

Wesleyan Reform Union of Churches

Becoming a
Church Member



**Privileges and
Responsibilities**

of

Church Membership

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The Privileges and Responsibilities of Church Membership

Introduction

In putting this course together, I was trying to give an understanding of what was involved in becoming a member of a church. For a long time, I had wanted to help people who seemed to have only a limited view of what it meant to be part of a local church.

This is the outcome, the barebones that can be used to take folk into a deeper knowledge of the “privileges and responsibilities” of church membership.

The principles outlined in this course are important, but I would encourage you to apply it imaginatively to your own situation. I have found that it is possible to get through two sections in an evening session so its possible to complete the course in six evenings/weeks.

It is good to read through the biblical references where given, you might find that when it comes to the question time that other points for discussion will naturally arise.

You need to guard against giving a lecture. The important thing is to discover God’s plan for your church and your membership of it together.

Peter Norton

Other leaflets are available introducing the subject of church membership. They can be obtained from:
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It may be obvious to you, but I think it needs saying, being a member of a Church is not like joining a club where you can become a member by signing up and paying your dues. We are talking about becoming part of the “Family of God” which requires something more personal than just signing your name on the dotted line. We are going to look at twelve aspects of the **Privileges and Responsibilities** of being a church member starting with a basic privilege.

1. Knowing that we are “Saved by Grace”

This phrase may seem a little old fashioned, so it would be good to talk it through to see if we can work out what we think it means. We need to understand what the Bible has to say on the subject.

In today’s world you can pick up a pamphlet explaining how you can become part of a scheme and by “going online” you can become a member of almost anything you could imagine, without meeting or talking to anyone. Not so with those who want to be part of the family of God: we need to talk to God and other members of His family.

One of the clearest biblical stories showing how difficult the concept of being “born again” (saved by grace) is, can be found in John 3:1-21, where the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is recorded.

In this conversation we see a very well-educated man finding it hard to get his head around the idea of having a new start in life; he could only think in terms of the physical and found difficulty in seeing things from a spiritual perspective.

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Lots of people will understand the problem Nicodemus had because they feel the same. We all like the idea of a new start, but how can it be achieved?

Jesus was saying that we all have to start again, as it says in Romans 3:23 “--**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” The process of being “saved” or “born again” is asking God to forgive our sins and come into our lives. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we will have the strength to resist temptation in the future. It is turning our life around or away from sin to live God’s way.

God’s love does this for us as we read in Ephesians 2:4&5. Nothing can separate us from His love. Romans 8:37-39. The outcome is found in John 3:16. Has this change happened in your life?

Questions

1. Would anyone like to tell us their experience, and how it has changed their life? Please be as brief as possible.

2. Would you say it was anything like being born again?

2. Being with the rest of the family in worship and communion with God

One of the reasons people gather together in a group is to talk about their common interests and to learn from each other. This was true in the days of the early church. The believers met together, and we see this as reported in Acts 2:42-47. There we see a description of the early church at its birth when they learnt from the Apostles, prayed and had fellowship together. Let's see what it was that turned the world upside down.

1. They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, listening to those who had been with Jesus.
2. They spent time together in fellowship, worshipping, talking.
3. Sharing in fellowship meals. This may have meant Lords Supper-type meals, but it surely included times of eating together as a family.
4. Along with this came the natural process of praying not only alone but also together with the rest of the believers.
5. They knew what it was to be in awe of God.
6. They were living daily in a time of miracles and wonders.
7. They willingly shared all that they had ("and had everything in common").
8. They gave to any in need, even selling what they had to help others.
9. They met every day together with glad and sincere hearts.
10. They praised God and were looked upon favourably by everyone.
11. Their numbers grew every day.

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Now this is just an outline of the things that the early believers were doing. It is true that we should see in these pioneers something of the ideal of true Christian commitment.

This did not happen to the exclusion of others, but it was such an important thing to them that they were willing to give as much of their time to God and the fellowship as they could.

