

Is Church Membership Counterproductive?

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Speaking as a “Born Again believer in Jesus” since 1972, it troubles me deeply that it seems that I cannot find a local Church I can call home. My search has been going on for close to 15 years now, and although I have attended many churches whose “statement of faith” I totally agree with; however, I believe I have narrowed down the issues that trouble me concerning the churches I have visited thus far into two major categories; hypocrisy within the church leadership (government,) and censorship. Yes... I said “Censorship!” This is in fact, a growing problem within the church! Many people complain about censorship as it has become more and more prevalent not only on “Social Media,” but in many other aspects of our lives as well. I read a recent story of a man who was fired from his job because of something he had said over twenty years prior, long before he worked for the employer that fired him, why... because his past opinions conflicted with his companies new “Woke Agenda!” Another article I read concerned a woman (In Finland) who is facing possible jail time and a heavy fine because she posted Bible Verses on Social Media supporting her disagreement with decisions made by her, and her religious denomination concerning LGBTQ issues!

Censorship is getting out of control when certain words, even those read directly from published sources (Even the Bible!) get “Bleeped Out” on platforms such as YouTube, simply because a virtual handful of people have issues with certain *common* words or moral expressions. I am not talking about blatant vulgarity here, but rather common use words or expressions some of which that have been spoken and debated for in some cases, thousands of years! Now... all of a sudden, people “are not allowed” even speak to them! I know that you can technically apply 1st Amendment principles to vulgarity as well but there is this other issue, namely *respect*, something that seems to have also fallen by the wayside these days, where people feel they can say anything to anyone regardless of how “offensive” it may be. Opinions are not necessarily “offensive” but vulgarity is in fact offensive to many, religious and heathen alike. It is sad that vulgarity flows so freely from the mouths of so many these days, even our government officials, and media representatives.

A History of Serving the Lord

Since I became a Christian back in 1972, I became an “Official Member” of only one church in which me, and my wife, started and faithfully served in a Tape and CD Ministry for 14 years. Prior to that, we served in a number of other churches in various ways. My wife taught Sunday school for years, and I started and led many mid-week Bible study and discussion groups. At one point, I was also involved in a nationwide evangelism program, this in addition to evangelizing co-workers where I was employed. At another church we attended, we developed and oversaw an entire Sunday school program covering Pre-School through Adult. My wife was asked to create and manage an entire VBS program at another

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church we didn't even attend, which she did! The both of us were also members of a Gospel music group in which we ministered in various churches throughout the area in which we lived. In retrospect, we became members of that one church we joined after about 8 years only to have a vote in the future direction of the church as it was growing quickly, as there was no "requirement" for membership in order to serve God in that church or any of the others we had attended to that point. We really loved that church, and the people we associated with there. All this being said... this article is not about us, (me and my wife.) It is about how the church is, as I believe, "Shooting itself in the foot" by *insisting* people must join their particular "organization" in order to serve God! I say "organization" only because as I have stated many times in the past, if a person is a "Born Again Believer in Jesus," they are already members of "*The Church!*"

Why Did We Leave?

Like most churches that experience rapid growth, new people bring with them new ideas and different perspectives. I have heard every Pastor in every church I have ever attended say at some point, "It is okay to disagree on some of the controversial issues, as long as we agree with the core tenants of the Christian Faith." I agree with that statement 100%! However, I feel that most Pastors and Church Elders really do not mean what they are saying when they make that statement. I am not accusing them of blatantly lying, but rather they confuse "*Core Christian Beliefs*" with "*Personal Interpretation*" concerning various issues. In many cases, this will depend on what they base their interpretation on which can vary greatly in relation to what seminary the pastor attended, or what particular denomination they represent. I have heard enough sermons over the years that if you tell me what seminary they attended, I can predict what a pastor will say (or not say) concerning a particular issue!

What caused me to move on in search of a different place to serve the Lord was a statement the head Pastor (of the only church I ever joined) made within a sermon. As previously, mentioned, new ideas and perspectives were being introduced within the church. But rather than addressing the controversial issues head on, the Pastor made the following statement, and I must say that to me it was both shocking, and repulsive: He said during a sermon, "if you don't like or agree with what I am teaching, then leave... there are plenty of churches down the street!" What this in essence indicated to me, was that the pastor really was not interested in guiding and cultivating disciples of Jesus, but like many other pastors, only seemed to be interested in filling the pews with those who agreed with his interpretation of those "controversial issues!" Rather than proving his interpretation through the Word of God, he was in essence saying, "My way or the highway," to anyone

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who disagreed with him! This attitude unfortunately has spread throughout the church as a whole. People who question particular doctrinal issues are henceforth treated as “the enemy.” They are rejected rather than being corrected, or nurtured, with the Word of truth should they indeed be in error. This is like kicking a toddler out of the house for naive disobedience! Sometimes we have to patiently “Train up a Child in the way he should go;” the same is true for young children as well as young - naïve Christians!

