

BC art. 28; Heb. 10:19-31; John 17:13-19; Church Membership Required? I. Called Together II. Called Out  
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, is it necessary for you to be a member of the church? And if so, what is  
 required of you if you are a member of this church? This past week I was researching and I found various  
 examples of Church Membership Contracts. These formal looking documents outline what is expected of you if  
 you become a member of a specific local church. It is true that joining a church brings both rights and  
 responsibilities. The church is not a social club that you can join or leave at your every whim. Last week we  
 looked at the identity of the church- this week we look at the responsibilities of those who are members of that  
 church. Remember that the church is the Ekklesia in the Greek- those who are called out and called together  
 people of God. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ calls His people to gather as a church.

### **I. Called Together**

In our first point we are going to see that Jesus calls His people to gather together- and that means that those who  
 are joined to Christ by faith will necessarily gather when Jesus calls. This may seem self-evident, but this teaching  
 clearly outlines the need for God's people to come when the Good Shepherd says come! Our BC article puts it this  
 way- all people are obliged to join and unite with the church. To say this another way, the true church- the holy,  
 Catholic body of Christ- will evidence itself by coming together at a local time and place. Our passage from  
Heb.10:25 puts it this way- do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some. Do not neglect- do not  
 forsake or abandon the local fellowship of the saints. Although you may be joined to Christ by faith- that does not  
 cancel out your calling to be joined together with God's people. In this way, Christ's body becomes my body- His  
 House is where I find my abode. At issue is the tempting human nature- it is easy to sleep in on Sunday or plan  
 some get away that carries over the weekend. But as we heard last week- you need the church and the church  
 needs you. So no bedside or lakeside individual worship service can replace the gathering of the saints. When  
 Jesus calls us to come- we must come. It is an obligation and responsibility- not an option for our consideration.  
 Do not neglect it or forsake the local gathering of my people. And as a gentle reminder, Jesus calls us together  
twice every Lord's Day- so that we begin and end this day in His house of prayer. But as our BC continues- we find

the reasons why we should be so diligent in gathering together. We are to come together with an eye to keeping the unity of the church by submitting to her teaching, instruction and discipline. As we read in Heb. 10:23, hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. The reason we must come is so that we might be taught, strengthened and educated in the good confession- to be catechized in the way of truth. We come to learn and to be taught how to obey God's commands. This is part of the process of maturity that Jesus has in mind for you- that you would grow up and be sound in mind and doctrine. Going on from the milk and getting acquainted with the full scope of God's teaching- so that you can handle and even crave the solid meat of His teaching. It is here that Christ sanctifies us in the word of truth. We have profitable teaching that opens God's word- applies that word- and equips us for every good work. Added to that we have elders who hold us accountable- as these disciple us and train us in our godly walk. This is how disciples are made! Joining the church is not like getting on a cruise ship- rather it is like getting on a battle ship! Here you are not pampered and waited on- but rather you are challenged as you learn discipline and order. Your life is being set into Christ's mold. So at church we bow under the yoke of Christ- learning to follow His change. Continuing in our article, we find that we are to serve- so that we build one another up according to the gifts God has given us. As 10:24 says- consider how to stir one another up to love and in good works. Or again in v. 25- encouraging one another. The "one another" passages of the Bible only make sense- can only be applied- if the church is coming together to see and commune with one another. You need to come to church so that you can use your gifts for the good the whole body- by your very presence, your singing, your offerings, your encouraging words after church- the body benefits and becomes stronger. Each part- or each member has a calling in this area. Imagine for a moment that you had a part of your body that was not working- say 10% of your organs did not function. Well, when these do not work properly the whole body suffers. So it is that your calling is to be a benefit to others. That's why it is best to not run off right away after the service is over- seek to be a blessing to others as you share your life as a part of the body of Christ! The church is not like a music concert where you come to enjoy but not contribute- you have a responsibility to not only be here- but also to bless others when you come- to contribute! Now when we hear words like obligation

and responsibility, we can start to think that the church is a burden- a duty we have to submit to. But remember that as Christians, the yoke of Christ is light! It is not like our parents telling us to eat vegetables even if we don't want to- rather we want to come to church! We delight to be with God's people. Do husbands feel obligated to love their wives- like it is a forced responsibility? Or is loving our wives something we delight to do- even if it is a command? So joining and going to church- participating in the worship and service within that community- is not only a responsibility but our desire and delight! If we do not want to be here today- then we should pray that Psalm 122 would be impressed upon us- I was glad when they said to me- let us go up to the house of the LORD! So why should we delight in this day and in this place? Not only because it is command- keep the Sabbath Day Holy- but because Jesus is present here with us! Because the Holy Spirit has promised to work through the means of grace! Because we love the Lord and husband of the church- so we also will love His bride and His people!

## **II. Called Out**

As we move on to our second point, we find that those who are called together are also called out- or they are called to separate themselves from those who do not belong to Christ and His people. Not only a duty to come together- but a duty to come out of and be distinct from! As our article states- to preserve this unity it is the duty of all believers to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church. Being joined to Christ and His people means that we must necessary not be joined to those who do not believe in Christ or who hate God's people. Paul said as much in II Cor. 6- do not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever- for what fellowship does Christ have with false gods. Or as James 4 says- do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility towards God! The fact remains, we cannot serve both God and money- when we serve a different master, we are by that very nature opposed to what others embrace. We are called to keep a holy distance from those who would deny or reject Jesus Christ as Lord. This is called the antithesis- or the divide between two opposing views. This has led to what many call the motto of the Christian worldview- that we are to be in this world but not of this world. Jesus said as much in John 17 where we read, we are not of this world. Our citizenship and our allegiance is to someone else. As salt and light, we are different- set apart- as we seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God. It

is not possible for God's people to have the closest relationships and bonds with those who do not share that faith. That is why Christians are not supposed to marry unbelievers. We seek different things- we pursue different goal- we have different priorities and specifically on Sunday- those different priorities are evident. To prove this point, back when we were living in PEI I saw that the greatest hindrance for people- the reason that many people were tempted to miss church- is because of some other event or gathering took precedence. For example, if your child was playing soccer on a traveling team, you would be forced to miss church. Or if you were going to a hockey game with friends, you would miss church. Bad company corrupts good morals -I Cor. 15 says. As it is said- show me your friends and I will show you your future. But let's go back to John 17:14. Yes, we are not of this world- because Jesus is not of this world. He is of the world to come- no longer living in this fallen earthly realm. But as v. 15 continues- Jesus does not ask for us to be taken out of this world. Rather, we are to remain in this world for the time being. It is impossible to cut off all ties with those who do not embrace Jesus Christ. Short of living in a compound or commune, we will still rub shoulders with those who do not claim Christ as their Lord. You are still in the life of your neighbor and co-worker for a reason. And here is where we must have wisdom. How do we live in this contrast- left in this world- but ultimately not of this world? Although we do not accept their ideology- we are still going to have contact with the people who still live in the dark. In fact, as v. 18 continues- Jesus sends us out into the world. We are not supposed to live our lives in a commune, but rather doing good and letting our light shine in the darkness while reserving our closest friends and the Lord's Day for the fellowship of the saints. If we join with God's people every time there is a worship service- and if we seek to obey His commands- we will be distinct and set apart from this world.

To conclude, the calling of the church is that of gathering. Coming together to praise and worship Christ when He calls. Although this is an obligation- an action mandated by Christ- let's not forget what a privilege and blessing this gathering can be! May we all be glad when it is said to us- let us go to the House of the Lord!