

## THE MEANING OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she also becomes a member of the body of Christ – the universal church. As a result of being united with Christ and the other members of His body, a believer qualifies for membership in a particular expression of that body – the local church.

**The universal church** is the body of Christ made up of individual believers (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:27) whom He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28) and of which He is the Head (Col 1:18). A person becomes a member of this universal church upon conversion (1 Cor 12:13) and thus enjoys every spiritual blessing in Christ including forgiveness of their sins (Eph 1:3, 7) and future reward (2 Pet 1:11).

**The local church** is an assembling of like-minded Christians in a specific location for the purpose of worshiping and working together in unity (1 Thess 1:1; Eph 4:1-3). A person does not become a member of a local church automatically (Acts 9:26a), but must be extended the right hand of fellowship (Acts 9:26b-28).

**Church membership** is a declaration of citizenship in Christ's kingdom. It is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.<sup>1</sup> Membership, therefore, is a covenant of *commitment* and *accountability* to a specific local church. It involves relational commitments and kingdom *responsibilities*.

To become a member of a local church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, community of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes. These purposes include receiving instruction from God's Word (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-31; 1 Pet 4:10-11), participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and proclaiming the gospel to the lost (Matt 28:18-20) and to one another (Rom 1:15-17; 1 Cor 15:3-5). In addition, when one becomes a member of a church, he or she submits to the care and the authority of the biblically qualified elders that God has placed over that assembly (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-3).

As the assimilating process progresses, church attendees are encouraged to become members of Redemption Church. Membership confirms commitment (Luke 9:62) and provides accountability (1 Cor 5:1-13). It also identifies those who accept the vision and doctrinal statement of Redemption Church and affirms their willingness to actively pursue membership expectations. For example, devotion to Christ, godly living, financially giving, worship-service attendance, small group participation, ministry involvement, and a commitment to unity and spiritual growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, 64.

## THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The purpose of local church membership is threefold:

1. *To provide a biblically implied means of obeying certain scriptural commands that would otherwise be difficult to obey apart from membership,*
2. *To encourage greater unity, fellowship, accountability, and functionality within the church,*
3. *To engender a variety blessings and opportunities that result from this commitment.*

Membership is a covenant of commitment and accountability to a specific local church.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Although the Bible does not explicitly command Christians to formally join a local church, the biblical warrant for enforcing a membership policy permeates the New Testament.

### The Establishment and Purpose of the Church

- Jesus established the church to be a public, earthly institution that would distinguish, affirm, and oversee those who profess to believe in him (Matt 16:18-19; 18:15-20).
- Jesus established the church to publicly identify His followers in order to display the good news about Himself to the world (John 17:21, 23; cf. Eph 3:10).
- Jesus intends for His people to be marked out as a visible, public group, which implies joining together in local churches with discernible members (Luke 9:23-27, 57-62).

### The Example of the Early Church

- The first New Testament churches associated coming to Christ with coming to His Church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5).
- The early church formally joined together with other believers in a local assembly and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:41-42).
- Membership-like statistics in Acts conveys the idea of formally joining a church (Acts 1:13-15; 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:13-14).
- The early practice of one church writing a letter of commendation to another church when a believer moved to different city suggests that there was local church allegiance (Acts 18:27; Rom 16:1; Col 4:10; cf. 2 Cor 3:1-2).
- The fact that the New Testament epistles were written to churches or to church leaders presumes that believers were committed to a local assembly (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1 Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1).
- Putting widows on a list indicates that the early church had a method for organizing and recording church attendees (1 Tim 5:9)

## **The Existence of Church Government**

- A plurality of elders who oversee a local body of believers is the New Testament model (Php 1:2; 1 Tim 3:1; 1 Pet 5:1-3).
- The specific duties of elders presuppose clearly defined church memberships who are under their care. Elders are to:
  - Shepherd the sheep (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-3)
  - Labor diligently among the believers (1 Thess 5:12)
  - Have charge over the church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17)
  - Keep watch over their souls (Heb 13:17)
  - Give an account for those they lead (Heb 13:17)
- Spiritual leaders cannot easily fulfill their responsibilities apart from a distinguishable, mutually understood membership that defines who they oversee.
- The elders of a church are primarily responsible to shepherd and lead those who have submitted themselves to their care and authority (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:17), which is apparent through membership.
- A good shepherd knows his sheep. He shepherds by directing, protecting, feeding, tending, equipping, encouraging, admonishing, and leading the flock entrusted to him (Luke 15:4-6; John 10; 21; Acts 14:12; 20:31; Eph 4:11-12; Heb 13:7, 17; cf. Ezek 34). These responsibilities are more easily and discernibly accomplished in the context of church membership.

