

Church Membership:

What Does This Mean?



With Appendix:

Christian Parenthood: What does this mean?

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What is a Christian?

A Christian is:

- a sinner. . .
- who is saved by grace through faith.

As a sinner in this fallen world, the Christian daily. . .

- recognizes and despises his sinful flesh.
- knows he will be tempted by the devil and the world.
- knows he can fall from faith and God's grace.
- knows he must die and fears most dying an unbeliever.
- acknowledges/prays in his need for Christ's grace.
- craves to receive and depends upon Christ and his grace.
- wants to arm himself with God's Word for defense.

As a believer in the church, the Christian daily. . .

- loves and depends upon God for temporal/eternal gifts.
- seeks to please God through obedience to his law.
- stands as God's child against all that is evil in the world.
- values his identity as a child of God and shows it in his life.
- desires to grow in faith and usefulness in God's kingdom.
- values gathering publicly in church with God's family to share and eat of the Bread of life in Word and Sacraments.
- follows Christ's path and goals for himself and others.

So, are YOU a Christian?

What Benefits are Given You as a Christian?

A Christian is given every spiritual blessing in Christ. God has loved us and all the world in Christ. Heaven and God's favor were closed to us. Sin was the wall over which even God could not extend his hand to help us. The wall had to be removed. God accomplished that through sending his Son, born of a real woman, the virgin Mary, and as he lived a sinless, perfect, holy life, as none of us could or would, and offered that life as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross, and rose again on the third day on blessed Easter, God took away the wall that stood between us and his love. Now heaven and God's favor have been opened to us through, and only through, Jesus Christ. So that all who believe in him are saved by grace.

Only Christians have this benefit because, though Christ's work applies to all since he died for all, only those who believe and come to depend on him as the sole source of their salvation are saved. And as Christ is the Shepherd of his sheep, that is, believers, they prove their faith by heeding Christ's Word for what it is, God's Word, the Word they follow, that is, the ultimate authority in their life. By faith they receive Christ and all his benefits when his forgiving and saving and sanctifying voice is the sound that fills their ears and the love that fills their hearts. As St. Paul diagnoses faith and, also, unbelief, "No man speaking by the Holy Ghost calleth Jesus accursed, and no man can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Ghost." 1 Cor. 12.3. In other words, when he hears the voice of Christ, no believer who has the Holy Ghost can say of Christ, who is speaking to him, "To hell with him, I'll do what I please. I don't care what he says." He refuses Christ and the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Spirit and faith are in those who hear Christ speak and say by faith, "I'll follow him and heed what he says to me. He's my redeemer, my Lord. **I must follow him, lest I stray and be lost.**"

So as a Christian, you:

- have received the Holy Ghost.
- have been given Christ and all his benefits.
- are promised forgiveness of your sins by right...
- have heaven by right as a gift of Christ.
- have all the Word of God, the Bible, as your heritage.
- have the mind of Christ in the law as to what pleases God.
- have the mind of Christ as to his goals for this world.
- have the Means of Grace, **instruments Christ commands you to faithfully use, by which he saves you by grace.**

Why Must a Christian Belong to a Church?

Jesus said:

- "He that is not with me is against me; and **he that gathereth not with me scattereth.**" Luke 11. 23
- ...and... "**Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth.**" Matthew 28.20.

And the writer to the Hebrews says:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Hebrews 10. 25-27

The Third Commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

A Christian must, therefore, belong to a church because he:

- is commanded by Christ, his Lord, to receive these Means of Grace that bestow his grace in the church (**the 'all things' in Mt. 28.**).
- not only agrees the Gospel is true, but receives it from Christ through Christ's Word and Sacraments (**same reference.**).
- is not saved alone, but commanded by Christ to gather with brothers and sisters, to share his love and benefits (**Luke 11.**).
- knows he will be left out of salvation if he rejects or avoids Christ's grace, won and bestowed to him there. Willfully rejecting his Means of Grace, he can only expect God's judgement (**Heb. 10.**).
- knows he must be better than he is to get to heaven and the means for that sanctification is Christ in his Means of Grace, especially Holy Communion and its proper reception (**Heb. 10.**).
- is not satisfied with the state of his faith but knows it can only grow through learning God's Word, also by being served by the pastor who holds the teaching office in the church (**Heb. 10.**).
- must be part of Christ's mystical body, the church, and her public confession of the Gospel proclaimed there.

How do I Rightly Use My Membership?

As a child of God I must. . .

- receive my share in my eternal heritage earned by Christ.
- be a responsible steward of my church's Gospel.
- be my brother's keeper.

Jesus said: "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* Mt. 6.19-21

Jesus is our treasure in heaven and the one who left us his death benefits, or his Last Will and Testament (Holy Communion) in the church. But Jesus is not an idea nor a course of study nor merely a meal, he is a person who loved us and saved us. He is our treasure who is given us by God.

So Christ personally introduces himself to you and courts you unto eternity with him, through his Word. As we learn how he loved and treated sinners in the Bible we know what we can depend on from him also. And he would win you more and more to his love so heaven will be a great joy as you will receive there what you've treasured on earth. Just as you grow in your relationships with fellow sinners through speaking and hearing, so you grow to Christ through his Word, doctrine or teachings and then prayer.

In the church **you must let your brother, the pastor, serve you as Christ commands.** At Christ's command, your pastor hears your confession and absolves you. He teaches you Christ's Word and communes you so you grow. You must use him for that. Jesus says to his pastors: *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.* (Luke 10.16). And St. Paul says in Ephesians 4: *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children.*

Again, your receiving these things is not optional. It's commanded you by your Lord, - **if** -he is your Lord you heed him in his church. Else you despise Jesus. (See Luke 10.16 above)

What is my Stewardship of the Church's Gospel?

1. **Purity of the Gospel:** As a child of God you have been given the Holy Ghost and the whole Word of God in Christ and in Scripture. Having been given those things, you are responsible for their right use. It's a distinctively Biblical teaching of the Lutheran church that sheep judge their shepherd. So if false doctrine is taught, you bear responsibility in your church to point it out and to correct it, and to leave that Church if she refuses to heed our Shepherd's voice. Luther is famous for saying that the Pope must obey the 9-year-old miller's daughter if she rightly uses God's Word and corrects him. So you are not only responsible to hear the Word and learn Christ's doctrine, but to use it rightly to correct what's wrong. And if a Church is wrong and it is Christ's church, a single member will be heeded and thanked if he Biblically corrects the pastor or the congregation. It is also your duty to do your part to make sure that false teachers are not elected and called to be a pastor of your congregation.

Congregations must be also warned (and you must be wary) that worship is soul care, the personal application of Christ's forgiveness by the power of the cross; 'worship' that is merely pleasant entertainment while ignoring sin and grace is a misuse or abuse of the Gospel as it is being ignored.

2. **Right use of the Sacrament:** God doesn't use the Lord's Supper to convert unbelievers nor to correct false faith. If unbelievers or those holding a false faith (members of Churches holding false doctrine) are communed at your church (Open Communion), instead of sanctifying, communion is being abused to affirm sin that only instruction in the Word (not Communion) can correct. The apostle also warns (1 Cor. 11. 31) that without proper personal examination, not judging our own sin, those who commune there receive judgement from God instead of grace. Even when you visit a sister (LCMS) congregation you must ask "Do you commune any baptized Christian wanting to commune here?" and if they say "yes" you **must** refrain from communing there and **tell them why. They abuse the Sacrament Christ gave also to YOU!** You're also responsible for its use.

3. **Support of the Gospel Ministry:** The church needs a portion (percentage) of your income to support servants in the church. You must value what Christ does through those servants enough to support them. You're not buying God's grace by your tithe, no one has that much money, Christ paid his life for it. But you show gratitude and love to Christ in the servants of the church by feeding and clothing them. If you don't have faith to love them that way, you must confess you value your money more than Christ and his service to you. That's idolatry!

“Am I my Brother’s Keeper?”

That clever murderer first asked that after he’d killed his brother, Abel. He was so lost in hatred and sin that he expected God to say “Of course not!” In Christ we learn the opposite. As a Christian you are your brother’s keeper. You keep your brother Christ (1) in his Gospel and (2) in ministers, as Christ’s servants, when you retain Christ’s doctrine, and support his servants. But Christ and our pastors are not our only brothers.

3. **Keeping the brotherhood in the church:** You might want to review Christ’s teaching of the Office of the Keys. Read Matthew 18:15-20. These are commands of Christ for his church. We recognize those who are repentant over their sins and receive grace in the church as Christians, fellow members, whom we call brothers. But those confronted with their sins who and say, in effect, “to hell with Jesus, I want my sins, not grace; what I plan, not what Christ commands,” must not be called brothers. Why? They’re not. They don’t heed Our Father. What does that mean?

