

Meaningful Church Membership:
A guide to membership at Brackenhurst Baptist Church

This membership manual is published
by Brackenhurst Baptist Church.

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Contents

Introduction.....	5
Lesson 1: The Gospel.....	7
Lesson 2: Our Beliefs	11
Lesson 3: Our Covenant	17
Addendum 1: Membership Matters	21
Addendum 2: Assembly Required.....	25
Addendum 3: Communion of the Saints.....	28
Addendum 4: Humility, Hearing, and Healing	32
Addendum 5: Another Brick in the Wall.....	36
Recommended Resources	41

Introduction

We are pleased that you have expressed interest in becoming a member of Brackenhurst Baptist Church (BBC).

Reading through this booklet is your first introduction to membership at BBC. Whether you received this at a membership class or were handed it directly by an elder, it is important that you familiarise yourself with the content herein so you understand who we are as a church.

Having worked through this material, and having decided to pursue church membership, please express your interest to one of the elders. The elders will then arrange for an existing member of the church to walk you through, in a one-on-one capacity, the formal lessons required for membership. These lessons, compiled in a book titled *Basics of Church Membership*, are as follows:

1. The Bible
2. The Gospel
3. Church Membership
4. Church Discipline
5. Church Ordinances
6. Church Government
7. Making Disciples
8. Corporate Worship
9. Church Associations
10. Church Covenant

Assuming you still want to pursue membership after the *Basics of Church Membership*, one or two elders will arrange a membership interview with you. This is for the purpose of answering any questions you may have as well as reviewing what church

Meaningful Church Membership

membership involves. A membership application form will need to be completed in preparation for this meeting.

You will also be asked to sign a church covenant and to give a brief written introduction to yourself or your family to the interviewing elder(s) so that you can be introduced to the church at a normal Sunday service.

Your name will be placed in the church bulletin as a member applicant for two weeks. On the third week, should there be no serious objections from the church, you will be formally welcomed into membership. This will happen either via baptism at a normal Sunday morning service (if you have not yet been baptised as a believer) or during the course of a regular Sunday service.

This booklet is offered as one means to help you to understand what membership at BBC looks like. It presents BBC's beliefs and ethos in such a way that, in conjunction with the membership information class, you will be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to pursue membership.

If you have any questions, please feel free to talk to one of the elders.

The Gospel

Christians talk a lot about “the gospel.” The word “gospel” simply means *good news*. It is good news that is proclaimed in the face of a pressing problem. The Christian gospel is the good news of what God has done for believing sinners in Jesus Christ. And it is news that demands a response

To understand the good news of the gospel, we need to consider four basic truths.

Truth 1: God, the Creator

The first truth to consider is that God created us and we are accountable to him.

The Bible states it very plainly: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). This is the foundation of everything we know about God and humanity. If we get this wrong, we will get everything wrong. God created everything—including humans—and he therefore has the right to tell us how to live.

The Bible describes God as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” At the same time, he is a God “who will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7). The loving God of the Bible will not leave the guilty unpunished. God is holy and righteous and therefore he cannot nor will not ignore or tolerate sin—including ours!

Truth 2: Man, the Sinner

The second truth to consider is that we have all sinned against this good and holy God, and are therefore destined for eternal destruction.

Meaningful Church Membership

When God created the first human beings—Adam and Eve—he intended them to live under his righteous rule in perfect joy, obeying him and living in fellowship with him. When Adam disobeyed God, that fellowship with God was broken. By their disobedience, Adam and Eve had declared rebellion against God. They had rejected his authority.

But Adam and Eve were not alone in sin-guilt. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). We often think of sin as simply a violation of some heavenly traffic law—something over which God should not be too upset. That is a massive underestimation of the nature of sin. Sin is the rejection of God himself and his right to exercise authority over those to whom he gives life.

Once you understand sin in that light, you begin to understand why “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This death is described as “eternal destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). This final judgement follows physical death (Hebrews 9:27). This final judgment is certain for all who do not embrace God’s solution to our sin problem. This brings us to the next consideration.

Truth 3: Jesus, the Saviour

The third truth to consider is that God sent Jesus to die in the place of sinners to save them from their sin.

There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves from sin. This is why Jesus Christ came to earth. Jesus is God’s anointed one—the one sent to reconcile man to God. He is the King that God had promised would come to set up an eternal kingdom.

Jesus’ mission was to make people into citizens of his eternal kingdom. He did so by dying in their place—taking upon himself the

Lesson 1: The Gospel

punishment for sin. As he died on a Roman cross, the awful weight of our sins fell on his shoulders. He took upon himself the sentence of death God had pronounced against rebellious sinners. Jesus experienced God's wrath for those he came to save.

But the story doesn't end there. The crucified King did not remain in the tomb; he rose from the dead. He is not just the King crucified, but the King resurrected! Jesus' resurrection was God's way of saying, "What Jesus claimed about who he is and what he came to do is true!" (see Romans 1:1-4).

Truth 4: Forgiveness, the Offer

The fourth truth to consider is, because of who Jesus was and what he did, God now extends to humanity the offer of forgiveness of sin.

