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## Central Fellowship Baptist Church

### *Church Membership Matters Course*



You've heard of a story like this - or maybe you've lived it.

A couple begins attending a local church. They enjoy the music, and like the sermons just fine. After about a year or so the pastor, or perhaps a deacon, approaches them about formalizing their affiliation with the church in membership.

But they either politely decline or become squeamishly uncomfortable, or maybe even take offense.

The pastor trots out a few of the attractive new programs in which they could be involved, and mentions a few of the tantalizing youth activities that might make them reconsider their place on the fence. But to no avail. A month later they leave, in search of a more comfortable \_\_\_\_\_.

So why does this happen? Why is it that so many people lack the desire to become members of the local churches they're already attending? Or perhaps even more disturbing, you know of churches with membership rolls that far outstrip attendance numbers. Why is it that so many of those who are already members fail to take their involvement seriously?

No doubt, part of the reason for a lack of interest in church membership and its entailments is that the \_\_\_\_\_ of our culture - always waiting for a better deal to come along - coupled with the \_\_\_\_\_ of our times that shops around to get the most for the least - has radically affected the way many people think about their church involvement.

But some of the blame must surely be laid at the door of local churches whose teaching on the biblical reasons, benefits, and entailments of local church membership has been ambiguous at best.

Many pastors have been taught to treat people like \_\_\_\_\_, and so they rig up various props and programs designed to entice and attract. Indeed, in many churches there is little discussion at all regarding the biblical moorings and obligations of local church membership. Not surprisingly, when many regular attenders look at the lives of church members, they don't see anything very different.

The members may have gone through an initial class and may attend pretty faithfully. But non-members can attend just as often, and are usually served in many of the same ways.

So what distinguishes a member from a regular attender - a \_\_\_\_\_ at the business meeting?

Is there clear biblical reason for emphasizing membership in the local church?

Why is it better to be a member than simply a regular attender, especially if membership entails further obligation?

What does it mean to be a member of our church?

What is it that potential members are asked to commit themselves to?

How are members asked to live out that commitment in practical ways?

## What is a Church?

### Basic Training

Before we think about what local church membership should mean, we'd be wise to ask the more basic question: What is it that I join when I join with a local church in membership?



### The Church is NOT...

- ...a \_\_\_\_\_ of people who hold roughly the same religious beliefs, no matter what those beliefs might be. I'm not joining a religious club when I join a church.
- ...a \_\_\_\_\_. A building is simply a place to meet. I'm not going to an exclusive clubhouse when I go to church.
- ...a \_\_\_\_\_ with a clear vision statement and lucid objectives. I'm not joining an altruistic or philanthropic society when I join a church.

### The Church IS...

- ...a \_\_\_\_\_ of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

- ...a local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to \_\_\_\_\_ and committed to \_\_\_\_\_.
- ...a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's wisdom and glory (Eph 3:10).
- ...a display of \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_, Christ-like love (John 13:35).

**Church membership is thus for \_\_\_\_\_ only.** It is not for those who simply give cognitive assent to the gospel. It is for those whose lives evidence an increasing application of the principles of the gospel to the situations of their everyday lives, and whose character increasingly reflects the holiness of God.

## Biblical Background for Church Membership

- While we do not find indisputable proof texts for local church membership, we do find passages that \_\_\_\_\_ formal membership in local assemblies.
- **Paul's formal \_\_\_\_\_ of the sinner at Corinth presupposes formal inclusion.** Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to remove a brother from their ranks who was sinning in a way not even approved by pagans.

*2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.*

*7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:*

*12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?*

*13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1Cor 5:2, 7, 12-13).*



- Paul is calling for the exclusion of this immoral brother, which would imply that it meant something to be included in that church. He would lose the privileges of membership previously conferred upon him. Formal exclusion \_\_\_\_\_ formal inclusion.

## Biblical Background for Church Membership

- **Paul's reference to "the \_\_\_\_\_" in 2 Cor 2:6-7 seems to refer to a group commonly recognized as the church's members.**  
*6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.*  
*7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.*
- **The early church kept a \_\_\_\_\_ of widows.** We know from the widow list mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:9 that lists of people were kept and tracked. If widows were listed, it is likely that a list of current members was kept and updated as well.
- **God Himself keeps a list of all believers.**  
*3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. (Phil 4:3).*  
*27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev 21:27).*
- **God has always made a clear \_\_\_\_\_ between His people and the world.** Drawing this distinction was the reason for the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Covenant - these laws distinguished Israel from the nations surrounding them, as a people set apart to the Lord. Such clarity of distinction between God's people and the world argues for clarity and specificity on our membership rolls.

## What Does Church Membership Signify?

### Sign Language

Church membership \_\_\_\_\_ a church's corporate endorsement of a person's salvation.