Part of your benefit of being in the church is that every member is going to keep an eye on you. If you fall into obvious sin, that is, spiritual peril, they will love you and tell you so, and even drag you, through church discipline, to a proper loathing and rejection of your sin and a hunger to be forgiven and freed from it. Friends don’t let friends live in sin. So **you can expect to be HUMBLY disciplined by FELLOW SINNERS** who know the struggle against sin and the ‘pleasant slavery’ of laziness and lust. A Christian most fears his fleshly love of sin crowding out his faith/love for Christ, so he will no longer repent. He wants the church to love him enough to do all in its power, even excommunicate him, in order to warn him of his great peril.

This benefit is also a responsibility. As you want help and correction from your brothers to keep you on the narrow road to salvation, so you are responsible to love your brother enough to correct him when he strays and to help him to repent if he falls from faith into open sin. It’s not an option for Christians. If there is no love for the brothers there can be no faith.

4. **Loving brothers yet to be born.** And as the Gospel of Baptism and preaching, of water and the Word, is God’s means of birthing people into his kingdom, you are responsible to confess Jesus to your children, family and community through your witness of receiving communion often with the church and by abstaining from sinful and evil pursuits, standing for what is good and God pleasing, and always being prepared to give an account for the hope within you to those still outside the church (mission).

False Doctrines: Satan’s Dangerous Stumbling Blocks Trip Up Your Church Participation

It is dangerous, demonic, soul-destroying false doctrine that. . .

1. I must now be saved merely by knowing some truth about God.

Thou believest that there is one God; you do well, the devils also believe and tremble. James 2.19

2. I now believe and can never fall from faith.

Wherefore let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall. I Cor. 10.12

3. I’m a child of God and, thus, no longer sin nor need God’s grace.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1.0

4. I can intentionally sin and not have thereby fallen from faith.

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Hebrews 10.26-27

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified 1 Cor. 6.9f

Conclusion

5. As a child of God I do not need a pastor to teach me anything... or only pastors need to grow in their knowledge of Christ.

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **Till we all** come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children. Eph. 4.11f.*

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Heb. 13.17

6. I can participate in the church or her school as a child and despise Christ and his church the rest of my life and consider myself saved.

***Be thou faithful unto death,** and I will give thee a crown of life. Rev. 2.10*

7. My sin is none of the church's business, it's enough that I consider myself forgiven.

*...but **if he neglect to hear the church,** let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mt. 18.17-18*

8. I don't need to gather with the church if I have faith.

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Luke 11. 23

The church is the means by which Christ, through the means of grace he instituted, sanctifies his believers, that is, through the church he keeps believers in faith, brings them growth in faith, and brings forth fruits of faith, pleasing to God and in service to his neighbor.

A believer is not only justified (forgiven) by Christ, but is also renewed by Christ. He becomes a new person. The core change that occurs when one is converted to God is that he turns from being one who will not listen to God, since the devil is his spiritual father, to become a child of God, who heeds his heavenly Father's voice. Then again, people fall from saving faith. They exchange a living, saving faith, that readily acknowledges God as he teaches him of his sins and his need for grace given through the church, for a 'historic' faith. This dangerous 'historic' faith may know facts about God, even say 'the Bible is true,' but never takes the Gospel to heart; doesn't value what is learned in the Bible or take it utterly seriously, does not value even the least letter of God's Word above all the world and life itself. It is a 'knowledge of God' not leading to repentance and urgently receiving God's grace. **When one stops desiring grace, he's fallen from saving faith** no matter how much he may think he 'knows about God.' He merely has an empty, rote knowledge, devoid of the love of God in Christ.

But a converted person hears the voice of his heavenly Father zealously as one hungry and thirsting for righteousness that he, as a sinner on his own, can never produce or have, and that he can only find in and with Christ, where Christ has placed it, in his Word and Sacraments.

So it's important to ask: are you converted and, so, part of the church?