What does God expect us to do with the information that Jesus died in our place? He expects us to respond with repentance and faith.

To repent means to turn away from our rebellion against God. Repentance doesn't mean an immediate end to our sinning. It *does* mean that we will never again live at peace with our sins.

Not only that, but we also turn to God in faith. Faith is reliance. It is a promise-based trust in the risen Jesus to save you from your sins.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world through him might be saved. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:16-18).

Meaningful Church Membership

Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

To be counted righteous before God, we need someone’s righteousness credited to us. That’s what happens when a person is saved by Jesus: All our sins are credited to him, who took the punishment for them, and his perfect righteousness is credited to us when we place our trust in what he has done for us.

Do you believe that you have rebelled against God and deserve his wrath? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died the death that you deserve for your sins? Do you believe that he rose from the grave and lives to stand in your place as your Substitute and Saviour? If that is your heartfelt conviction, you can call upon him in repentance for the forgiveness of your sins.

Our Beliefs

Brackenhurst Baptist Church (BBC) is a member of Sola 5—an association of God-centred evangelical churches in Southern Africa. We affirm the Sola 5 confession of faith (<http://www.sola5.org/confession>) and core values (<http://www.sola5.org/values>). You can request a hard copy of the Sola 5 handbook from one of the elders or from the church office. Below is an abbreviated statement of faith, which will help you understand what we believe as you pursue membership of the church. If there are any areas of the statement with which you disagree, please disclose this to an elder during the membership process.

1. **The True God.** There is one sovereign, self-existent, living and true God, who exists in three distinct persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and who created and sustains all things. God has revealed himself generally to all people in creation, providence, and the human conscience, and savingly to his people in Jesus Christ and through the Scriptures.

2. **The Holy Scriptures.** God has revealed himself and his gospel fully and finally in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This revelation is preserved for us in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible, in its original writings, was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore the final authority for Christian faith and practice. The Bible sufficiently reveals all we need to know for salvation and godly living and the Christian conscience is bound by it alone. Human interpretation of the Scripture is not infallible; nevertheless, Scripture can be accurately understood by careful examination and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Meaningful Church Membership

3. **Creation, the Fall, and Sin.** In the beginning, God created the universe and everything in it—good and perfect, out of nothing, and by the power of his word—in six days according to Scripture. God created humankind, male and female, in his own image so that the whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. Adam and Eve wilfully and freely broke God's commandment and thereby lost their original righteousness and communion with God. All humans inherit Adam's guilt, to which is added guilt for sins personally committed. All people are therefore by nature subject to death and eternal punishment. Apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, man is dead in sin and therefore unable to turn himself towards God or to exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ. Sin is rebellion against God and his law, which expresses itself in acts of disobedience by doing what he prohibits and failing to do what he requires.

4. **Redemption and the Person and Work of Christ.** Although human beings are unable to save themselves, God was pleased to provide a way of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. God's work of redemption proceeds from grace alone, through faith alone, and the glory for salvation belongs to him alone. To give effect to God's eternal purpose, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. He lived on earth as a man under God's law, which he perfectly fulfilled. On the cross, he acted as substitute for his elect, bearing their sins and suffering God's wrath in their place. He died and rose bodily on the third day and forty days later ascended to the right hand of the Father, from where he poured out his Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. At God's appointed time, he will return personally to bring final salvation to those who are waiting for him. God now calls all men to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and freely promises

Lesson 2: Our Beliefs

to all such people that they will be redeemed from sin and inherit eternal life.

5. **The Application of Redemption.** Saving faith is ordinarily produced through the ministry of the word. It requires a knowledge of what God has revealed—about himself, man, and the gospel—includes a conviction that these things are true, and comes to fulfilment as the believer repents of sin and rests in Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life. Any reliance which a person places in personal morality, good works or ceremonial faithfulness—whether in place of or in addition to faith in Christ—disqualifies that person from God’s gift of salvation. In repentance a person perceives that he or she has offended a holy God, yet grasps that God, in Christ, is merciful to penitent sinners and therefore turns from sin towards God. Saving faith always results in a life of good works characterised by supreme love for God and for one’s neighbour. Those whom God has regenerated, enabled to believe, justified, adopted and sanctified will certainly persevere in the state of grace to the end and be eternally saved.

6. **The Holy Spirit in Redemption.** The Holy Spirit is from eternity truly God. Although the Holy Spirit was already active in the Old Testament period, he was, according to the promises of the prophets, poured out in matchless abundance on the church after the ascension of Christ. His work is largely concerned with calling and preserving God’s people in this life. By the gift of the Spirit, God assures his children of their sonship and eternal life; gives to them a foretaste of what is yet to come; restores in them the image of God, conforming them to the likeness of Christ; instructs them in the words and ways of Christ; liberates them from the bondage of sin and enables them to obey God from the heart; assists them in their prayers; mediates Christ’s presence; and unites them to one another. Each true congregation of the Lord

Meaningful Church Membership

Jesus Christ is charismatic by nature—in the sense that every believer receives a gift (or gifts) and is responsible to exercise it (or them) in practising the priesthood of the believer.

7. **The Church: Universal and Local.** The universal church consists of all the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, its head. A local church is a covenanted gathering of visible saints, which is recognised by faithful preaching of the gospel, pure observance of the ordinances in the fear of God, the practice of church discipline, and mutual love.

8. **The Local Church: Government.** Christ is the head of every local church, and has given to each local church all the power and authority necessary for the exercise of worship and discipline. Christ has appointed two offices for the government of the local church: elders (also known as pastors, bishops, or overseers), and deacons. Elders must keep watch over the flock as men who must give an account, provide sound teaching for the edification and strengthening of the saints, and prepare God's people for works of service. Deacons are appointed to attend to ministries of mercy and other practical service, in order to free the elders for prayer and the ministry of the word.

9. **The Local Church: Ordinances.** Christ has also given to his church two ordinances (or sacraments) to be observed until he returns: baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the formal expression of a believer's entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ. The only proper subjects of baptism are those who profess repentance and faith in Christ. The due administration of this ordinance involves immersion in water. The Lord's Supper is observed by eating the bread and drinking the cup, which symbolise the body and blood of the Lord. The Supper is to be observed regularly by all believers in good standing with their local

Lesson 2: Our Beliefs

church who, receiving the elements in faith, spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death.

10. **The Christian Lifestyle.** All Christians are called to live lives of worship by offering themselves as living sacrifices to God. God's people are also called to specific acts of public and private worship. Christian ethics are controlled by God's law, which is expressed in the two great commandments: to love God and neighbour. Participation in the fellowship of the body of Christ through the local church is one of the believer's greatest privileges and responsibilities, one of the most important means of proclaiming Christ to the world, and one of the believer's primary sources of preservation, comfort, and edification. Christians are commanded to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ by their actions, lifestyle, and words and thereby to make disciples of Jesus Christ in all nations.

11. **Civil Institutions: The State.** In human society, God has appointed civil rulers to maintain order and justice, if necessary, by the use of the sword. Civil government is an institution separate from the church, which has no mandate to prescribe the doctrines and practices of any church, to coerce its citizens into following one religion or another, or to prevent its citizens from practising religion. God has commanded Christians, within the limits of obedience to God, to submit to their rulers, to participate in the life of their society, and to promote the well-being of their fellow-citizens.

12. **Civil Institutions: Marriage.** Marriage is a lifelong covenantal union between one natural man and one natural woman. It must be entered into publicly and formally. Marriage is the basis of the family, which is the essential building-block of any stable society. Since marriage is a creation ordinance, its privileges

Meaningful Church Membership

and commitments apply to both believers and unbelievers. It is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord.

13. **Death, Resurrection, Judgement and the Final State.** After death, the human body returns to dust. A time is coming when everyone who has ever lived will be raised bodily from the dead. After the general resurrection, there will be a day in which God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. The righteous will receive the reward of eternal life; the wicked, who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be punished with everlasting destruction. The day of judgement will glorify God: by the display of his mercy and grace in the salvation of believers, and by the manifestation of his justice in the condemnation of unbelievers.

Our Covenant

Brackenhurst Baptist Church's (BBC) membership covenant is a document outlining the biblical principles of behaviour expected from members of the church. Each member is required to sign a church covenant as an expression of their commitment before God and to the local church to live according to its stated principles. By signing the covenant, members ask each other to help hold them accountable to live in accordance with their commitment.

While the practice of signing a church covenant is not displayed in Scripture, the principle of submission to a particular local church and the God-ordained leaders of that church is quite plain. A church covenant simply crystallises the sort of behaviour that the church (under Christ) expects from its members.

Matt Shmucker, from the 9Marks ministry, has offered a helpful summary of what a church covenant is. He argues that a church covenant can be described in at least five different ways:

1. A church covenant is a promise made to God and to a local church.
2. A church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live. While our statement of faith is a good summary of what we believe, our church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live. More importantly, it is a summary of how God would have us live. It does not include every explicit command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ.
3. A church covenant is a sign of commitment to God, to his church, and to personal holiness.
4. A church covenant is an ethical statement. Historian Charles W. DeWeese writes, "A church covenant is a series of written pledges based on the Bible which church members

Meaningful Church Membership

voluntarily make to God and to one another regarding their basic moral and spiritual commitments and the practice of their faith" (Baptist Church Covenants, p. viii). One theologian calls church covenants the "ethical counterpart to confessions of faith." A church covenant can be an important part of applying a Christian worldview to every aspect of our lives. Inherent in the purpose of a church covenant is the understanding that church membership involves being held accountable to live in a manner consistent with a common understanding of Scripture.

5. A church covenant is a biblical standard. A church covenant is helpful in a church that is practicing Biblical church discipline. As members of a church, we exhort one another to live holy lives, and we challenge brothers and sisters persisting in sin.

