

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, September 19, 2010 – 6:00 PM
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The Ten Commandments of Church Membership - 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8

Introduction: One of the strange characteristics of churches is that they seemed to have been build with revolving doors. What I mean is that it's really not hard to get people in church, but it sure is hard to keep them – thus, a revolving door.

Now part of the problem can be attributed to the pull of the world. On former days, especially when and where I grew up, the church was more or less the hub of the community. Not only was it the spiritual center of life, it was also the social center, and in the very olden days, even the educational center of communities. But today, in our ever mobile and increasingly secular society, the church has become just another thing to do in one's life. For a lot of folks, they will fit it in only if something else more appealing comes along. For many, church attendance or membership is simply not a priority, and ones' loyalty and faithfulness to the church has been watered down to mean, *"That's where I attend."*

Another reason for this is that many churches simply have not done a good job of letting people know what church membership means. In many ways, we've allowed church membership to mean voting rights instead of responsibility.

So what does it mean to be a member of a local church? How can we become better church members? Specifically, for us who are members, we need to ask ourselves the question, *"Am I a Good Church Member?"*

In order to answer that, we must get to the basics. And one of the basics tenants of Christianity is the Ten Commandments. From those ten laws handed down by the very hand of God, come all the other moral laws that govern and guide our behavior.

So tonight, I want to give you the Ten Commandments of Church Membership. In these, I hope we can see that church membership means something more than having our names on a church roll or attending every now and then. I hope we can able to understand that our church membership carries with it a certain responsibility and privilege that we all need to take seriously.

But before I get into these Ten Commandments of Church Membership, I want to get even more basic that church membership. I want to talk about being a Christian.

The title of *"Christian"* appears only three times in the New Testament and implies three things: First, it implies that a person who is a Christian is one who is a believer in and a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus disciples believed in Him and followed Him and learned of Him. And in **Acts 11:26b (NIV)** it says, *"...The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."* The word literally means, *"Little Christ's."* It was initially meant to be a derogatory term, but it has now become a title of honor.

The second mention of the word *"Christian"* implies that those who are Christians will be witnesses of Christ. **Acts 26:28 (NIV)** says, *"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think in a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'"*

The third mention of the word *"Christian"* implies that Christians are not immune from suffering and hardship. **1 Peter 4:16 (NIV)** *"...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."*

What I'm getting at is the fact that churches are supposed to be made up of Christians and Christians are people! A church is a visible assembly of called out believers or "Christians" who have been baptized and who have covenanted together to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

So, every Christian ought to be a member of a local church. But I'm afraid that some Christians have tarnished the name of Christ because they don't understand what their church membership means. This is especially true concerning the expectations the Lord makes of us and our responsibilities toward fellow Christians!

Now no church member is perfect. But we are called to live a life that is pleasing to God. And part of my responsibility is to stir you up to live such a life! **1 Timothy 4:6 (NIV)** says, *"If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus...."* So tonight, I want to be a good minister by sharing with you some characteristics of an ideal church member using the Ten Commands of Church

Membership.

1. Thou Shall Surely Be Saved!

Believe it or not, but there are unsaved members in our churches! I don't have any accurate statistics to quote, but I know from first-hand experience that there are people whose names appear on church rolls who have never been born again!

I don't know all the reasons for this, but from my experience, some simply never came to a realization of what salvation means. Some thought they were saved at an early age, but later found out that what they had experienced was pure emotionalism and not salvation. Still others I have encountered thought their church membership alone made them right with God, but not so!

I believe this is one reason the Apostle Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** for everyone to: "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith....*"

But it's not just that church members be saved; they should be sure of it! **1 John 5:13 (NIV)** "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life*" If you're going to be a good church member, then first of all, be saved and sure of it!

2. Thou Shall be Scripturally Baptized.

Jesus said in Matt.28:19 "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ...*" Why did Jesus include baptism as being equally as important as going and making disciples and teaching? I believe it is because of what baptism portrays. Baptism is like a picture. A picture of a person is not the actual person, but it is an exact representation of the person. In the same way, baptism is not salvation, but it is a picture of the new birth realized by salvation. **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)** says, "*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...*" Baptism shows to others that you are no longer the person you use to be, but are now identified with Christ – specifically, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Baptism is also the first step of obedience in the Christian life. As I already said, it is not salvation, but rather the first step in obedience afterwards. Every time you read of a baptism in the New Testament, you'll find that the person was saved FIRST. So, baptism is very important, and good church member should be scripturally baptized!

3. Thou Shall be Faithful in Church Attendance.

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer of Hebrews says, "*Let us not give up meeting together.* **Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)**. So, whether you want to believe it or not, faithful church attendance is a command from God.