- If we believe that only genuinely converted Christians are to be members of the local church, then it makes sense to take time to hear people's testimonies and listen for \_\_\_\_\_ of godly fruit and increasing holiness in their lives.
- When the church approaches membership in this way, membership can function as the



church's corporate witness to the fact that the new member does indeed increasingly display the fruits and characteristics of a genuine Christian.

**Church membership signifies an \_\_\_\_\_  
to grasp hold of one another in mutual love and discipleship.**

- By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service.
- We increase others' expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the \_\_\_\_\_ of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve us in love and to encourage us in our discipleship.
- In short, we enter a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with that church and its leadership.

**Church membership signifies a \_\_\_\_\_  
that involves people in each other's lives for the purposes of the gospel.**

- Church membership should not be viewed as a loose affiliation useful to members only on occasion. This is a self-centered way of looking at membership. It says, "I want to join this club for the benefits that it can offer me. But as soon as it starts demanding more than I feel I'm receiving, I think I'll start looking around."
- Church membership is not a set of \_\_\_\_\_ that I purchase with my tithe. It is a set of \_\_\_\_\_ that I commit myself to carrying out, both for and with other members in gospel fellowship, work, and joy.

**Church membership signifies an \_\_\_\_\_ for God and His people.**

- By joining ourselves with God's people in local church membership, we show that we want to covenant with them to help and be helped, encourage and be encouraged, rebuke and be rebuked. In other words, we show that we want to love God's people, and be loved by them.
- According to 1 John, this willingness to love God's people is the fundamental indicator of our heart's disposition towards God Himself.

*20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21).*

## What are the Criteria for Church Membership?



\_\_\_\_\_

Churches should be careful to allow only genuine believers into the covenant of church membership. Why?

**Because of who the church \_\_\_\_\_.**

• By definition, the church is the \_\_\_\_\_ people of God. Those who are not a part of that people are welcome as visitors. But membership in a local church only belongs rightly to those who already belong to God by faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

- Unregenerate members do not share the same spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ as Christians. Infusing the Church with their blood will lead to complication, infection, and potential fatality.

**Because of how the church \_\_\_\_\_.**

*15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

*16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16).*

- The \_\_\_\_\_ of the body comes from Christ. But Christ causes that growth through the instrumental working of each individual part. Unregenerate members therefore do not contribute to the growth of the body because they have no proper function in it.

**Because of the \_\_\_\_\_ that membership signifies.**

- To enter church membership is to enter into a covenant with the other members and the pastors. It is a commitment to being \_\_\_\_\_ involved in the lives of other members to do them good spiritually.
- Therefore, when we allow non-Christians into our membership, we are allowing them \_\_\_\_\_ to the lives and

struggles of other members - allowing them to informally counsel and comfort, rebuke and correct, teach and train.

- In limiting membership to Christians, we are \_\_\_\_\_ the flock from being infiltrated by wolves in sheep's clothing

## Observable \_\_\_\_\_

In discerning who is a genuine believer, the most reliable criteria for which we can look is the \_\_\_\_\_ of godly character and actions. Why demand such fruit?

### Because Jesus advises us to do so.

*15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

*16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

*17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

*18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

*19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

*20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matt 7:15-20).*

*(Compare also John 15:1-11; Gal 5:22-23; James 2:14-26; 2 Peter 1:4-11; 1 John 3:10)*

### Because other criteria are \_\_\_\_\_.

- Emotions ebb. \_\_\_\_\_ in worship can be merely external.
- Clarity in \_\_\_\_\_ about spiritual things has been achieved by the unconverted.
- Being entrusted with \_\_\_\_\_ or positions at church does not necessarily imply godliness.
- And the use of apparently spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ can be fatally deceptive (Matt 7:21-23).





- Increasing \_\_\_\_\_ to God's character is the only sure yardstick with which to measure the genuineness of Christian confession.

## What are the Entailments of Church Membership?

### R&B (Repentance and Belief)

The most important entailment of local church membership is a lifestyle of repentance and belief. One must make a genuine commitment to consistently repent of known sin as it occurs, and to continually believe in Jesus' death and resurrection as the only basis of acquittal before God.

More specifically, this lifestyle of repentance and belief should be evidenced in three concrete steps.

1. \_\_\_\_\_. This is the first way we are commanded to express our death and resurrection with Jesus Christ.
  - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you... (Matt 28:19-20).*
2. \_\_\_\_\_ of Faith. The most important thing we unite around is the message we proclaim - the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - For this reason, it is healthy to require people to sign the church's statement of faith. This way, everyone knows what the church is united around, and doctrinal division is less likely to occur.
3. Church \_\_\_\_\_. The second most important thing we unite around is the \_\_\_\_\_ demanded by the message we claim to believe. For this reason, it is healthy to ask people to commit to the principles and priorities of a church covenant.
  - This way, everyone knows what it \_\_\_\_\_ to be a member, what is \_\_\_\_\_ of them when they join, and when they are falling \_\_\_\_\_ of fulfilling their covenant obligations as members.





