

Sermon #15

Membership

God exists.

He is.

God always has been, and always will be.

He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

God is all: wholeness, entirety, summation.

God is willing and able to fulfill us,

whether or not we are members of a local church.

God does not limit His grace and love to church members,

just like He did not limit His grace and love to the Israelites.

Church Membership

Church membership, as it is practiced today, is a man-made thing:
sheer arrogance.

There's nothing in the Bible that says "Join a church"—or any other organization.

It is not one of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus didn't recommend it or teach about it.

Joining a church organization doesn't get you brownie points with God.

And it isn't a sin to NOT be a member of a church organization.

To think that a person can enter the kingdom of God by legally joining a church is sheer folly.

And to think that a person becomes part of God's flock by adding his name to the rolls of a church is insanely hilarious.

Jesus never taught anything even close to this.

And to think that a person must have his name on the rolls of a church organization before he can be "saved" or "go to heaven" is outright blasphemy.

Man has always demanded human churches, pastors and teachers,
so God lets them have what they want.

But God desires to give Himself, in an intimate, direct relationship,
to each person.

He likens it to marriage, where the two become one.

In becoming one with Him,

we also become one with all true believers everywhere.

This relationship and unity is the one true church of God.

Human religious institutions are a concession, not a commandment.

Jesus, speaking of the teachers and leaders of organized religion,
told His followers to

¹⁴“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind
leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

Matthew 15:14

Joining a church is symbolic of uniting with God and other believers.

But symbolism, in itself, is powerless and useless.

It can even be a hindrance to uniting with God.

At best, symbolism leads us to God and helps us along our
journey of faith.

At worst, symbolism and church traditions become idols that lead us
into self-righteousness and complacency toward God.

Ultimately, church membership is a non-issue.

What counts is faith expressing itself through love.

If you belong to God, He knows it.

If you follow the voice of the Messiah, the Spirit of truth,

He is your Shepherd and you are His sheep.

It is laughable to think that God checks around to see if your name
is on the membership roll of a church, as some sort of criteria he
uses to decide who goes to heaven.

If you desire and enjoy church membership, and it helps you move forward toward intimacy with God, fine! It is probably a good thing for you.

But if membership in a church organization distracts you from seeking God, or diverts you from His paths of righteousness, give it up! It is not required.

The only place your name needs to be written is in the Book of Life. And God—not any pastor, rabbi, elder, pope—determines whose name goes there and whose name doesn't.

Family Membership

Now, what about membership in a family?

God is the Father of the one and only eternal family.

The Messiah, the Lamb of God,
is the Bridegroom of every forgiven soul.

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Our loving heavenly Father patiently nurtures us through every challenge and sorrow, and rejoices with us in every small victory over lies, deception, fear and doubt.

He is the ideal Father:

ever-present, ever-loving and protective;

teaching us truth and goodness;

and showing us how to enjoy and be fruitful in the life

He has given.

He's the Dad we all wish we had, but which none of us had.

He's the Head of the Family that we all want to belong to,
whether we realize it or not.

Man's idea of family is a group of people who are blood-related and/or legally related.

Many businesses are even describing themselves as a family nowadays.

Many churches claim that you become part of God's family when you become a member of that church.

In contrast, here is what Christ defines as His family:

“Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?”

Pointing to His disciples, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:48-50

If you want to be related to Christ, just claiming His blood won't do it.
Neither will just joining a church.

You must do the work of God,
which is to believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

If you truly believe Christ,
you will follow Him and choose to obey His teachings.

God also wants us, as His beloved Bride, to follow His example of love
and righteousness so that we will have joy and peace.

In doing this we are completely fulfilled in Him, whether or not we
have membership in a human family or local church.

Jesus said, “whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My
brother and sister and mother.”

When I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, sent from God,
I am Jesus' brother and sister and mother.

When I accept Jesus' teachings as true, and believe He meant what He
said, I am Jesus' brother and sister and mother.

When I repent of sin, humble myself, and take a lowly place,
I am Jesus' brother and sister and mother.

When I choose to do something God's way instead of the way I think is
best, I am Jesus' brother and sister and mother.

When I obey a command of Jesus, who was the Voice of the living
God, I am Jesus' brother and sister and mother.

No human bloodline or heritage
can guarantee me a place in God's family.

No legal maneuvers, claims or rationalizations
can get me into God's family or Church.

No church institution or pastor
can establish me as a child of God or brother of Christ.

No amount of good deeds or religious activities or donations
can buy my way into the family of God.

Believing truth and obeying Christ is what brings me into
God's family, and what establishes Me in His Church.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

"I AM goodness and truth, and I AM the Head of the Church.
If your heart is filled with goodness and truth then you belong to Me.
I know the ones who belong to Me.

 Their names are written in My Book of Life.

Rejoice in My goodness! I AM with you.

 There is no peace outside of Me.

 Listen to Me and learn from Me.

I, the Lord your God, AM your Creator and Father.

 My family and church are one and the same.

 Those who belong do My will.

Some are perfected and some are not, but all are following Me,
saying 'not my will but Thine be done.'

I AM your Lord, Savior and King.

 I know what is best, and I give this to you.

Stop splitting hairs: if you do My will you belong to Me.

 If you reject My truth and disobey My commands,
 you are rejecting My name and breaking our bond.

It is never too late to restore that bond.

 Repent and follow Me!

 Take on My name and we will be One.

My name is Truth and Love, Goodness and Mercy.

 Receive this from Me and give it to others;
 then you will truly be part of Me.

Rejoice! I AM good! Celebrate our union!"

Notes: