

The Importance of Placing Membership by Carl McMurray

Over the years any number of folk have placed membership with the church here in Anderson. Additionally, several from outside the group have been restored spiritually and others have been baptized, most of which also expressed their desire to place their membership here. Invariably the question arises, “Why? Why ‘place membership?’ Why be ‘identified’ with a local church at all?” Some may even ask if this is a biblical practice. The answer is yes, and here are a few reasons why.

When one “identifies with” a local congregation...

He/she is following a biblical example of behavior. In Acts 9:26 we find Paul’s actions recorded for us after his conversion and subsequent flight to Jerusalem. “He was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him...” After Barnabas introduced him to the group, however, verse 28 records that “he was with them...” “Identifying” with a group then is a way to “associate” and “be with” a group as opposed to simply knowing of them or visiting them. By example we can see it is the right thing to do.

He/she receives the benefit of being watched over. In 1 Peter 5:1-3 shepherds are instructed to oversee and be examples for “their charge,” or “the flock of God among you.” Hebrews 13:17 states that leaders will give account for souls; therefore, these Christians should submit to their leadership. This cannot be “all” souls that leaders will give account for. What souls can it be, except those who have determined to “associate with” and “be with” the local flock. When one identifies with a flock, they are submitting to the oversight, care, and leadership of those shepherds. Such care should not be viewed as a burden but as a blessing. Rebuke and correction by those who will give account for their soul should be given serious consideration as part of God’s guidance. Understanding that local churches are flocks necessarily implies a knowledge of who is in the flock and who is not.

He/she is encouraged to use and develop their talents. Romans 12:6 indicates that we may all have differing gifts and we should endeavor to use them. Whether this is in leadership, communication, teaching, serving, encouraging, or giving, there is a job for you. Local church families do not depend on visitors, guests, and well-wishers for their spiritual health and growth. Congregations grow in a healthy way because committed Christians exercise their gifts for the building up of one another, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 25. Is the health and well-being of your home dependent upon well-wishers and the kindness of visitors—or on committed and loving parents who provide whatever is needed? So it is with God’s family.

He/she shows respect for Christ’s will in organizing the church. The practice of meeting together for worship and encouragement as a local body is a practice begun by the apostles. The organization of these local bodies as flocks, under groups of shepherds/pastors who oversee, lead, example for, and give account for those in their charge, likewise, was begun by the apostles under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ. Specific responsibilities such as supporting elders, preachers, and needy saints are given to these local church families and a specific practice of funding these efforts is also given in a free will, first day offering into a common treasury. Unknown to the scriptural pattern is the modern day practice of non-commitment, appearing here and there, erratic giving, and unwillingness to accept accountability or responsibility. A desire to participate and encourage the pattern Christ set up through His apostles illustrates a submission to His will, His wisdom, and His divine plan.

Why be identified with a local church family? Because the organization, fellowship, and work of the local body is the way our Lord has determined that each can grow the best and do their best. We should trust Him to know best.