

What It Means To Be A Member.¹

The difference between being an attender and being a member can be summed up in one word -- commitment. The difference between being an attender at a church and being a member is like the difference between living together and getting married. If you're just living together there's no commitment; you can walk out at any moment. Marriage means you're committed for the duration. At Saddleback, we recognize the need for a formal membership. We ask you to commit to membership in our church for four reasons.

1. A Biblical Reason.

Christ is committed to the church and it shows obedience to what He is committed to. The Bible says, *"Christ loved the church and gave His life for it."* Every once in a while I'll hear somebody say, "I like Jesus I just don't like the church" or "I'm committed to Christ but I don't want to be committed to any local church" or "I like Christ; I don't need the church". Whenever I hear that, I know one thing: They are an incredibly immature believer. The more mature you grow as a Christian, the more you're going to love the church. The Bible says the church is the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. How about if I said to you, "I like you. I just can't stand your body." You'd be offended by that. The Bible says the church is the bride of Christ. How about if I said, "I like you. I just can't stand your wife." You'd be offended. When you say, "I love Jesus but I don't need the church." The Bible says Jesus died for the church. He gave His life for it. The more like Christ you become, the more you're going to be willing to give your life for the church. It's not perfect but it's what Jesus died for. If we're going to be like Christ, we'll be as committed to the church as He is.

2. A Cultural Reason.

It is an antidote to our society. We live in an age where very few people want to be committed to anything ... a job, a marriage, a church, a country. This attitude has produced a generation of church shoppers and church hoppers. They hop around from one church to another every week. Membership swims against the current of America's consumer religion. It is an unselfish decision. Commitment always builds character.

3. A Practical Reason.

It defines who can be counted on. Every team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrollment. Every business has a payroll. Every army has an enlistment. Even our country takes a census and requires voter registration. Membership identifies who's in our family and who's not.

4. A Personal Reason.

Membership produces spiritual growth. The New Testament places a major emphasis on the need for Christians to be accountable to each other for spiritual growth. You can't be accountable when you're not committed to any specific church family. We're not into rituals or organization or simply signing your name on a piece of paper and it meaning nothing. That's not what membership is all about. We're talking about a step in your personal development. First, you commit your life to Christ. But that's just your first step in your growth. Next, you need to commit yourself to Christ's family, the body of believers. If you don't like other Christians you're not going to like heaven -- that's all who's going to be there. If you're not willing to commit to some other Christians right now, what do you think you're going to enjoy about heaven?

¹ This information was copied directly from the membership curriculum of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, CA.