We need to remember that this was not an easy time, and the church was soon persecuted.

Questions

1. Do you enjoy being with others worshipping God? Why?
2. How important do you think it is to spend quality time with other Christians? What encourages you most?

3. Studying the Word of God (The Bible)

This is as important as ordinary food is to the body, since it feeds the spirit, it is soul food.

If we take 2 Timothy 3:14-17 as our guide for this section, then we shall see that the Bible is important to every aspect of our life as Christians.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Firstly, it was through the Bible that we heard and began to understand the need for change in our own lives.

Someone brought to us this information of the love of God, and we were challenged about our way of life.

Secondly, there is this realisation that this book is God-breathed: God breathed the words into His people over the years.

Thirdly, this book is good for:

1. Teaching the truth
2. Rebuking error
3. Correcting faults
4. Giving instruction for right living
5. So that the follower of God may be equipped to do every kind of good work.

Questions

1. Does the Bible confuse you sometimes, and then do you suddenly understand bits that were obscure before?
2. How literally should we take the Bible?
3. Has there been a verse or passage from the Bible that has helped you through a difficult or sad time?
4. If your answer to the last question is “yes” can you tell us what it was?

4. Prayer

Talking and listening to God at all times and in all places.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, so in Luke 11:1-13 we have the explanation from Jesus of how we should pray.

This prayer (known to us as “The Lords Prayer”) is the ultimate in clear and concise communion with God, it contains all the elements required in our talking to the heavenly Father.

Let’s look at the order as it occurs.

- 1 Putting God first. Jesus’ priority was to put God first and so should we.
- 2 Realising that God is in heaven we are reminded that he is above and beyond us yet cares for us.
- 3 Praising God should be the natural thing for a follower to do. Our words will never be adequate to express this greatness, yet it should still be our desire to say how great God is.
- 4 Wanting God’s kingdom to come, with all that it means for the world and ourselves.
- 5 Wanting God’s will to be done, no matter what that means for us.
- 6 Asking God, the provider to give what we need, not what we want, though what we want and what we need may coincide sometimes.
- 7 Asking for forgiveness daily, as we are ready to forgive others.
- 8 Asking God to lead us away from hard testing. This is not a desire for the easy life, it is a belief that God can and will give us what’s best for us.

In Romans 10:13 we see the power of prayer for salvation, the thing we talked about in our first session.

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In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 we see that prayer is to be made for all especially for those in authority.

In James 1:5 we see that God is the one to whom we should turn when in need.

Therefore, prayer is for all times and all places and situations.

Questions

1. Do you find praying difficult?
2. Do you have a specific time of day and method of praying?
3. Do you believe that prayer is effective?

5. Supporting my fellowship in prayer

It's all part of being in the team (family).

In so many of the letters of Paul we see this statement of commitment to others in prayer.

1Thessalonians 1:2-3. "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Colossians 1:3-4 "We always thank God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints"

Philippians 1:3-6 "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

1 Corinthians 1:4 "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."

These are all great examples of how we should pray, but ultimately, we need to look at the great prayer that Jesus offered as we read it in **John 17: 1-26.**

We see that Jesus prayed for what was going to happen to him, for His disciples and then for all who would believe the message

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preached through the disciples and leaders of the future. In other words, Jesus prayed for us!!

No doubt you will find more examples of this important duty mentioned in the Bible, but for us it is like all pulling in the same direction.

Questions

1. Do your prayers follow:

Yourself

Others

Jesus

2. From what we have read, what would you say is the correct order of our prayers?

3. For whom do we pray?

6. Witnessing

Telling others about God and what he has done for you, not only in words, but also in actions.

Matthew 28:16 –20 gives us the clearest indication of what we should be doing, where we should be doing it, and under whose authority we are.

As you can see from the text Jesus states, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** So, we know that we are supported by the One to whom **“all authority”** is given; there is no need for us to fear.