## Five Basic Responsibilities of Membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ *regularly*. If we don't attend, we can't be \_\_\_\_\_, and the pastors can't get to know us in a way that meaningfully informs their shepherding care of us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *regularly*. If we don't give, the pastors can't fully \_\_\_\_\_ themselves to preaching and teaching, the missionaries have to come home, and the lights will have to be turned off in the building.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *regularly*. One of the most basic ways we can edify and encourage one another towards greater obedience, holiness, and joy is through prayer. Pray through your church's directory a page a day, using the Scripture you're reading in your devotions.
- *Attend* \_\_\_\_\_ *services particularly*. It is an ordinance commanded by the Lord for our joy in and remembrance of Him. It binds us together as a believing community, and reminds us of the significance of Christ's death.
- *Attend* \_\_\_\_\_ *particularly*. We should care enough about the life of our local church to attend member meetings and to contribute to them in helpful ways by being quick to listen and gentle in speech.

## Why is \_\_\_\_\_ Membership Dangerous?

Meaningless membership refers to the common practice of neglecting to tie church membership to specific responsibilities, priorities, expectations, privileges, and sanctions. It is dangerous for the following four reasons.

### 1. Meaningless membership sends a \_\_\_\_\_ witness to the surrounding community.

- When we fail to tie membership to specific obligations, we allow people to become members without them feeling any particular \_\_\_\_\_ or accountability to live and teach as the church lives and teaches.
- The poor behavior of many members in such a low accountability environment often taints the church's corporate witness in the community and confuses unbelievers around us about what it means to be a Christian. It makes the church look grossly \_\_\_\_\_ when an immature or unconverted member sins repeatedly in a publicly known way.



**2. Meaningless membership causes \_\_\_\_\_ due to the sin of unconverted members.**

- When we uncritically allow mere verbal professors of Christ to enjoy membership in the local church, such members can become sources of division within the church. The church is a \_\_\_\_\_ of mutually sanctifying relationships. One quarrelsome unbeliever can \_\_\_\_\_ many seeds of division by slavery to sins like gossip, anger, lying, and covetousness.
- Division is especially likely if the verbal professor of Christianity has natural \_\_\_\_\_ ability and is able to propound his own views over against those of the church by teaching Sunday School or leading Bible studies with false motives. When this happens, meaningless membership has led to the infiltration of false teachers.

**3. Meaningless membership causes \_\_\_\_\_ regarding the duties of membership.**

- When we fail to tie church membership to \_\_\_\_\_ duties, new members don't have any concrete understanding of that to which they are committing.
- When members do not understand exactly what their responsibilities are, they are left without a practical \_\_\_\_\_ by which to faithfully examine their own behavior or to which they can hold their Christian brother or sister accountable.



**4. Meaningless membership leads to the \_\_\_\_\_ of irresponsible members.**

- Church membership is a local church's affirmation that an individual is bearing fruit that evidences repentance. Failing to tie church membership to duty and obligation \_\_\_\_\_ to the **lazy** and **unconverted** that the diligent killing of indwelling sin is unnecessary, and that observable growth in practical holiness is for the \_\_\_\_\_, not for all.
- Such failure communicates the church's \_\_\_\_\_ approval of the idea that a person can be a genuine Christian and anticipate entrance into the Kingdom of God while simultaneously indulging complacency with spiritual inactivity and disobedience.

## Three Reasons to Join a Local Church

### 1. Join For Other the Sake of \_\_\_\_\_

Join a church for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_

- Church membership helps make the gospel \_\_\_\_\_ to non-Christians by providing a unified witness of what it means to be a Christian.
- Membership provides this unified witness by implementing a statement of faith, encouraging unity in doctrine, and a church covenant, encouraging unity in lifestyle.



Join a church for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_ Christians.

- God is not merely concerned about our own private piety, but also about our care for the other sheep. This is a whole aspect of godliness that privatized Christians ignore. If we don't love God's people, then John says we have reason to question our love for God Himself (1 John 4:8).
- God wants us to \_\_\_\_\_ weaker Christians and run the race with them. Don't leave it to other people to care for those outside your circle of friends. This is \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility.
- Members should see themselves as \_\_\_\_\_ - coming to serve others, not to be served.

Join a church for the sake of the church \_\_\_\_\_.

- If regular attenders don't eventually make themselves known to the pastor as members of the church, then the pastor cannot take responsibility for them as part of his particular flock. Pastors need to know for which sheep God will hold them accountable so that they can tend to them most responsibly and effectively (Heb 13:17).
- If regular attenders don't join churches, then pastors cannot be freed to do what they do. Pastors can only devote themselves to the ministry because they are set free to do so by members who fund their work.