BBC's covenant reads as follows:

By God's grace, we are gathered as those who have repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have given ourselves to him and affirmed one another as citizens of his kingdom through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Relying on his gracious aid, we do now solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

We will walk together in love as Christ commands, caring for each other, watching over each other, encouraging and admonishing one another as occasion requires, and striving to avoid anything that will bring unwarranted harm to the Body or jeopardise our own or the faith of another.

Lesson 3: Our Covenant

We will regularly attend the church's gatherings and faithfully pray for one another.

We will endeavour to lead those in our care in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, as well as to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

With God's help, we will live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly desires. Our symbolic burial and resurrection in baptism testifies to this special obligation to live a new and holy life.

We will work together to maintain a faithful gospel witness in our worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully to the expenses of the church, the needs of our neighbours, and the spread of the gospel around the world.

If we leave this congregation, we will join another gospel-preaching church as soon as possible where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Addenda: Our Commitments

In addition to studying the church covenant, we have included five articles as addenda in this manual, which will add meat to the bones of our covenant. If you wish to further your pursuit of church membership, we strongly recommend that you read these articles in full.

Addendum 1: Membership Matters

A sincere perusal of Scripture reveals that the relationship between the Christian and the church is much more significant than we might realize. In fact, contrary to the practice of many, God not only calls believers to attend church but to bind themselves to a local, Bible-believing congregation in a visible and vital way.

Because the practice of formal church membership is often neglected in our day, we want to begin by establishing the fact that church membership matters—a great deal.

The idea that one can be a Christian and yet not be a committed member of a local church is a novelty. It is an idea that has grown in prominence over the past several decades. Before World War II, this idea was an aberration. However, with a post-war shift to individualism (perhaps arising from the fears of the recent horrors of destructive authoritarianism), there is now a well-entrenched scepticism concerning the principle and practice of church membership. Without delving into the many factors behind this development (some helpful resources are recommended at the end of this booklet), we wish simply to present the biblical case that, for the Christian, church membership matters.

Biblical counsellor Jay Adams was once asked whether the local church should exercise discipline on those who attend but are not members of the church. He caused a stir—but an important one—when he answered, “Of course not: Church discipline is only for Christians!” He assumed that Christians are identifiable and accountable members of a local congregation. He was affirming the biblical principle that church membership matters.

Meaningful Church Membership

Many would respond that the Bible nowhere commands church “membership” and this is merely a manmade requirement. It is true that there is no text that reads, “You shall join a church.” But the absence of such a statement no more mitigates against church membership than the absence of a command for a husband to live in his home with his wife mitigates against the wise counsel that a husband and wife should live under the same roof. There is plenty of Scripture that, when honestly evaluated, leads to this practice. The same can be said of church membership. Consider the following.

The Body of Christ

The principle of the body of Christ demands church membership. If the Christian is a member of the body of Christ organically (see 1 Corinthians 12), then it is fair to conclude that the Christian should be a member of the church organisationally. In fact, to claim to be a member of a local church organically and yet to reject an organisational identity is hypocrisy. It is more akin to a lifeless and useless amputated arm than it is to a connected and fruitfully functioning one.

The Bride of Christ

The principle of the bride of Christ gives another motivation for church membership. The believer is married to Christ. This marriage requires loving identity with him. Many in our day claim that they do not need to be formally married to live together in a committed relationship. But of course they do. In fact, this is actually the ultimate reason why they *refuse* to be formally, covenantally married. Without a formal agreement, they can leave the relationship with impunity—or so they think. Sadly, too many

Addendum 1: Membership Matters

Christians treat the local church in an equally non-committal way. They use her for what they can get from her, but there is little or no commitment to covenantally care for her.

Church Discipline

The expectation of church discipline (addressed later) also argues for formal church membership. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to the church about a sinning member who needed to be disciplined out of the fellowship. He gave instructions: "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (vv. 4-5). An obvious question arises: How would they know when they were "assembled"? Would there not need to be a recognisable, definable people? Certainly. If you argue against church membership, then logically we should be allowing Christians to go from church to church to participate in their business. Of course, that would be ridiculous. Membership matters.

The Task of the Elders

Consider the task of the elders to "care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28). This is a responsibility for which the elders will give an account to God (1 Peter 5:1-4). Does this not imply that there is a "definable" group of sheep for whom the under-shepherds are responsible? And is it not legitimate to conclude that they can only be responsible for an identifiable group of people who have willingly and formally submitted themselves to be shepherded? Does this not clearly imply that these Christians have made themselves formally accountable as members of that local church?

Meaningful Church Membership

After all, if membership does not matter, then elders have the impossible task of shepherding every Christian everywhere!

Covenantal Christianity

We could develop this further and argue that the covenantal character of the Christian life demands formal church membership. Christians are in covenantal relationship with God through the new covenant instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are thereby his people because he is our God (Hebrews 8:10).

When believers are united by Christ into a local body, they are united in this covenant relationship to one another. A look at the covenants in Scripture leads us to the obvious conclusion that they were formally, and usually publicly, recognised. The same principle holds for the Christian under the new covenant. Christians are expected to carry out biblically-defined covenantal responsibilities in relation to one another. This requires formal accountability. In other words, membership matters. In fact, those who argue against formal church membership simply underscore the reality that, if *everyone* is a member, then *no one* is a member. And if no one is a member, what's the point?

