His ministry Jesus had shown that He was the master, that He controlled the very elements. He turned water to wine (John 2:7-10), cast out demons (Mark 5:1-20), cleansed lepers (Luke 17:11-19) and even raised the dead (Luke 7:11-17; John 11:17-44). But at no time were the disciples more impressed with His mastery than when he was with them during a severe storm on the Sea of Galilee. Note the record:

And when he was entered into a boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Save, Lord; we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a

great calm. And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him? (Matt. 8:23-27)

To the very last of His free moments Jesus demonstrates His mastery by the effect of the words, "I am he." The onrushing soldiers and officers were stopped in their tracks and they fell backward. One cannot help but think that for at least some of those arrestors there was a new sense of awe like the officers who had been sent earlier to arrest Jesus and came back said, "Never man so spake (John 7:46)."

Conclusion

You have a Savior whose words are confirmed by Heaven itself with mighty works, wonders and signs. The truth of His message has been confirmed and can be trusted. You have a Savior that chose to die for you. He was not some revolutionary

in hiding who was finally caught. No greater love can be shown for you (John 15:13). You have a Savior who is the master of the very elements. If He says He can and will save, if He says that there is a place prepared for you, if He says He's coming again, then, every word is true. What a friend we have in Jesus.

G. E. Watkins
Austin, Texas

Kevin's Korner — Holiday Cheer

W

ell, we are in the final stretch for the last holiday of this year. If there are any last minute shoppers out there, I guess you better get busy. We have family coming in for the holidays this year since we've elected to keep Mary Lynn home. We are expecting our company to arrive on Tuesday and depart the following week sometime.

In this spirit of the season, I thought I would share a few holiday "one-liners" with you.

Q: What do they call Santa's helpers?

A: Subordinate Clauses

Q: Why was Santa's little helper depressed?

A: Because he had low elf esteem.

Q: What happens if you eat the Christmas decorations?

A: You get tinsel-itus!

Ok, I think you might like this one.

A man's wife has an artificial leg. Shortly before Christmas, he buys her a new prosthetic and hides it in the closet. Unfortunately, she finds it and confronts him with the artificial limb. "This wouldn't, by any chance, be my Christmas present, would it?" she asks. "No, of course not." responds her husband. "It's just a stocking stuffer."

There are three stages of life:

1. You believe in Santa Clause.
2. You don't believe in Santa Clause.
3. You are Santa Clause

Here's another one you might like.

While working as a mall Santa, I had many children ask for electric trains. "If you get a train," I would tell each one, "you know your dad is going to want to play with it too. Is that okay?"

The usual answer was a quick yes, but after I asked one boy this question, he became very quiet. Trying to move the conversation along, I asked what else he would like Santa to bring him. He promptly replied, "Another train."

I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a joyous holiday season!

Elders:

Clay Bozarth, Leon Duncan,
Bruce Foster, Bill Fort, Glenn
Quigley

Deacons:

Ken Smith, Brent Stevens,
Rusty Windle.

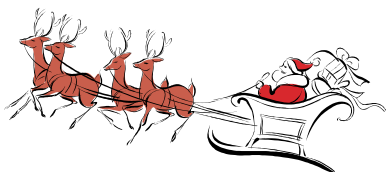
Preacher:

Kevin Cauley... 870-423-6707

- We are truly thankful to God for the wonderful new Lord's day that he has given us today to worship him in Spirit and in Truth!
- Let us remain constant in prayer for the following individuals: Marie Adams, Pat Foster, Rose Spencer.
- Please remember our shut-ins: Curtis and Opal Hull and Edith Mischler.
- Our monthly potluck is scheduled for this afternoon. If you are visiting with us you are more than welcome to stay and enjoy a meal on us. Our ladies really are excellent cooks and I'm quite sure you won't be disappointed.
- There will be a drop-in baby shower for Mary Lynn Cauley on Sunday, January 2nd, 2005 from 2-4 P.M. at Shawna Stevens house. Mary Lynn has registered with the BABY (spelled B-A-B-Y, Bob) registry at Wal-mart.
- This will be the last week to check next year's monthly service schedule. If your name is someone where you don't want it to be, please let me know. Also, if your name is not on the list and you want it to be on there, please let me know about this as well. Next week I will post the final schedule.
- The pantry item for this week is pancake mix.



Merry Christmas!



Welcome!

To the Berryville church of Christ.

Family Times for Worship and Study

Sunday Morning Bible Class:.....	9:30 AM
Sunday Morning Worship:	10:30 AM
Sunday Evening Worship:	6:00 PM
Ladies Bible Class:	10:30 AM
Wed. Evening Bible Class:	7:00 PM

Serving Each Other

December 19th, 2004 December 26th, 2004

	December 19th, 2004	December 26th, 2004
Sunday Morning		
Songs:	Ken Smith	Brent Stevens
Preaching:	Kevin Cauley	Kevin Cauley
Opening Prayer:	Glenn Williams	Ken Smith
Scripture Reading:	Ray Duncan	Jerry Roller
Lord's Table	Dan Hand	Glenn Quigley
	John Gass	Leon Duncan
(assist)	Jerry Roller	Jack Gentry
	Brandon Foster	Perry Foster
Closing Prayer	Clay Bozarth	Bob Philips
Sunday Evening		
Songs:	Glenn Williams	Bruce Foster
Preaching:	Kevin Cauley	Kevin Cauley
Opening Prayer:	Leon Duncan	Dan Hand
Scripture Reading:	Perry Foster	Dale Pinkley
Lord's Table	Clay Bozarth	Ken Smith
	Brent Stevens	Ray Duncan
Closing Prayer	Bob Philips	Rusty Windle
Wednesday		
Songs:	Glenn Quigley	Kevin Cauley
Opening Prayer:	Glenn Williams	Rusty Windle
Invitation:	Bill Fort	Bruce Foster
Closing Prayer:	George Eddings	Ray Duncan

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