Regular attenders \_\_\_\_\_ from the commitment of other people who have become members and who give and serve and pray regularly.

## 2. Join For the \_\_\_\_\_ Health of the Church

Join a church to \_\_\_\_\_ false gospels.

- The best defense is often a good offense. God wants us to band together in love so that we can model Christianity for the world. This is often how we best debunk messages that masquerade as biblical Christianity but are really different messages altogether.
- Christians are called to differentiate the true gospel from false ones, to defend it against distortion, and to prevent it from being perverted. We do these things best together because we are sharpened by each other's insight, encouragement, and correction.



Join a church to \_\_\_\_\_ the church.

- Some people refuse to join a local church because they feel they would be slowed down in their spiritual growth if they joined. Perhaps. But maybe God wants such people to join a church to help speed other people up. Membership doesn't stop with M-E.
- Joining a local church counters wrong \_\_\_\_\_, helping us live out the corporate nature of Christianity. The NT is full of injunctions to care for each other. This is part of what it means to be a Christian. So if we think we are mature, yet lack a care for Christ's body that evidences itself in carrying out the responsibilities of local church membership, we hurt the church, and we are not yet as mature as we presume to be.

## 3. Join For Your Individual \_\_\_\_\_ as a Christian

Join a church for your own spiritual \_\_\_\_\_.

- We can't always read our own souls perfectly. We can deceive ourselves, and we therefore need other people to help us walk as individual Christians (*Jer 17:9; Ps 19:12*).
- The Bible speaks of people as \_\_\_\_\_. Sheep aren't meant to be wandering around on their own recognizance between folds. Sheep are

dumb. We fall into ravines when we are by ourselves. We need to be shepherded into folds.

- So we need to exercise the \_\_\_\_\_ to view ourselves as sheep and submit ourselves to a local body of believers for mutual encouragement, protection, and examination. It is our wisdom and safety to humbly stay with the flock and near a good shepherd who grazes, guides and guards us.

### **Join a church for your own spiritual \_\_\_\_\_.**

- In joining a church, we are asking our church family to hold us \_\_\_\_\_ to live according to what we confess. Membership in a local church is that congregation's public testimony that your life gives continual evidence of regeneration.
- In joining a church, we are taking hold of one another to know and to be known in mutual responsibility and care, so that we can make sure we are bearing the fruit of holiness, *"without which no one will see the Lord"* (Heb 12:14; cf. John 14:21; 15:10, 14).

## **The Best Reason to Join a Church**

### **Join for \_\_\_\_\_**

### **Join a Church for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_ name.**

- The building up of the church is ultimately GOD'S work. *The LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42, 47).*
- *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ME (Acts 9:4).* Jesus so closely identified himself with His church that He said Saul was persecuting *Him* when he was persecuting the church.
- If Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ himself closely with the church, we should too. By our being together in a church, we are giving testimony and praise to God through our lives as we live and love each other together.
- It would be easy to put on programs and attract people, and allow people to enjoy being in the choir and having homogenous friendships in small groups, but never deal with the most important issues.
- We could service people socially, but will they be committed to pray, give, serve, love, and attend? These are the marks of a faithful Christian, and these are the characteristics and actions that give God glory in the church.



## Join a Church for the sake of God's \_\_\_\_\_.

- God wants His \_\_\_\_\_ displayed and His gospel \_\_\_\_\_ to all the nations.
- *6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. (Isa 49:6).*
- We can take God's glory and gospel to the nations better if we \_\_\_\_\_ together than if we remain alone.
- Being part of God's plan to spread His glory and gospel to all nations is a privilege that we will not have in heaven. We seize the privilege of evangelism best if we work together as one diverse unity.



## The Reflecting Pool

- Does the Bible make explicit mention of membership rolls in a local church? Where is it implicit? *Read 1 Cor 12:14-26.* How can church membership help us as Christians to live out these obligations we have to one another as Christ's body?
- Do most of the members of your church view membership as a loose affiliation useful only on occasion, or more as a regular responsibility involving them in each other's lives for the purposes of the gospel? What are the responsibilities of a church member? How can the fulfillment of those responsibilities contribute to the work of the gospel?
- Why might it be true that church membership is dangerous unless it is the reflection of a living commitment to Christ? What does a living commitment to Christ and His church look like?
- Church membership is a church's corporate testimony to an individual member's salvation. *Read Hebrews 13:17.* The Bible teaches that church leaders will be required to give an account for those under their care. Do you think this "account" will simply be a statement that a person once made a decision for Christ, or is it a knowledgeable testimony that a person is faithfully bearing fruit in the gospel? How does this affect our understanding of who should be on our membership rolls?
- How would a biblical understanding of church membership make our witness to non-Christians clearer? How would it make it more difficult for weaker Christians to stray while still considering themselves Christians?