It is sadly true that many Christians have been hurt by a local church. That is to be lamented. Nevertheless, the solution is not to avoid mutual accountability that comes with formal church membership. Rather, Christians need to obey the Lord and identify with that which he loves—the church—and help her to be lovelier. A lack of accountability can make life easier. But the Christian is called to a cross, not to comfort. And so if you want to mature as a Christian, then seek meaningful membership in a local church that is seeking to please her head, the Lord Jesus Christ. As you do, you will come to appreciate the biblical principle that membership matters.

Addendum 2: Assembly Required

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). These verses require more than the Christian merely regularly attending worship services, but they do not require less. Believers go to church.

Brackenhurst Baptist Church seeks to be a normal, that is biblical, local church. This means, among other things, that it seeks to be a church where its members are well-known by the eldership and fellow members. When someone is absent from the services for a significant amount of time (like, say, one or two weeks!) their absence is noticed. It is assumed that church members will desire and be committed to gathering for corporate worship. This expectation leads to the *expectancy* of engaging in meaningful worship of our God.

We regularly observe the Lord’s Supper (usually three out of four Sundays per month). This is normally held in the evening. One reason for this is that we believe this ordinance should be prioritised. An effort is therefore called for to participate in this meal. In an age of drive-through fast food, we are seeking to savour this significant Supper.

Our Sunday evening gatherings are focused on corporate prayer. We believe the church should gather to pray together.

Our midweek small group meetings—Grace Groups—take place at various times during the week. The overwhelming majority of our membership is meaningfully committed to these.

All of the above combine as the scriptural norm for Christians. In other words, the biblical norm for Christians is *meaningful* church

Meaningful Church Membership

membership. Yes, the biblical instruction to believers highlights that *assembly is required*. And, unlike the false advertisements of many toys, the Bible makes it clear that *much* assembling is required.

This is the intentional ethos that we, as a congregation, have for decades sought to inculcate. Jesus, who is the final and the fullest revelation of the Father (Hebrews 1:1-2), *commands* us to be intentional and committed members of his local church (Hebrew 10:19-25). And those who love Jesus are motivated to keep his commandments (John 14:15). We therefore are committed to gathering with one another.

In Hebrews 10, the writer is simply reiterating the common biblical teaching that the Christian is not a lone ranger. Rather, he or she draws near to God *corporately* as well as individually. To change the metaphor, an isolated sheep is not a healthy sheep. When professing sheep separate themselves from the flock, we can legitimately conclude that some disease is at work (Proverbs 18:1).

In an age characterised by individualism, church membership is not a welcome practice. Some see it as intrusive and legalistic, while others view it as a needless relic of the past. But neither attitude is biblical and therefore neither attitude is healthy. To neglect or refuse church membership is not a sign of health; it is rather an indication of spiritual illness. BBC aspires to be healthy. We desire the best for God's people. A committed and communing congregation is our Christ-driven passion. And this requires *assembling*.

We are always blessed to hear when someone is considering BBC as their potential church home. It is a joy to let them know that we expect nothing more and nothing less than what Christ expects

Addendum 2: Assembly Required

of *his* church. The revelation of his expectations is found throughout the New Testament.

Under the old covenant, God had rules to govern the lives of his people. The same is true of the new covenant. The rules are to be individually obeyed in the context of a corporately caring and communing congregation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore the community of faith of BBC assumes that those who become members will behave like members. For instance, they will be characterised by relational connection rather than as an isolated (amputated) appendage of the body. It bears repeating: It is assumed that church members will assemble with other members.

Members will expectantly assemble for the corporate worship services on the Lord's Day—morning and evening. Church members will gladly gather for Family Bible Hour. Church members will be happily committed to intentionally connect their children to the church by various means, including involvement in the children's and youth ministries. There is the assumption that, in most cases, church members will assemble with others in a Grace Group. It is assumed, in other words, that those who profess love for the Lord will love what he loves (Ephesians 5:25). And, like Jesus, they will love the church "to the end" (John 13:1). Through thick and thin, members of BBC will persevere *with* and *in* this community of faith.

If this sounds intense to you, then you have the biblical sense of what being a church member requires. But this intensity is in the context of being *intentional* to love and to follow Christ. And there is no greater way to live. So, if BBC is your desired church family, then be *encouraged* that much assembly is required.

Addendum 3: Communion of the Saints

The uniform teaching throughout the New Testament is that the Lord's Supper is reserved for disciples of Christ. By biblical definition that means that the person has been baptized upon a credible profession of faith and is walking in fellowship with the Lord. It also means by extension that such an individual is a member of a local church. In other words, disciples of Jesus Christ are baptized members of a local church who gather around the Lord's truth and the Lord's Table.

