

**Biblical Membership: Participation, Accountability, and Presence**

**Here is a great question that I received:** What does the bible have to say about non-attending church members that have all the rights and privileges of church membership?

**Here is my answer:**

From a biblical and ecclesiological standpoint—particularly within historic Baptist and congregational polity—the idea of **non-attending members retaining full rights and privileges of church membership** is difficult to justify. Scripture consistently ties *membership* to *active participation, accountability, and submission to spiritual oversight*, not merely to one's name on a roll. Scripture consistently ties membership to **active participation, accountability, and submission to spiritual oversight**, not merely to one's name on a roll.

**Acts 2:42 NKJV**

<sup>42</sup> **And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

Here is a **reverse version for clarity**, expressing the truth of **Acts 2:42 (NKJV)** by stating the opposite to sharpen understanding:

**Reverse for Clarity — Acts 2:42**

They did **not** drift casually from the teaching of Scripture, but remained **steadfast** in the apostles' doctrine.

They did **not** live in isolation or spiritual independence, but devoted themselves to **fellowship** within the body.

They did **not** neglect the Lord's Table or treat worship as optional, but were committed to the **breaking of bread**.

They did **not** rely on self-sufficiency or prayerlessness, but persevered together in **prayers**.

**1. Church Membership in Scripture Is Relational, Not Nominal****Biblical Truth:**

The New Testament never presents church membership as a passive or symbolic status.

**2. Scripture Commands Faithful Gathering****Biblical Truth:**

Persistent non-attendance is treated as spiritually dangerous, not neutral.

**3. Rights Flow from Responsibilities in the Body of Christ****Biblical Truth: Function precedes privilege.****Additional Scriptures****4. Church Authority and Accountability Require Presence****Biblical Truth:**

**Shepherding** assumes **proximity**.

## **5. Church Authority and Accountability Require Presence**

### **Biblical Truth:**

**Shepherding assumes proximity.**

## **6. Church Discipline Assumes Participation**

### **Biblical Truth:**

**Discipline requires relationship.**

**Matthew 18:17 NKJV**

<sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

### **The Steps to Correcting Offending Brothers,**

**Matthew 18:15-20 NKJV**

#### **Dealing with a Sinning Brother**

<sup>15</sup> “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

<sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’

<sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

<sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

### **Historical and Theological Setting of Matthew 18**

Before we **examine the procedure**, we must **understand the context**.

**Gospel of Matthew** presents Jesus as the promised King and authoritative Messiah. In **Matthew 18**, Christ is not merely teaching ethics—He is establishing **kingdom order** for His covenant community (**for His Church**).

**Matthew 18** is often called the “Community Discourse.” It addresses:

- Humility (**18:1–4**)
- Stumbling blocks (**18:5–9**)
- The pursuit of straying sheep (**18:10–14**)
- Restoration of sinning brothers (**18:15–20**)
- Forgiveness without limit (**18:21–35**)

The entire chapter is governed by one overarching concern: The holiness and unity of Christ’s redeemed community. The church is **not a voluntary association**; it is a **redeemed covenant body** purchased by Christ’s blood (**Acts 20:28**).

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**Acts 20:28 NKJV**

<sup>28</sup> **Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

**Acts 20:28 NKJV — Reverse for Clarity**

<sup>28</sup> If you do **not** take heed to yourselves, you will not rightly care for the flock.

If you neglect the flock, you disregard the very people over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers.

If you refuse to shepherd the church, you are failing in the divine assignment given by the Spirit Himself.

And if you treat the church lightly, you are dishonoring what God has purchased at the highest possible cost—His own blood.

**Reverse Principle Stated Clearly:**

No one can faithfully shepherd the church while ignoring personal holiness.

No one can neglect the flock without resisting the Spirit's appointment.

No one can minimize the church without diminishing the value of Christ's blood that purchased her.

Therefore, sin within it **is not trivial**— it threatens the visible testimony of the kingdom.