

## Membership Is Fellowship

by John MacArthur

The genuine spiritual unity of saved souls is evident throughout the New Testament. And back then, just as today, that unity was manifest in the local gathering of believers.

Christians inherently bond together in common, shared spiritual life with those of like precious faith. Through the new birth of salvation, we have entered into a fellowship with other believers—a fellowship that's so wonderful, unique, and precious that Paul sternly warned the Corinthians to make sure there were no divisions among them that could threaten it (1 Corinthians 1:9-10).

The word we translate as fellowship—*koinonia*—essentially means partnership. Paul describes that partnership in Galatians 2:9: *“And recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.”* He and Barnabas were affirmed and welcomed into common participation in eternal life, as it is manifest through the visible life of the church.

That's exactly what happens in church membership—the individual believer is publically identified with the local body of believers and enters into an ongoing spiritual partnership with that congregation. It's a public affirmation of our unity in Christ, our care for each other, and our shared desire to grow together in the love and knowledge of God's Word.

That's why the modern trend of believers floating freely between congregations and never firmly planting in one place is a foreign concept to Scripture. What we have today is a model built on a consumer mentality—people go to church wherever their felt needs are addressed, and unplug and move on when those needs change or are better met somewhere else. That pattern is completely contrary to the one we find in God's Word.

In fact, it's expressly forbidden by Scripture. Hebrews 10:23-25 is unequivocal when it comes to the necessity of fellowship. *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*

How can the people of God *“stimulate one another to love and good deeds”* if they aren't regularly meeting together? It can't happen. Forsaking the fellowship of other believers cuts you off from a key, God-ordained source of biblical instruction, refining accountability, and spiritual growth (cf. Proverbs 27:17).

And the need for fellowship is even greater as we draw nearer to the return of Christ. The shepherdless flock won't thrive; it'll scatter. And the rogue sheep is easy prey for wolves. Faithful fellowship helps insulate you from the influences of a world that's sprinting to hell. Why wouldn't a Christian take advantage of that?

Instead, too many believers today approach church like a duty or a task—one that's quickly pushed aside and forgotten as soon as it's been accomplished.

I can't understand that attitude. I want to be with the people of God every opportunity I get. I want to share together in our common love for the Lord and His truth. I want to build and deepen friendships, bear each other's burdens, and extend comfort and encouragement to those who need it. I want to come together with a collective choir of believers to sing praises to the Lord. I want to pray and worship with people who love God's Word, and I want to see firsthand what His Word is accomplishing in their lives.

All of that is meant to happen in the church, not in spite of it.