“therefore, go and make disciples of all nations”. It is clear that there are no limits to the people we are able to tell of our Saviour (save that of language) so we must live the life as a witness also.

“baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” baptism indicating an outward show of an inner work of God like a stamp of approval.

“---and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” which makes it clear that the words of Jesus have priority.

“---and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

There is no need for us to be alone as we work for Jesus.

In Luke 24:46-48 we have a similar statement about the work that the disciples would be doing and therefore what is our responsibility. He told them, **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”**

Then in Acts 1:7-8 we have a more specific description of the boundaries of our call to witness.

“He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”

For them it meant at home first, then the whole country, then on into other countries even though they may be considered enemies, then on to the ends of the earth, everywhere.

It’s a big job but someone has got to do it!

Questions

1. Do you find it easy to tell others about your faith?
2. Are there other ways of witnessing other than talking?
3. Do you consider witnessing to be an added extra?

7. Taking responsibility as a church member

Ways in which we take responsibility include praying together and being involved with decisions made by the church.

To get some guidance on how we should relate to each other in the church and the world around us we shall look at the letter of James. James is a good guide for the practical outworking of the Christian faith and the advice found in James 1:19-25 could be the sort that would help us as we attend our first Church Business Meeting. It is of course the description of how we should conduct ourselves with everyone.

Please read - James 1:19-25

There is also the encouragement to put into practice all that we have heard and read from God's Word, so we are not just on the edge of the work but right in the middle of what God is doing in our community. Our responsibilities go deeper, in James 5:13-20 we see the need to make ourselves available for use by God in His church.

Please read - James 5:13-20

In Acts 6:1-6 there is a description of the way in which decisions were made in the early days of the church, all of the disciples involved along with the Apostles.

The reason for such compliance with the will of God is seen in 1Peter 2:4-5, we are being built into the temple of the living God, "living stones."

As you come to him, the Living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This is a great and awesome responsibility for us as followers of Jesus.

Questions

1. Do we feel we want to be involved or would we rather someone else did the work?
2. Are we willing to serve God in any way he wants?
3. Do we serve God in the church because we feel we ought to or because it is our calling?

8. Giving to the work of God through our fellowship

This may seem a difficult subject to approach but it is important that we look at all the privileges and responsibilities so that we do not get an unbalanced picture of what membership means.

When we talk about giving to God we need to think in a biblical way. The Bible teaches that it is not giving from what you have left over but giving to God first.

Someone once said that the last place to be converted is the pocket, and again that God does not measure what we have given by what is on the plate but by what is left in the pocket.

One word that is seen in this context is 'tithe,' indicating a tenth of ones produce or income. We will see this mentioned in the readings from the Old Testament, but first let us see what Jesus said about giving to God.

Please read - Matthew 22:15-22

As usual the Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus out. We see that the answer that Jesus gave was complete, one on which there was no come-back.

This strongly suggests that there is a principle to be considered for which we need go back and search for earlier instructions.

Please read - Proverbs 3:9

Now the principle is not so that you get more but that you think of giving to God first.

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Now turn back to Leviticus 27:30-34. Tithing was expected of God's people and the tithe once given to the Lord, was holy to Him.

Now we have looked at what the bible says here are some questions.

Questions

1. Someone said that the pocket is the last thing we allow God to convert, what do you think?
2. Do you find the subject difficult to talk about or is it just another part of Christian living?
3. Do you think that a tenth is the limit of our giving or just a guide?

9. Using my gifts

The things I can do for God and His family here, so that others will come into the experience of knowing Jesus as their Saviour.

Most of us know what we can do well; for some the list is long, for others the list is short. There may be new abilities discovered when we become Christians, and we need to be willing to express these “things we can do” for God.

God’s Holy Spirit is willing to help us to find new areas of service that seemed unlikely before we became Christians; along with the new life come new avenues of service we never thought possible.

