

BECOMING A MEMBER

Of Cornerstone Christian Church



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608 N Bartlett
Medford OR 97501
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Published in the United States as A Cornerstone Publication

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Introduction

Membership is the formal process by which professing Christians are received publicly into the fellowship of this church. It's a status confirmed by vows and based on the teaching of the Bible. The 'church visible' is more than a building; it's a body, in covenant with Christ and each other as members. "We, though many are one body" (Rom 12:5). This simple paper explains briefly what church membership is about.

Membership Is Biblical

On the one hand, there is no proof text that says, “Thou shall sign the membership roll of a particular church.” One searches in vain for chapter and verse detailing membership. However, we do believe, that membership is not only a meaningful way to live life faithful to Scripture, it’s a necessary way. The Bible establishes a connection between the visible and invisible church. Though it is, in one sense, true to say that church membership is not necessary to salvation, the statement is also misleading in another sense. R. B. Kuiper put it well, saying:

1. “The scriptural rule is, that church membership is not a prerequisite for salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation”.
2. Membership is based on the biblical idea of separation. Throughout Scripture God marks out and distinguishes his Church from the rest of the world. In the Bible this distinction is clearly expressed. Such clarity of distinc-

tion argues for clear and specific terms of membership. Without membership, leadership has no certain or comprehensive way of knowing who all the members really are. This is a significant weakness and hindrance to our call as leaders.

3. The Bible describes the people of God as a congregation in covenant with him and each other. Covenant always involves certain understood and agreed upon promises and conditions entered into by the persons involved. This is just another way of describing formal membership. Covenant members are obligated to love and serve other members; but, how can these duties be fulfilled without a practical way to identify who the members are? Every member is important so we should know who the members are.
4. Membership is also necessary for biblical church discipline. Members are to submit to one another and the overseers of the church (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb 13:17).

If a member is practising sin they are to be corrected. If over the course of time they refuse to repent and turn from their sin excommunication becomes necessary. In the Bible this is described as a change in status from member to non member, from insider to outsider (Mat 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). We do not see how this kind of discipline is possible apart from formal membership. Paul's formal exclusion of the unrepentant sinner at Corinth presupposes his formal inclusion into the visible Church at some point prior. The church is commanded to judge those who are "inside" and forbidden to judge those "outside" (1Cor5:12). Membership is a change in status from outside the community to inside.

5. The focus of the New Testament is on the local congregation. The Greek word for “church” appears some 114 times in the New Testament. Ninety four of these references refer not to the invisible/universal Church of Christ but to the visible/local congregation gathered together as a public assembly to witness and worship under God. Members publicly confess a common creed and commitment. Membership based on a public confession is one good way to distinguish the true gospel, and the true church from the counterfeit.

6. Membership promotes unity, peace and accountability by binding us under common obligations to each other. Membership is not a means to a selfish end. The church is not a religious club we join for the benefit it affords us. Membership helps counter our individualism and consumerism by formally obligating us to consider the corporate implications of our actions, and not merely our individual concerns.

The Membership Process

The process of membership may take a little time but it's worth it. Our hope is that the process will edify your faith and build appreciation for membership.

First step - Talk to a Pastor.

If you are a new believer or new to the reformed faith we want to encourage you to talk to one of the pastors who will try to answer your questions and familiarize you with our beliefs and practice.

Second step - Attend a membership class.

We realize your time is valuable. Our aim is not to lay an unnecessary burden on you but to build you up in faith and appreciation of membership.

Third step - Meet with leadership.

A brief 15 minute “get to know you” introduction with all the elders. This meeting is for mutual encouragement and a chance for all of us to get acquainted with each other.

Fourth step - Public notification.

Notification will be given to the congregation two weeks prior to the Sunday that you are to be received into membership.

Fifth and final step - Public reception.

Vows will be taken in the morning worship service and you will be joyfully received into membership.

Membership Vows

A Common faith

1. Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments, and taught in this church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

A Common profession

2. Do you promise, by the grace of God, to continue steadfast in the profession of this doctrine?

A Common life

3. Do you promise at all times to conduct yourself conformably to this doctrine, desiring to serve the Lord, according to His word, mortifying your old nature and living a godly life?

A Common discipline

4. Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent in doctrine or life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

(Answer 'yes' to all the questions above)

Expectations

When you become a member of this church you are making a commitment to us and we to you.

1. Faithfully attend

You are committing yourself to faithfully attend public worship. The most basic expectation is to sanctify the Lord's day as holy, by not neglecting worship (Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8-11) (Heb.10;24-25).

2. Holiness

While we will never attain perfection in this life we are called to strive for holiness (Heb 12:14; 1Pet 1:15-16). The world views Jesus through the members of his Church. We are called to be good witnesses and shine God's light in a dark world (Matt.5:16).

3. Loving service

We are called to love, support, encourage, share, pray for, and exercise our gifts for the edification of others - “Love one another with brotherly affection. Out do one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord... seek to show hospitality” (Rom 12:10-11,13).

4. Support the ministry

The Lord provides for his church through the members. God loves a cheerful giver (2Cor 9:7). Financial support provides for the support of the pastoral staff that they might be devoted to the ministry of the Word. Financial support also provides for mercy ministries, assisting those inside and outside the church in tangible ways. Finally, financial support enables us to contribute to missionary work in this community and abroad.

5. Be a witness

Serve Christ in every area of life. Furthering the work of the Kingdom through lives lived by faith.

Conclusion

Membership supports the church's witness. The low accountability environment of a church without membership taints the church's corporate witness in the community and confuses believers and unbelievers about what it means to be a Christian. Failing to tie church membership to Christian duty gives the impression that struggle against sin and growth in sanctification is optional at best and unnecessary at worst. Christian growth isn't a private project that can be achieved independent of other members of the body of Christ. Failing to tie church membership to Christian duty communicates the church's implicit approval that a person can be a faithful Christian while remaining disconnected from the church through church membership. Becoming a member is a blessing from God, and we pray that the Lord would work through us that we may become a blessing to each other and the world.

Belgic Confession

Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members

We believe that since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, regardless of his status or condition.

But all people are obliged to join and unite with it, keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.

And to preserve this unity more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to God's Word, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it, even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid and death and physical punishment result. And so, all who withdraw from the church or do not join it act contrary to God's ordinance.

The Heidelberg Catechism

83. Q. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel and church discipline. By these two the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and closed to unbelievers.[1] Matt. 16:19; John 20:21-23.

84. Q. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel?

A. According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come. [1] Matt. 16:19; John 3:31-36; 20:21-23.

85. Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by church discipline?

A. According to the command of Christ, people who call themselves Christians but show themselves to be unchristian in doctrine or life are first repeatedly admonished in a brotherly manner. If they do not give up their errors or wickedness, they are reported to the church, that is, to the elders. If they do not heed also their admonitions, they are forbidden the use of the sacraments, and they are excluded by the Elders from the Christian congregation, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ.[1] They are again received as members of Christ and of the church when they promise and show real amendment.[2]

[1] Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5:3-5; 11-13; II Thess. 3:14, 15. [2] Luke 15:20-24; II Cor. 2:6-11.

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Medford, Oregon
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