The Lord's Supper is commonly referred to as "Communion." This is a special word that conjures images of closeness, intimacy, and fellowship; it evokes the idea of *relationship*. It is significant that it was in association with this meal that John "*leaned back against*" Jesus (John 21:20). It is a meal of deep spiritual and relational significance. At this meal we hear, as it were, God affirming his covenant with us. We are reminded that we are his people and that he is our God. Therefore, to claim that you are Christian and yet consistently reject the Supper offered by the Saviour is absurd. It is wrongheaded in its thinking, hypocritical in its testimony, and perhaps ultimately damning in the end.

Baptism likewise is an ordinance that the Christian and the local church is to take seriously. Baptism, like Communion, is not an option.

Every case of a conversion in the book of Acts involved the same four elements: *repentance* from sin, *belief* in the Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed in *baptism*, accompanied by the indwelling of the

Addendum 3: Communion of the Saints

Holy Spirit. Therefore, to claim to be a Christian and yet refuse to be baptised is clearly contrary to the biblical norm and expectation.

As a local church, BBC is persuaded that the Lord has mandated baptism by immersion. It is for this reason that no one is admitted as a member of the church apart from such obedience. But we must be clear: Going through the motions may get you wet, and it may lead to your name being on the membership list, but it is no guarantee that you are a Christian.

Our baptisms include a series of questions, culminating in the individual publicly professing to follow the Lord as his faithful disciple. But how sad it is when an individual, having been covered with water (symbolising death) subsequently disappears, rarely to be seen again. To treat one's profession of Christ as Lord with such contempt can be damning. For even though such a person may not be taking the Lord seriously, nevertheless the Lord takes them seriously. He will hold them accountable for every idle word, including the idle word of an empty confession (Matthew 12:36).

The point to be emphasised, both with the Lord's Supper and baptism, is that these ordinances are about "connection"; they are about a covenantal confession and commitment. And since they are carried out in the context of the local church, they are about the "communion of the saints." To refuse to participate in these commanded means of grace is to reject Christ and his body. At the risk of being misunderstood, the local church is washed together and dines together. As a congregation, our desire is to foster such communion of the saints. In fact, when church members ignore such relational gifts, church members should be deeply concerned.

At this point, some are prone to make the accusation of legalism. But let's not be so quick. The Bible clearly teaches that one's profession of faith is evidenced by works. Apart from Holy Spirit-

Meaningful Church Membership

produced works, we can conclude that faith is dead (James 2:26). And so, if there is no meaningful (as defined by Scripture) expression of the communion of the saints, we might be wise to be suspicious about a profession of faith. Faith *works*. And therefore faith *worships*—in communion with the saints.

When a wife and mother prepares a meal for the family, it is rude to deliberately refuse to gather to partake. There may be times when a family member is unable to be at the meal due to some other responsibility. But surely it is fair to expect that notice should be given. In fact, in most cases, real and thoughtful effort will be made to be in attendance for the supper. Yet far too many Christians treat the Lord's Supper with less respect than they would for their family meals.

At BBC, the expectation is that church members will honour the Lord, as well as their brothers and sisters, and pitch up—well-washed—for the meal. We only admit to the Table those who are baptised members of a local church (not necessarily members of BBC). In other words, communion is *for* the saints; it is an expression of the communion *of* the saints.

If someone professes to be saved and yet is not hungry for the meal prepared by the Lord, something is seriously wrong with their appetite. They evidently are not spiritually healthy. And it is this health to which BBC is deeply committed. As a congregation, we are hungry together and we help together that we might be healthy and truly happy (“blessed”) together.

Sadly, there are far too many churches that are quite content with a membership that is careless and therefore neglectful of membership privileges and attendant responsibilities. The result is a “bunch” rather than a body. Yet, only a body can truly appreciate and experience the communion of the saints. For those looking for a carefree membership with little or no expectation, you truly do

Addendum 3: Communion of the Saints

not know what you are missing. There is nothing like biblical and therefore meaningful fellowship.

As Christians partner together in the local church for worshipful service, they will increasingly appreciate that the ordinances prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ are not ordinary. In fact, a proper appreciation of both baptism and the Lord's Supper is an extraordinary blessing when observed in the context of the communion of the saints.

Addendum 4: Humility, Hearing, and Healing

Church discipline is God's gift to the church for the maturity of her members and the purity of her body. Matthew 18 requires that those who refuse to submit to church discipline are to be treated as unbelievers, that is, those who are outside of God's community of grace.

Matthew 18 is a chapter about saving/rescuing fellow Christians. Let me explain.

The chapter starts with Jesus' disciples wanting to know, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (v. 1). Their motive for the question seems to have been personal glory: How can I get the spotlight onto *me*? How can I be the *most* important, the *most* respected, the *most* admired? How can I satisfy my appetite for being the *greatest*?

Jesus answered with a practical illustration. He called a child into their midst. "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (vv. 2-4). It seems like a contradiction: The smallest is the greatest.