Please read - 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

In this passage we have a clear description of the gifts of the Spirit of God, which are clearly special and available to all Christians.

Further there is a list called the fruit of the Spirit.

Please read - Galatians 5:22-23

One of the greatest gifts God is willing to give us is to be found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, love. The description of what love is and is not, is something we ought to read regularly.

Please read - 1 Corinthians 13

Let us leave this session with these great words ringing in our ears as we look at the questions.

Questions

1. Do you want to use your gifts, (the things you can do) for God through the Church?
2. Are you fearful that God will ask you to do something that you cannot do? Has he done that before?
3. Would you like some help from God in exercising your gifts, and help in discovering where your gifts lie?

10. Knowing that I belong to the largest family in the world

Just a short time ago a report was given that estimated the Church in China to be between 50-160 million people. This would make the largest Christian national population in the world, and this in a land where there is persecution of Christians.

It may seem a large number but in relation to the billions that live in the world we need to be ready to find fellowship with other Christians. The danger of not meeting together is that we might drift away from God. A recent example would be that some people did not return to Church following the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

In the New Testament there is clear teaching on meeting together and on personal behaviour; one affects the other.

Meeting together for worship is encouraging and strengthening, it also helps us to keep on going in the way God has shown us in the life of Christ.

Please read - Hebrews 12:14-17

In Colossians 4:2 we are encouraged to meet together for prayer, being alert to the dangers around us.

Please read - Colossians 4:2

Paul in his letter to the Church in Ephesus is praying that together they will discover the range of God's love.

Please read -Ephesians 3:14-21

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In 1Timothy 2:1-10 there are instructions for conduct in worship, and further on in chapter 3 we see directions about how leaders of the Church should live.

Also, in Ephesians 4 advice on living in unity, then in 1Peter 2:4-12 we are encouraged to be built together into a spiritual house for God.

Please read - Ephesians 4:20-32

Please read - 1Peter 2:4-12

Questions

1. Does it feel good to belong to such a large family?
2. Had you realised that to belong to the family of God meant so much? Do you think it is worthwhile?
3. To be part of something so big and still be able to talk personally to the King is incredible, isn't it?

11. Taking my desire for the best into the world, because Jesus is involved in all I do

Jesus said that we are to be “the salt of the earth,” which could be interpreted as bringing a good flavour to the world. You will have heard the saying that “something has left a bad taste”. Well, we must bring a good taste to those around us. If something is said to have been done in bad taste, we know what that means; we need to be seen as people who do things that are in good taste.

Please read - Matthew 5:13-16

Here we have the words of Jesus indicating that the world must see that we are followers of Jesus.

In Galatians 5:13-14 it says **“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”**

We see this encouragement to be careful with the gift of freedom that God has given us, but to live to the command that Jesus gave us.

In Galatians 6:10 we are told to take the opportunity to do good to all people, but especially to the family of believers.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The best may be seen in us as we follow the advice found in the Old Testament in 1Kings 2:1-3 where it is made clear that to follow the law of God is the way to true freedom.

We need to flavour the world for God with godliness.

Questions

1. Are we sometimes guilty of saying, “Anything will do” or “I can’t be bothered”?
2. Are we sometimes guilty of saying or doing things that we know are wrong, things that leave a bad taste?
3. Are we ever embarrassed about being a Christian?
4. I will help anyone. True False (tick appropriate box)

12. In the end trusting Him not my feelings

This may be a tough assignment, but God is always there **Matthew 28:18-20. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

Trusting my feelings could bring trouble, trusting Jesus will lead me to God.

Trusting God is a principle that runs through the whole Bible.

For Example: - Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.

In the Psalms again and again we see this principle mentioned of trusting God for all things.

In **Proverbs 3:5-6** we read this:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

People quote these two verses often and rightly so for if we were to keep to them, we would be doing what God wants.

Questions

1. I find it hard to trust God, but my feelings are real. What should I do?
2. Do feelings have any part in our relationship with God?

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Notes:

