

why join a church? | *Discovering Grace Church*

church membership: *what does Scripture teach?*

Though all believers in Jesus are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this through clear, committed identification with a particular local church (what we're calling "membership"). According to God's word, identifying with a particular local church like this is:

- **Implied in church metaphors**

In the New Testament, the church is described as:

- A body (1 Cor. 12:27)
- A temple (Eph. 2:21)
- A household or family (1 Tim. 3:15)
- A flock (Acts 20:28)

These metaphors depict separate individuals being joined together into a single entity. Thus some means of identifying together is the necessary implication of these pictures for the church.

So, church membership says.....

- **Assumed for church discipline**

*"If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt 18:17).* Jesus describes a situation in which believers are to lovingly confront other believers who are persisting in a sinful way of life. The last step of this redemptive process is to tell it "to the church". This is only possible when believers are joined together in a real and identifiable way.

So, church membership says....

- **Necessary for pastoral care**

*"Pay careful attention to yourselves and **to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).*** Pastor/elders are responsible to care for an identifiable group of people. (cf. Heb 13:17). Thus pastoral care requires some mechanism like membership to know "the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made [them] overseers."

So, church membership says...

- **Vital to spiritual health and growth**

*"...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, **when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:15-16).*** In this passage, without being joined together with other believers we will lack the strength and nourishment that each member—including ourselves—is to supply.

So, church membership says...

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Our vision as a church is to...

*Glorify God as a gospel-centered community
on a gospel-centered mission.*

We define **our mission**, in light of the above vision, as follows...

*Making and growing disciples of Jesus
in our church, city and world.*

For this lesson, we'll focus on unpacking our essential vision.

THE GOSPEL: *our center & matter of "first importance"*

Gospel just means "good news". It's the good news God the Son taking on a human nature in Jesus Christ, living a perfect life, dying a sacrificial death on the cross, rising triumphantly from the dead, and ascending back to heaven – where he currently reigns and rules.

This good news is to be our "functional" center - the matter of "first importance" for us: *I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Just a few examples of this gospel *functioning* as the center and matter of "first importance":

- Romans 1.13-17
- Philippians 2.3-11
- Mark 10.42-45

We want all we do to be rooted in and flowing this good news. In other words, with this good news as our matter of "first importance" it will define us as a church more than anything else:

"What it means to be 'spiritual' is profoundly tied to the cross, and to nothing else.... This lesson is especially important when so many Christians today identify themselves with some 'single issue' (a concept drawn from politics) other than the cross, other than the gospel. It is not that they deny the gospel. If pressed, they will emphatically endorse it. But their point of self-identification, the focus of their minds and hearts, what occupies their interest and energy, is something else: a style of worship, the abortion issue, home schooling, the gift of prophecy, pop sociology, a certain brand of counseling, or whatever. Of course, all of these issues have their own importance. Doubtless we need some Christians working on them full-time. But even those who are so engaged must do so as an extension of the gospel, as an extension of the message of the cross. They must take special pains to avoid giving the impression that being really spiritual or really insightful or really wise turns on an appropriate response to their issue. We must come back to the cross, and to God's plan of redemption that centers on the cross, and make that the point of our self-identification" – D.A. Carson (emphasis added)

Then, as people amazed by God’s grace and motivated by God’s grace, this good news means to move us in dynamic ways – moving us *upward*, moving us *together*, and moving us *outward*.

upward in worship: “Glorify God...”

This good news means to make us worshippers of God. Upon believing this good news, we are reconciled to God as disciples – learners and followers – of Jesus. That transformation makes all of life into a context for the worship and enjoyment of God in Christ: *by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* (Romans 12:1)

We structure for this, especially, as we....

inward in community: “... as a gospel-centered community...:

Through this good news God joins us into a new community – the church. But the church is not meant to be a meeting we attend but a body of believers to which we belong. We want to see people connecting in real ways, around the word of God, such that we “*grow up in every way into (Christ)...*” - as “*each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love*”. (Eph 4.15-16)

We structure for this, especially, as we....

outward in mission: “... on a gospel-centered mission”

This good news calls us to our world. As Jesus was “sent”, so he sends his disciples – including disciples today (John 20.21). He has “*all authority*” and promises to be “*with you always to the end of the age*”, and calls us to “*go*” with the gospel into our community, and our world (Matt 28.18-20).

The fruit of this mission is God’s alone to bring, but we want to be faithful to proclaim this good news. We also want to be faithful to reflect the mercy of this gospel through practical acts of service and hearts of love toward those who don’t yet believe this good news.

We structure for this, especially, as we....