The point that Jesus was making is that little children can't make it on their own in this world. They are intensely dependent on others to survive and find satisfaction. "Independence" would destroy them. God's grownup children are no different. We need the help of others and they need us. One particular area in which we need help is our war against sin. Sin has the power to destroy and we can either push others towards destruction, for which there

Addendum 4: Humility, Hearing, and Healing

is a grave warning (v. 6), or we can save them from destruction. Saving them is what Jesus talked about next.

Christians, like children, are naturally prone to do foolish things. Some of our behaviour, if not stopped, may eventually lead to our destruction. Christians, like children, need others who care enough to intervene when they pursue harmful activities.

In vv. 7-9, Jesus instructed his disciples (thereby instructing us) to deal severely with their (and our) own sin to avoid bringing ultimate harm to themselves (and ourselves). However, in this grave process, we should not be alone. When fellow Christians see us sin, they should care enough to save us (v. 15). We need each other to bring us back to a place of safety (vv. 12-14).

Confrontation is painful to both those on the giving and the receiving end: *"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"* (Hebrews 12:11). The pain involved, sadly, often prompts us to rather preserve our own popularity than preserve the lives of others through selfless love. Exposing sin is awkward and painful, but if we can see the value of it, we will not avoid the encounter.

A further problem with Christians, like children, is that we do not always hear after the first painful confrontation. Despite the real threat that sin holds, we do not necessarily see the danger, even when someone else points it out. Love covers over a multitude of sins. But there are some that must be confronted rather than covered. If there is a prideful unwillingness to confess and deal with sin, then it needs to be exposed. *"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13). If someone does not take personal responsibility for his sin, either by downplaying it or blaming others, we need to try harder to make them hear; we need

Meaningful Church Membership

to make them feel more pain, not because we have run out of patience or our love has run dry, rather, because we seek their welfare. "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother" (v. 15). Following this, if he does not want to listen, then one or two others are included. If refusal to repent continues, then the whole congregation needs to be informed of the matter.

Should this step be unsuccessful in producing repentance, the next step must be to isolate the person from fellowship. Isolation—that is, withdrawal of fellowship—is the final step to inflict pain. While this may seem harsh, remember that this is God's prescription to secure the welfare of the person secured by repentance. Such repentance results in reconciliation. But it also serves another important purpose. In the Old Testament, isolation was meant to prevent spreading of physical and spiritual disease. When Paul called the Corinthian church to address those who were guilty of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, revilement, drunkenness, or swindling, he borrowed a phrase used often in Deuteronomy: "Purge the evil person from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:13; cf. Deuteronomy 17:7 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). The message is clear: The church should deliberately avoid ordinary conversation with unrepentant sinners—conversation, that is, which implies that all is well. We are not helping the sick by declaring them to be well.

The final step is painful but not without hope. Some believers will respond by listening and then we need to forgive them. Peter asked Jesus about this in v. 21: How often do we need to forgive? Jesus shows how quickly and comprehensively the process of discipline can come to an end: As soon as the sin is repented of, the record is wiped clean, not just seven times but seventy times seven times (or seven times in one day, according to Luke 17:4). Even if the fellow-believer sins repeatedly, if he earnestly confesses

Addendum 4: Humility, Hearing, and Healing

his sin, the record is clean and the process is stopped. If the sinner humbles himself like a child and acknowledges his dependence on God and others, forgiveness is complete.

Jesus encourages his followers by fully endorsing this step: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (vv. 18-19).

To summarise then: To attain greatness, we need to humble ourselves to become like children. Children are dependent on others for their survival and joy. We need each other's help because of our proneness to sin. Since sin is destructive and may eventually lead to our eternal condemnation, we need to deal severely with our own sin. When we see our brother sin, we need to lovingly pursue him, even if we need to go to great lengths to do so. We need to care enough to confront. If he hears us, we will *all* have benefitted as he is brought back to safety. If he won't listen, we need to take one or two others along to speak to him. If he still won't listen then we need to tell it to the congregation. If he still won't listen, he needs to be treated as an outsider. If, however, he at any stage repents, we need to forgive him completely. It is this God-prescribed humility that heals.

Addendum 5: Another Brick in the Wall

The strength of the church of Jesus Christ lies in the ministry of its members. Every member of our local church should be a minister. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). Every believer in Jesus Christ has partaken of God's saving grace and should therefore be involved in the ministry of working out this grace towards other believers and towards the lost world.

This section has nothing to do with Pink Floyd's famed song. Its focus is an entirely more significant Rock Group: the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 2:1-10, the apostle writes to scattered believers undergoing severe trials, in order to encourage them to persevere *in* and *for* Christ. The theme of his letter is suffering to the glory of God. Like rocks, they were to be immovable.

Peter writes out of concern for his readers to realise their enormous privileges in Christ; and that their "inheritance" would serve them well as they faced suffering for their faith.

Things were heating up in the early 60s, and soon Nero would morph into a madman exerting his arrogant fury on the church. Peter wanted to encourage these Christians to continue to identify with Jesus Christ who, though he was rejected by men, was chosen of God to be the Saviour of the world and the head of the church (2:1-4). Peter reminds believers that they are significant "living stones" whom God had chosen and personally shaped to fit perfectly into the church which he is building. Each of them was a

Addendum 5: Another Brick in the Wall

significant brick in this temple of God; a temple that would stand throughout eternity.