Or have you heard the Gospel, which is the power of God to convert and save you, and stubbornly refused the saving and sanctifying Word of Christ that not only forgives you but makes you yearn to be another person, in the image of Christ? If you have stubbornly refused this treasure of Christ and work of the Holy Spirit, it's not God's fault. He's been calling you to be his and you've said "No." God won't force you. You CAN reject his Spirit and your salvation. If you've been satisfied with yourself and your life, wake up. You can't get to heaven as you are. You must be born again. (John 3)

So now, if you can ignore all of Christ's doctrine in this pamphlet, which is the voice of God in the Bible to all his believers; if you can let this witness of the Holy Spirit about your urgent need of Christ in his church go in one ear and out the other, then please don't fool yourself. You are an enemy of God, for he's talking to you and you judge him to be someone you can

ignore. You are saying of God who's been so kind to you "to hell with him." Know that although our great God loves you and has done everything to save you through the blood of his dear Son and his victorious resurrection, you will reap the consequences of your obstinance and you will certainly spend eternity with your father, the devil, the father of lies. For God has told you the truth and you have treated him as if you could stand as his judge to write him off as a ranting liar. In the end, on judgement day, it will be apparent who's the Judge and who's the liar. God loves you and you reject him every time you turn up your snout (Mt. 7.6) at his Gospel and his Sacraments in the church and say, "We're sick of this miserable food."

But - **if** - you yearn and desire to be born again, be of good cheer! The Holy Spirit must already have begun his good work in you! You couldn't even desire such a thing unless the Holy Spirit had convinced you it's a good thing, desirable! Only ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of your sin by showing you how good God's been to you, how well he's provided for you in Christ, and how ungrateful and indifferent you've been to him. See your poverty of spirit and the misery that stubborn sin has brought you by your seeking treasures in the world and its pleasures and relationships and in your comfort, while despising God's eternal treasures won for you in Christ. The Holy Spirit must convict you of what you deserve from God for that, and of your fearful peril of losing God. Come and confess your sin to God. Speak your sin to your pastor. Christ will forgive you through him. In that relief from your burden of guilt, you will surely experience why you must treasure your church. And the Holy Spirit will bring you Christ and his fullness, more and more, so you bear God-pleasing fruit, fruits of a penitent sinner who's been given God's undeserved love in Christ through faith.

Be ye faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Rev. 2.10



Appendix: Christian Parenthood: What does this Mean?

In the turmoil of our changing society, with materialism and secular humanism rapidly displacing Christian piety, it's so important that our children not be frustrated by the confusion surrounding them, but to "bring them up in the fear of God" (**Eph. 6.4**) who has revealed himself clearly to us. This daunting task is given exclusively to parents, the sole instruments God established to bring forth and preserve lives most vulnerable in infancy and childhood.

Parenthood can be a great blessing when it is carried out in the fear of God and under the counsel of God in his Word, diligently teaching God's eternal blessings into the hearts of God's children. But it's also a great responsibility for which God will hold parents accountable. **On judgement day, God will hold parents accountable** if they don't honor him or raise their baptized children as God's children, but as children of the world.

Faithful Christian parents, therefore, are mindful of God, especially God's promise to bless good parenting. But they also remember, on the other hand, to fear the consequences of neglecting the important task God's given them to raise their children as God's children.

What Does God Promise Us Parents?

Though Scriptures abound with stories, examples, admonitions, and warnings about faithful parenting, let's think about just one of those promises in the Bible:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22.6

While this might merely sound like a proverb or a wise 'guideline' this is God's promise to parents that he will not break, and as this promise is in the Book of Salvation, its greatest application is to your child's salvation.

If you train your child in the ways of God he will not depart from it! If you train him to walk away from God and his ways, you've taught him to keep on departing from God. No, you didn't die for your child's sin, Christ did. But your child's salvation depends on you and your training him rightly. If you teach your child the way of Christ, he will be saved! That's God's promise. But teaching him to oppose God also has a certain outcome!!

What does “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6.4) Mean ?

In the rite of Baptism, children are given Baptism. Christ has appointed that as the means by which children, born to us sinners as sinners, are born again by the power of Christ's death and resurrection. Through water and the Word, water and the Spirit, God makes them his children. As such God becomes their Father and the church their mother and they become part of the household of faith, God's family. In that rite, the path of God's children's 'nurture and admonition' is described for sponsors, who are to help and remind parents of their responsibility, as follows:

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church sponsors are to confess the faith expressed in the Apostles' Creed and taught in the Small Catechism. They are, whenever possible, to witness the Baptism of those they sponsor. They are to pray for them, support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith, and encourage them toward the faithful reception of the Lord's Supper. They are at all times to be examples to them of the holy life of faith in Christ and love for the neighbor. (LSB 269)

So to repeat and summarize, it is a parents' responsibility, in “bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” to. . .