Mandatory Membership

In the paragraph entitled “A History of Serving the Lord,” I listed some of the ways my wife and I have served the Lord in the past. Again I emphasize, I did so not seeking praise, or out of pride, but rather to illustrate a point. All of the churches we have visited in recent years have one thing in common. ***Today, in order to serve the Lord in most churches, one must become a member!*** With all the experience and faithful service behind us, the only two options my wife and I have to serve the Lord in any of the churches we have visited recently is to be a greeter or a parking lot guide! I am not denigrating in any way those who serve the Lord in those capacities... ***Everyone*** serving in the Body of Christ is important... those jobs are important! ***The main point here is that the Body of Christ (The Church) consists of anyone who is a “Born Again Believer,” not only those who hook up with a particular 501(c) (3) organization!*** As mentioned earlier, I am in total agreement with the “Statement of Faith” of the churches I have been referring to; therefore whether or not they are truly “Born Again” should be the only criteria when vetting people who want to serve in the church. After all, as I mentioned previously, just about every pastor I ever heard says, “It is okay to disagree on non-essential issues.” So if I say, I agree with a church’s *Statement of Faith* evidenced by my willingness to attend that church, does that not represent me as being in agreement with that churches “Core Issues?” On the other hand, do I have to agree on all the “non-essential issues” as well; if so, that sounds “*contradictory*” to me!

I am not implying that people should be allowed into leadership positions without proving their abilities but one church I visited would not even let a non-member sing in the praise band! If a person can sing, and they want to sing in the praise band, why do they have to be a member of that particular church to do so? This is not a position of leadership; they will be singing what the praise band leader chooses not what they choose! The particular church of which I was a member, for years had people in the praise band who were not even Christian! Some were paid musicians! Yet in that same church I was told recently that if I wanted to lead a Bible study within that church *today*, I would have to renew my membership! What is wrong with this scenario? For one, it is a “Waste of

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Talent,” which can also be construed as “Quenching the Spirit;” something the Bible explicitly instructs us not to do! As an aside, one of the Non-Christian members of the praise band in my former church *became a Christian because of his being a part of Christian worship services!* Sadly, he died suddenly at a relatively young age soon afterwards! Nevertheless, had this talented man been banned from associating and participating with Christians as he had done for years, where would he be now? He was not challenging church doctrine... he was contributing to, and in the process, being influenced by the music he was playing, and by the people he was associating with! Had this man not been able to participate in the Praise Band, he probably would have continued playing his Bass Guitar in the secular realm, perhaps at the local pub where there was another “Spirit” in charge leading him away from, rather than towards a relationship with his Savior. This is something to think about isn’t it?

In Conclusion

I totally understand the importance of protecting a churches congregation from outside “Evil Influences,” however, by insisting that the congregants “sign on the dotted line” in order to serve within the church, in my opinion, is turning away a lot talented / experienced Christian brothers and sisters (Solid Christians) willing to serve, but perhaps not willing sign on for whatever reason. Perhaps they have a job that forces them to move from time to time... perhaps they want to confirm their feelings about that particular church or what they feel is their calling before joining a particular fellowship. If they agree with the Statement of Faith and profess to be Born Again Believers, what more does the Word of God require of those willing to serve? To my knowledge, there was no requirement in the early church to commit to anything more than to serve the Living God, not a particular congregation! The Bible teaches that the early church was riddled with diverse opinions and in many cases turmoil, but as an example, the apostle Paul went from church to church, sometimes staying for days... sometimes staying for years serving God according to his calling with no record of him formally joining a particular congregation. Why is this a requirement in so many churches today, and is this really just another form of censorship or the Quenching of the Holy Spirit? I welcome your thoughts and opinions.

Some other points to ponder:

1. What criterion is used when vetting a (non-member) guest speaker in your church?
2. Are only “members” publications allowed in your churches Book Store?
3. Who served in your church before “membership” was established and how were they vetted?
4. Would one of “the disciples” be allowed to serve in your church as a non-member?

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5. Do you know any non-member “disciples” willing, yet prohibited from serving in your church?