Furthermore, Jesus said in Matt.18:20 "*For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.*" So when you miss church, you're missing the presence of Christ!

A good church member will attend church faithfully! And naturally, when someone is not here, it raises a question of concern or even obedience, and what could be more important in your life than obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ? So, if you want to be a good church member, attend church faithfully!

4. Thou Shall be Cooperative Servants.

Acts 4:32 (NIV) says, "*All the believers were one in heart and mind.*" The early church was so united in Christ, they were cooperative to the point they could be described as being as one. That means that everyone's entire being was intertwined with all other believers! They got along. They functioned with one goal, one purpose, and they followed only one leader, Jesus Christ.

That is a far cry from the way the church and its believers live today! Why is it that churches are not like this anymore? Could it be that people are not as committed to Christ as these were? This church's love for Jesus was demonstrated Jesus by their willingness to sacrifice for Him and serve Him. It seems that nowadays, we have to beg, and plead, and sometimes even pay to get something done! But, it shouldn't be this way.

Unwillingness, unfaithfulness, and having an uncooperative spirit only leads to dissension within God's church. So, if you want to be a good church member, then sign up and serve!

5. Thou Shall be Consistent.

One of the problems the church faces today is a members' testimony damaged by their inconsistent living. It seems that more and more you hear of careless, wishy-washy church members. They're in and out, up and down, hot and cold, or hit and miss. They act like a saint on Sunday and a Sinner on Monday. There's no consistency whatsoever!

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NIV)** *14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

I know this passage is one that people have difficulty with, but basically Paul is saying *"Listen We ought to be more careful about who we associate with and hang out with, and what activities we're involved in. We should be careful about music we listen to, the language we use, the things we let into our minds and homes."* In other words, our appearance before man ought to be consistent with our beliefs and our testimony.

6. Thou Shall Know and Study the Bible.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV) *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."* The phrase *"do your best"* is translated *"diligent"* in other translations and it means: *put forth the effort to learn by reading and thinking and making a careful examination!* The word *"approved"* means: *regarded with favor, acceptable."*

Listen, Bible study shouldn't just be limited to one day a week. Sunday School and Sunday night discussion groups and Wednesday night Bible Studies are great, but let me ask you, do you just eat meals on Sundays and Wednesdays? I'm taking a wild guess, but probably most of us eat every day don't we? Good church members should be good students of the Bible every day! Why? It is because we need what it gives every day.

7. Thou Shall Pray for One Another Daily.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV) says that Christians are to: *"Pray continually."* **James 5:16 (NIV)** admonishes Christians to, *"Pray for each other."* Paul requested prayer for himself and he practiced praying for people everywhere. Samuel said to his people, *"...far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you."* **1 Samuel 12:23 (NIV)**. Good church members will lift up fellow members in prayer every day.

8. Thou Shall be Cheerful Givers.

Many people join a church for what they can get out of it. But God didn't praise cheerful takers. **2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)** says, *"God loves a cheerful giver!"* So if you want to experience God's love, be a giver!

In fact, the church can't survive without givers! You see, God has a plan to support His work and it's called tithing – Malachi 3:8 &10, *"Will a man rob God, Yet you rob Me! But you ask, 'How do we rob You?' In tithes and offerings.....Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this," says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven, and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'"* Good church members are givers!

9. Thou Shall be Obedient Witnesses For Christ.

Jesus said, *"Go, teach... make disciples...be My witnesses."* Mt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8. If we're obedient to Christ, we will be His witnesses everywhere we go.

I heard of a man once who was applying for a job. The interviewer ask him, *"What do you do now?"* The man replied, *"I am an ambassador for Christ."* The interviewer said, *"No, I mean what is your main job?"* The man said, *"That is my main job. Everything else I do is secondary."*

That is the way we should feel about our witness for Christ. It's our main job. It should be a lifestyle, and just as natural for us as gathering acorns is for a squirrel. Good church members are witnesses for Christ!

10. Thou Shall be Fully Committed.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV) says, *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*

To commit means *to involve oneself, to pledge oneself. To give of yourself."* Good church members are committed to Christ. And if we are committed to Christ, we will be committed to His church. Why? Because said in **Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)** *"... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."* So being committed to the Church demonstrates our commitment to Christ.

Conclusion: What kind of a member are you? A help or a hindrance? A giver or a taker? Committed or complaining? Consistent or insistent? Faithful or found missing? Cooperative or Combative? Witnessing or Wasting time? Your answer to these questions will determine your answer the question we posed at the beginning, *“Am I a good church member.”*