## **The Application of Biblical Commands**

- Believers are commanded to obey and submit to their leaders, so that elders may oversee the church with joy and not grief (Heb 13:17). The believer who refuses to join a church has not formally entrusted himself to the care of the elders.
- The New Testament mandate that churches practice church discipline necessitates an established group of members to carry out the process (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:6).
- The biblical expectation to discern between members in good standing and those living in un-repentant sin (1 Tim 1:20; Titus 3:10) assumes a criterion for distinguishing.
- The scriptural exhortations for all believers to edify other members of the body of Christ (the church) by practicing the “one-anothers” (e.g. Heb 10:24-25; Gal 5:13) and exercising their spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 1 Pet 4:10-11) presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly.

## **The Meaning of Biblical terminology**

- Terminology from the book of Acts fits the concept of formal church membership and suggests a recognizable group with well-defined boundaries: “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17).
- The implications of New Testament church metaphors: the church is called a “building” (1 Cor 3:9) and believers are the “living stones” of the spiritual house (2 Pet 2:5), thus each “brick” has a place and a purpose. The church is pictured as a “body” (Rom 12:4-5), thus each member makes a contribution and helps compensate for the weaknesses of others. The church is portrayed as a “family” (1 Tim 3:15; cf. Eph 1:5), thus there is a close relationship of interdependence and support for one another.

## REASONS TO JOIN A LOCAL CHURCH

Not every reason for joining a church requires membership, but becoming a member will encourage, strengthen, and promote all of what follows.

### Join the Church for Your Church

- Becoming a member demonstrates your love for the local church (Col 1:2, 7).
- Becoming a member expresses high regard for the local church (Acts 20:17-38; Col 1:24-25).
- Membership shows your appreciation for the local church (1 Cor 16:19; 1 Thess 5:12 5:17).
- Membership demonstrates commitment to a specific local church (cf. Luke 9:62; 14:33).
- Membership helps discourage capricious “church hopping.”
- Joining a church publically proclaims your allegiance to Christ and His church (Eph 2:19).
- Membership promotes unity, stability, and loyalty within the church (Eph 4:1-16).
- Membership is a helpful way to maintain order within the church (1 Cor 14:40).
- Membership identifies those who accept the church’s vision and doctrinal statement.
- Membership fosters corporate ownership and doctrinal agreement.
- Membership helps define biblical expectations and promotes accountability.
- Membership signifies a church’s corporate endorsement of a person’s salvation (cf. 2 Cor 2, 7)
- Membership is way to exclude certain individuals who are divisive or refuse to repent (1 Cor 5:1-13; 1 Tim 1:20; Titus 3:10).
- Becoming a member initiates a long-term relationship with the church and its members.
- The entire church benefits from a member’s commitment to give, serve, and pray.

### Join the Church for Your Church Leaders

- Becoming a member lets the leadership and the other members of that local church know that you are committed to attending, giving, praying, and serving.
- Leadership can more easily know and shepherd identifiable members (1 Pet 5:1-3).
- Joining a church is a way for you to get acquainted with the church’s leadership.
- Becoming a member of a local church allows leaders to watch over you with joy and not grief, which is profitable for you and the church (Heb 13:17).
- Becoming a member shows your high esteem and appreciation for leadership (1 Thess 5:12).

### Join the Church for Your Fellow Believers

- Membership facilitates bearing the burdens of one another (1 Cor 12:26; Gal 6:1-2; Heb 3:13).
- Membership is a way to experience the blessings of mutual accountability (Matt 18:15-20).
- Membership encourages mutual edification (Heb 10:24-25); it shows that you want to help and be helped, encourage and be encouraged (cf. 1 Thess 5:14).
- Membership provides a basis for enriched fellowship (Acts 2:42; Gal 2:9).
- Membership is an avenue for severing one another (1 Pet 4:9-10; cf. 1 Cor 12).
- Joining a local church counters individualism, helping us live out Christianity corporately.
- Becoming a member sets a good example for weaker or younger believers.
- Membership replaces a loose affiliation of Christians with an intimate band of believers.

