

Doctrine of the Church, Lesson 4 Handout
Church Membership: Who is Part of a Local Church?

I. Local Church Membership is Assumed in the New Testament

- A. Assumed that each local church congregation knows who each other are. See, for example, Matt. 18:17; Acts 8:3; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 14:27; 15:3, 4
- B. Implied by biblical commands to worship together, encourage, serve, and hold one another accountable (Col. 3:12-17); carry out church discipline (Matt. 18 and 1 Cor. 5); submit to a particular church (Heb. 13:17); have specific pastors/deacons that know who they are leading and responsible for (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:17); regularly gathering together (Heb. 10:24-25)

II. Local Church Membership is to Consist Only of True Believers: Regenerate Church Membership

- A. Jer. 31 tells us that every member of the New Covenant community will have a new heart and personally know God through faith; John 3 calls this the “new birth” of the spirit, when someone becomes a Christian
- B. The fundamental purpose of church membership is to mark out those who give a right, genuine profession of repentance and faith the true gospel (see last week)
- C. Therefore, to be a church member, one must be a Christian
- D. For example:

1 Cor. 1:2, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”

Gal. 1:2-3: “To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Phil. 1:1: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.”

III. Local Church membership is a covenantal commitment

Church membership is a covenantal commitment to *be the local church*:

- A. *It's a commitment to regularly gather as the church* for the preaching and teaching of God's Word and the practice of the ordinances
- B. *It's a commitment to believe the gospel of God's Word*; this is why we have a church statement of faith, which defines the gospel and gives a summary of what we believe the Bible says

- C. *It's a commitment to live in accordance with God's Word*, as His people, in order that our profession of faith in the gospel prove credible and that the local church can continue to affirm our profession; this is why we have a church covenant and have each member exemplify their commitment to the spirit of the covenant by signing it.
- D. *It's a commitment to submit ourselves to that particular church community* - submitting to the local church's preaching and teaching, fellowship, and spiritual oversight in our lives - including the discipline of the church.

IV. **Local Church Membership is Crucially Important: 12 Reasons Why¹**

1. *It's biblical.* The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Christians today should expect and desire the same.
2. *The church is its members.* (Read through Acts)
3. *It's a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper.* (See 1 Cor. 11:20-33)
4. *It's how you officially represent Jesus.* Identifies you as a passport-carrying citizen of the Christ's Kingdom
5. *It's how you declare your highest allegiance.*
6. *It's how you embody and experience biblical images.* (For example, see Eph. 4; 5; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Pet. 2; 5)
7. *It's how you serve other Christians.* (For example, see Eph. 4:11-16, 25-32).
8. *It's how you follow Christian leadership.* Membership helps you to know which Christian leaders on planet Earth you are called to obey and follow. It allows you to fulfill your biblical responsibility to them (see Heb. 13:7, 17).
9. *It helps Christian leaders lead.* Membership lets Christian leaders know which Christians on planet Earth for whom they will "give an account" (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:17).
10. *It enables church discipline.* It gives you the biblically prescribed place to participate in the work of church discipline responsibly, wisely, and lovingly (Matt. 18; 1 Cor. 5).
11. *It gives structure to your Christian life.* It places an individual Christian's claim to obey and follow Jesus into a real-life setting where authority is actually exercised over us (see John 14:15; 1 John 2:19; 4:20-21). *It's God's discipling program.*
12. *It builds a witness and invites the nations.* Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching universe (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:9-12). The very boundaries, which are drawn around the membership of a church, yield a society of people that invites the nations to something better. *It's God's evangelism program.*

¹ Jonathan Leeman's "12 Reasons Membership Matters" from his book *Church Membership*, p.79.