- speak the faith to his child,
- remind him of his baptism (he belongs to God, not the parent)
- see that he grows in faith by instruction in the Bible/Catechism.
- teach him unto worthy, life long reception of Holy Communion, the means of his child's future sanctification found only in the church, without which he will not see God.
- himself be an example in being sanctified, growing in faith to God and in love for the neighbor, possible only by God's grace.

Do you intend to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord -or- to teach him the path away from God, his Father??

How Does this Promise of ‘not departing’ Apply to Me as a Christian Parent?

Look again at the promise (two pages back) from Proverbs 22. Many point out children who have been baptized, attended Lutheran Schools, even through college, who become heathen; rank unbelievers. I've had elderly mothers look to me with tears in their eyes and say, “I did everything I could and they still departed from the faith.” And the suggestion by these 'good Christian' moms is that, perhaps, God's promise isn't true.

So since my child departs from the faith, what God said must not be true!?! With all empathy for a mom's legitimate despair over her child being 'lost', I must honestly tell her, after I tell myself as a parent, NO! It's not God who has failed. It's we parents who fail, isn't it? When God tells us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, guess what, we don't, none of us. None of us perfectly live at enmity with God's enemy, the world; nor, by word and deed, perfectly teach our children all the evils God hates and tells us to avoid in the world, lest we be spiritually ruined or lost. None of us perfectly correct our children in their sinful ways, but we err, we tolerate and allow what Christ doesn't. None of us, even if we go to church weekly and have family prayers and devotions every day, meet God's standard in being examples to our children of being people who love and honor God's Word, who render the unconditional obedience that the authority of God's Word deserves in our lives. God's promise is true. And inasmuch as we have **NOT** taught our children the good path they should walk, they are doomed to the sinful paths we, as sinners, teach our children. It's not God who fails and can be blamed, we all fall short, even as parents. Lost children merely follow us, their parents, as sinners who often won't admit our own sins and failings, who won't seek God's grace for our sins where he placed it for all, parents and children, in Word and Sacrament, in Christ's church. So what hope is left for us in this promise?

Hope in grace, alone. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Children need better parents than we are. Where will they get them? By grace. If you confess your sins and seek God's help for your failures with your children, he will forgive you. He'll turn your evil failings into good for your children, and help you improve. If you don't, why should he help you when you refuse and don't believe in the help he's explicitly commanded you to use. **YOU** be a Christian. **YOU** use God's grace in God's Word and Sacraments. **Else God has no other help or hope for YOU** and God's law promises your children will follow you in your own hypocrisy and unbelief!

How Do I, a Sinner, Honor God as a Father or Mother?

You can first be a 'good parent' to your child when you yourself become 'a good child of God,' that is, when you become a good member of God's household, the church; when you begin to heed God's anger for your sins and stand in line with your fellow sinners to receive his grace in the church. Taking communion, even every day, will not help you improve as a Christian or parent, if you do not engage and know and confess your struggle against sins still living in your flesh that would separate you and God. Communion only helps when you confess to your heavenly Father your need to be sanctified, your need to still learn from God, to grow and improve, your struggle against your sinful flesh, the world and the devil, and your total dependance upon your Father's grace and Biblical guidance. Only when you become God's child and heed your Father's voice, will God's voice speak in your parenting. Only then will you be an instrument in his hands for your child, and you will always be able to depend on him even as you remain imperfect, in need of his grace, sanctification and help.

So what does this mean? How do I honor God as a sinner who is also the parent of a child of God? What must I do?

- Admit my sins and failings as a parent, and confess them..
- Learn to love the truth and what is good and hate what is a lie and evil in both doctrine and life.
- Receive absolution from the pastor as from God for the sins, also parental sins, that I know and feel in my heart.
- Having confessed and being absolved, receive holy Communion often for my improvement/sanctification without which I won't ever become holy and see God.
- Recognize I won't grow in faith or love without Christ and his Wisdom found only in God's Word, the Bible.
- Ask God for a desire to learn, so I can also teach my children
- Recognize I need help in teaching my children the faith and **seek the help of godly teachers in our Grade- and Sunday School** who will affirm the good example I want to set for my children.
- Teach by word and example that the Word of God is the treasure of heaven that will not pass away, to be valued above all things, even life itself; that rejecting God's Word is rejecting God himself.

So we most honor God when we recognize our sins harm our children, we learn and confess our sins and failings as parents, and trust in God's grace to forgive us and correct our failings as only God, **our Father**, can.