## **Join the Church for Your Community**

- Membership supports the church's witness to the community (cf. Matt 5:14-16).
- Membership helps make the gospel message clear to non-Christians by providing a uniform witness of what it means to be a Christian.
- In an increasingly noncommittal cultural, local church membership helps distinguish committed believers from disinterested or idle Christians (cf. 2 Thess 3:6-15).
- Membership creates a distinct and refined identity; it clarifies the church's separation from the world.
- Membership communicates the collective values and vision of a local church.
- Membership models a caring community of Christians committed to one another (cf. Rom 12).

## **Join the Church for Your Personal Benefit**

- The Bible supplies sufficient evidence to warrant church membership (see above).
- Becoming a member admits that we can deceive ourselves and we therefore need other people to help us walk as individual Christians (cf. Jer 17:9; Ps 19:12; Heb 3:12-13).
- Membership guards against becoming a "lone-ranger" Christian (Php 2:1-4).
- Joining the church acknowledges your need for accountability.
- Membership honors and glorifies God (cf. Eph 3:20-21; Matt 16:18).
- Membership signifies your identity in Christ as a member of His body (Acts 9:4).
- Becoming a member demonstrates your attitude of submission (Eph 5:21; Heb 13:17).
- Membership is a way to obey certain biblical commands (cf. above).
- Membership is a suitable and responsible way to offer certain privileges and blessings.
- Becoming a member cultivates ownership and encourages participation in the church family.

After surveying the biblical data related to membership, the real question is, "Why not join the church?" It may not be a biblical mandate, but becoming a member of your church will benefit you and your church. If for no other reason, become more intimately committed to your church family as a way to more effectively serve God, love people, and spread the gospel.

## **CONDITIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP**

- A testimony of salvation in Jesus Christ
- Baptism since becoming a genuine follower of Jesus Christ
- Completion of the Redemption Essentials class
- Signed agreement with the Redemption Church Doctrinal Statement (membership application)
- A personal commitment to Abide in Christ, Grow in the Church, and Reach the Community
- A satisfactory interview with a Redemption Church elder
- Congregational approval based on applicant's name listed in the church newsletter

## MINISTRY ROLES THAT REQUIRE MEMBERSHIP

Speaking roles, leadership roles, and formal positions require membership. In other words, any ministry position that involves teaching, providing leadership and oversight, or includes officially representing the church requires membership.

### Formal Leadership Positions

- Elder
- Deacon
- Pastoral Staff
- Administrative Staff
- Director of Worship and Prayer
- Director of Children's and Youth
- Director of Missions and Outreach
- Director of Welcome and Connect Teams
- Director of Productions & Communications

### Teaching Positions

- Children's & Youth Teacher
- Men's & Women's Ministry

### Informal Leadership Positions

- Flock Leader
- Small Group Leader
- Men's Ministry Leader
- Women's Ministry Leader
- Youth Ministry Leader
- Worship Center Team Leader
- Productions Team Leader
- All roles associated with church finances

### Platform Positions

- Worship Team
- Announcements
- Scripture Reading

## MINISTRY ROLES THAT DO NOT REQUIRE MEMBERSHIP

While we encourage everyone to become a member, ministry roles that do not involve teaching, leadership and oversight, or officially representing the church do not require membership at this time.

### Assimilation Team

- Parking Lot Greeter
- Front Door Greeter
- Get Connected Table
- Guest Table
- Greeting Usher
- Seating Usher
- Lobby Team Member

### Children's Ministry

- Helper
- Nursery
- Worship

### General Ministry

- Host Home
- Ministry Volunteer

### Production Team

- Audio Visual
- Sound Board
- ProPresenter
- Set-Up/Tear Down

### Communications Team

- Photography
- Videography
- Website Management
- Media Ministries

### Prayer Ministry

- Sunday Morning Prayer
- Worship and Prayer Night