This passage (vv. 4-10) would have been particularly meaningful to Gentile Christians, for Peter was making it clear that *they* were meaningful *members* of God's temple. This privilege of being the dwelling place of God was not limited to Jewish believers; it was the privilege of *all* believers. They were "living stones" who, like their Jewish brothers and sisters, *mattered*.

Every Christian, and therefore every church member (since, as we have seen, the New Testament knows nothing of Christians who are not church members), is personally chosen by God as a "living stone" in the temple that Christ is building. And each one uniquely matters. We each have unique gifts that, when bonded to other bricks, make for a beautiful temple to the glory of God.

Note that Christians are "living" or "lively" stones. When Titus destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD the *true* temple was actually unscathed. The "dead stones" that Herod had used in the building of that historic structure were pulled to the ground, never to rise again. But the *church* of Jesus Christ, the *temple* of God, was alive and well; and from 70 AD beyond it would continue to be built up by the life-giving gospel through the power of God. This is precisely what Peter is saying in this passage. He is encouraging his readers that they are a part of a world-impacting structure, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as "living stones," each believer has the privileged responsibility to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5).

In continuity with the old covenant temple, our sacrifices are to be acceptable (as defined by God's word), but in contrast to the old covenant, our sacrifices are offered through the glorious and perfect High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Meaningful Church Membership

This passage speaks to several issues, including God's free and sovereign grace in choosing us to be bricks in the wall. Every time someone is born again, we are witnessing God adding another brick to the wall. Every time we heartily "amen" the embracing of a new member at BBC we are observing God's grace in adding to another brick to our walls locally. And each brick in the wall has a significant purpose which is to be lovingly and devotedly fulfilled in our congregation.

But we must ask, what do bricks *do*? Well, for one thing, they increase the height of the wall, thus giving added protection from enemies without. Further, each brick is essential for holding up the roof, thus giving strength to what is being built. And with the addition of each brick the structure inches closer to completion. So it is with the local church and *the "living stones" that God, the Master Architect, so intentionally and deliberately shapes for the building up of his church.*

Every "living stone" is placed in the church for the purpose of further strengthening the local church and protecting her from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Each new brick in the wall is added by God to bring his work that much nearer to completion. Each new church member is given for the purpose of the local church being built up as an increasingly worshipping people. After all, was that not the purpose for the physical temple?

We need to see that every church member is to be a living member—an active one—not a passive spectator. And so ask yourself, "Am I actively participating in the building up of my local church?" Further, ask, "Am I a living stone or merely a dead weight?" That is important to consider.

In many segments of the church today, church membership is approached with less conviction than is membership of the Rotary Club. Secular clubs often require more from their members than

Addendum 5: Another Brick in the Wall

do many local churches. A member of such a club is expected to attend meetings and to engage in the various activities that are part and parcel of the organisation's purpose and ethos. If a member fails to participate, membership is suspended until the situation is rectified.

Unfortunately, in many churches, this is rarely the practice, and those who buck this complacent trend, who follow up expectation with accountability are deemed to be "unloving," "legalistic" or "Pharisaic."

BBC is blessed in that its membership is largely *active*—that is, *present* and *participative*. This is the biblical norm for church members. There is no such thing as an inactive church member. You cannot call yourself a church member yet refuse to engage in what the church has to offer. You cannot call yourself a church member yet do nothing to build relationships or refuse to serve and support the corporate program of the church. An inactive church member is a contradiction in terms.

Sadly, many churches recognise as members those who rarely darken the door of the church or who have no active relationship with the body of Christ. In fact, these two categories (*inactive* versus *active* members) may speak to two very different spiritual conditions. And this highlights the eternal importance of how we view membership in the church.

The New Testament's various mandates, metaphors and examples clearly indicate that the only kind of church member is an *active* one. Our Lord calls upon his sheep to engage in fellowship with the flock and to reproduce other sheep (discipleship) as they fervently serve the Lord. Every member of the body will manifest the reality of their relationship with Christ by exercising (another *active* word) their gifts for the glory of God. This will be worked out, largely, in connection with the local church.

Meaningful Church Membership

This is the great responsibility, and a great privilege, of the church member.

One of the strengths of BBC over the years has been its commitment to meaningful church membership. This includes, but is not confined to, church members who faithfully attend our Lord's Day gatherings, morning and evening. It includes meaningful participation in our Grace Groups. It also involves the ministering to one another. In other words, as we use God's word as our plumb line, we aim to be a church filled with members who are living stones. Such is to be our biblical expectation each time that we see God adding another brick to our walls.

Recommended Resources

For those desiring further information about the principle of church membership, the following resources are recommended:

Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012)—208 pages (also available in Kindle format)

Jay E. Adams, *The Place of Authority in Christ's Church* (Stanley: Timeless Texts, 2003)—81 pages

Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010)—384 pages (also available in Kindle format)

Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008)—128 pages (also available in Kindle format)

