

WAS JESUS A REGULAR BAPTIST?



Lesson Nine – Pure Church Membership

Pure Church Membership

Jesus is the head of the church, and He has specific instructions about who is and who isn't a member.

Biblical Basis for Church Membership

According to Jesus and the Apostles (i.e., The New Testament), Christians have the responsibility to hold one another accountable and even to exercise discipline over one another.

Jesus gave the first instructions about church membership (Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20).

Notice the following implications about membership:

- Membership is based on a profession of faith in Jesus that matches God's revelation (16:16-18).
- Membership in the local church is intended to reflect membership in the universal church (16:19).
- Membership is for believers – “brothers and sisters” (18:15, 20).
- Membership is for repenting sinners (18:15).
- Unrepentant sinners are to be excluded from local church membership (18:17-19).
- Local church membership is intended to be the visible corollary of universal church membership (18:18-20).
- Local church members gather in His name with His presence (18:20).

Here we also learn the process for handling personal offenses:

1. The caring member confronts the erring member privately about his sin. If he repents, fellowship is restored (18:15).
2. If the erring member does not repent, the caring member involves two or three witnesses to establish the veracity of the claim (18:16). If he repents, fellowship is restored.

3. If the erring member does not repent, the caring member brings the matter to the church, and the church calls the erring member to repent (18:17). If he repents, fellowship is restored.
4. If the erring member does not hear the church, the church is to remove the individual from the membership. This is sometimes called “disfellowshipping.”

Paul applied Jesus’ instructions about church membership (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

Notice the following evidence of local church membership:

- Paul writes to a group of believers in Corinth.
- Paul is appalled that a member of their group (“among you”) is committing sexual immorality (v. 1).
- He is also appalled that the local church hasn’t done anything about it (v. 2-3).
- Paul tells the church to take action when it is gathered, and with the authority and power of Jesus (v. 4).
- The gathered church is responsible to remove the unrepentant individual from the membership (v. 5).
- The local church represents Christ in their community and so it must take unrepentance seriously (v. 6-8).
- The unrepentant individual becomes an outsider (v. 12-13).
- The unrepentant individual is no longer in fellowship with the church or the believers (v. 11).

Notice the process for scandalous public offenses:

1. Recognize that certain sins (1) are incompatible with a profession of the gospel and (2) result in public scandal (5:10-11).
2. At a gathering, the church should vote to remove the individual from the membership (5:2, 5, 7, 11-13; 2 Corinthians 2:6).
3. Until the individual repents, the church should make it clear that the individual is not in fellowship with the church or the believers (5:9, 11; Matthew 18:17).
4. The church should remain focused on the goals of discipline:
 - a. Represent Christ in the community (5:1, 6-8).
 - b. Lead the offending member to repentance and then restoration (5:5).
 - c. Halt the spread of sin (5:6).
 - d. To walk in the holiness won by the gospel (5:7-8).

5. When the individual demonstrates genuine repentance, the church must vote to forgive, comfort, reaffirm love, and restore the individual to membership (2 Corinthians 2:6-9).

The New Testament explains the responsibilities of church membership.

The New Testament is full of “one another” commands given to local congregations. While these *could* apply to the universal church, they *obviously* are for local churches.

The Church Covenant summarizes the responsibilities of church membership.

Notice the purposes of the church covenant.

- To state our intention to be a church.
- To state our agreement about what it means to be a church.

Regenerate Membership

The New Testament makes clear that membership in the universal church – the Body of Christ – is a prerequisite of local church membership.

Ordinances and Membership

- Ordinances are commanded.
 - They were instituted by Christ.
 - They were taught by the apostles.
 - They were practiced by the early church.
- They make visible something that would otherwise be invisible.
- They emphasize the gospel message.

Baptized Membership

Baptists believe that believer baptism by single immersion in water is a prerequisite for membership in the local church.

- It is an outward declaration of inward faith (Romans 6:1-6).
- It is an act of obedience (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Peter 3:21).
- It corresponds to Spirit Baptism.
- It implies ongoing accountability.

The Lord's Supper – Walking in Fellowship

Commanded by Jesus (Luke 22:17-20)

Done “in remembrance” – Memorial

- False view: Transubstantiation. The elements become Christ.
- False view: Consubstantiation. Christ is physically present with the elements.
- False view: Spiritual consumption. In some spiritual sense, believers consume Christ at the Supper.
- Biblical view: Memorial. We believe in the “memorial” view of the Lord's Supper.

Emphasizes Fellowship – Communion

Notice the things we learn about the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

- It is for believers gathered as the church (11:18-20, 23).
- It represents unity. (11:18-20).
- It is memorial (11:24-25).
- It pictures and proclaims the death, resurrection, and return of Christ (11:26).
- It is for the repentant (11:27-29).
- It is for believers walking in fellowship with Christ and His church (11:29-32).

Summary of the Lord's Supper

- Proper Meaning: Memorial
- Proper Subjects: Close – Believers, baptized by immersion, walking in fellowship (unity) with Christ and His church.
- Proper Attitude: Repentant

Conclusion

Jesus is the head of the church, and He has specific instructions about who is and who isn't a member. He gave clear instructions about the admission of believers, the importance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the exclusion of those not walking in fellowship with Him.