



Week 46 - Church Membership (Continued from Week 45)

Serve: Be supportive with your time and talent.

“As each one had received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10)

Too many view the church exclusively as a means of meeting their needs and desires. Church consumerism is far too common. Christ’s view of the church is quite different. Serving with our time, talent, and treasure is a tangible way to express our love for the Lord and His bride, the church. Also, scripture reminds us as we minister to the Lord and to others, remarkably our own needs are met. (Luke 6:38)

These words from Paul share the heart of God after we come to know Him: “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness, or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:2-4)

Every gift given to us from God should bless and benefit our lives and others in the church.

Give: Be supportive with your finances.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

According to the Lord Jesus, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21) Financial giving was systematic in the Old and New Testaments and should be included in the life of God’s people today. Scripture supports the concept of pastors and church leaders being supported financially through the generous gifts of the saints. (1 Corinthians 9:7-11; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Biblically, this giving is called generosity, tithes, and offerings. The tithe, which means “topmost” or “tenth,” should be given to the Lord through the avenue of the local church. According to scripture, this is giving God the first-fruits or topmost of our income. Tithing is actually something we bring to the Lord as it is something that belongs to God already. The local church

leadership stewards these tithes and gifts to do the works of the kingdom of God. Our part is to lay down our gifts as an act of obedience. (Acts 2:45, 4:32-37)

God's Word unequivocally speaks of giving, and reassures us with promised blessings for those who generously give, not out of compulsion, but out of gratitude and joy. (2 Cor. 9:7) This is an area of our lives where we, ironically, just can't afford not to give. As scripture affirms:

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." (2 Cor. 9:6)

In the Old Testament Law, tithing was tied to blessings and curses; under the New Covenant, we can expect, as sons and daughters of God, to receive both God's provision and a heart to lay our finances at His feet, as His Spirit empowers us to bring our tithes and offerings to the Lord. According to the prophet Malachi, this was a serious offence:

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows." (Malachi 3:8-10)

Malachi yearned to see God's people give their first and their best to the Lord.

In addition we see the teaching of generosity frequently in the New Testament where Paul sums this up with the church of Ephesus by saying:

"In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

Indeed, "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Support: Support the leadership of the church.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17)

"But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another." (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Another basic commitment of participating in the local church is to appreciate and pray for the church leadership team, elders, and staff. These people are set apart by God to provide an example for the "flock of God," sound biblical teaching, and spiritual oversight. Scripture calls us

to stand with these leaders as they serve the church. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17-19)

This principle of honor should be understood when people join the church. In addition it is a principle that should be kept unless the pastors violate biblical standards and can no longer be followed. Pastors are appointed by God to keep watch over those who are relationally and spiritually connected to them. (1 Peter 5:1-4) Practically speaking, pastors often help church members through prayer, counsel, and feeding people the Word of God.

These six basic commitments (from this lesson and week 45) to the local church are critical for the local church and the church member. As we do these things, we might very well experience the joys and blessings of finding spiritual family in a local community.

Church Involvement and the Blessings of God

Blessings to the Believer	Blessings to the Church
Personal growth	Church growth
Accountability	Partnership
Friends and family	Becoming a spiritual family
Opportunities to invest	Christ is honored
Significance	Synergy

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

Review

1. How can we express our love for Christ and the Church in a tangible way?
2. Define the “tithe”. Why is it important?
3. What attitude should we take as members of the Body of Christ toward our leadership?