

The background of the entire image is a dark, textured surface, possibly black or dark blue, which serves as a canvas for numerous irregular, translucent glass fragments. These fragments, in shades of red, orange, yellow, and green, are scattered across the frame, some overlapping and others isolated, creating a mosaic-like effect reminiscent of a stained glass window. The fragments vary in size and shape, with some showing internal patterns or textures.

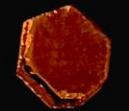
Men of the Word

Ekklesia

**CHURCH
MEMBERSHIP**

What is church membership?

To become a member of a local church is to enter a formal relationship with that church and all it represents. The one who joins makes a tangible commitment to the church's message, its members, and its mission. He accepts obligations, submits to accountability, and offers his service. Likewise, the church that accepts him commits to fellowship with him, to care for his soul, to labor for his growth, and to provide the context for God-honoring worship.



Seven Reasons Why Membership in the Local Church Is Essential

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I. AN AFFIRMATION OF IDENTITY

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- In the New Testament, the term ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), “church” refers to one of two possible “assemblies” when speaking of believers:

1) *the universal church*—the assembly of Jesus’ disciples throughout the church age, invisible and fixed (e.g., Matt 16:18 – “. . . and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it”);

2) *the local church*—an assembly of Jesus’ disciples present in a particular geographical location at a given time, visible and changing (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2 – “To the church of God which is at Corinth . . .”).



- Membership in *the universal church* is *automatic*—it happens to the saved sinner instantly, in the moment of regeneration, as a sovereign act of divine grace:
 - **1 Corinthians 12:13** – “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”
- Membership in *a local church* is *a conscious response*—it is an act that must be taken by the believer and the assembly in a recognizable, public manner.
 - **Acts 5:14** – “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”

- Automatic membership in the universal church was never implied by the New Testament to nullify or substitute for local church membership.
- The pattern of the early church is clear: hear the gospel → be saved → get baptized → identify with other believers:
 - **Acts 2:38–40** – “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . .”
 - **Acts 2:41–42** – “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
- These “3000” were added to the “120” known “brethren” of Acts 1:15.

- **Acts 2:47** – “. . . And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

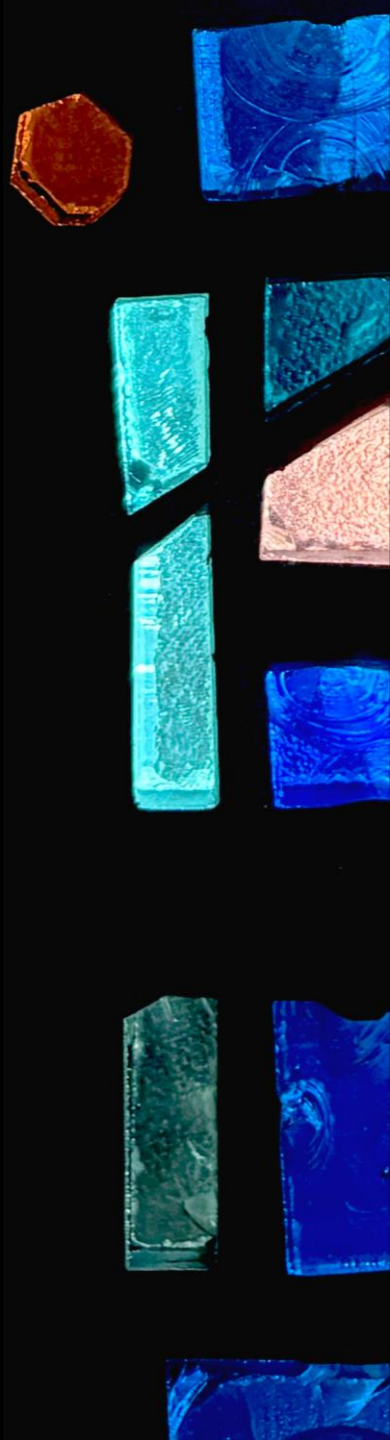


- **Acts 5:14** – “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”
- **Acts 16:5** – “So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

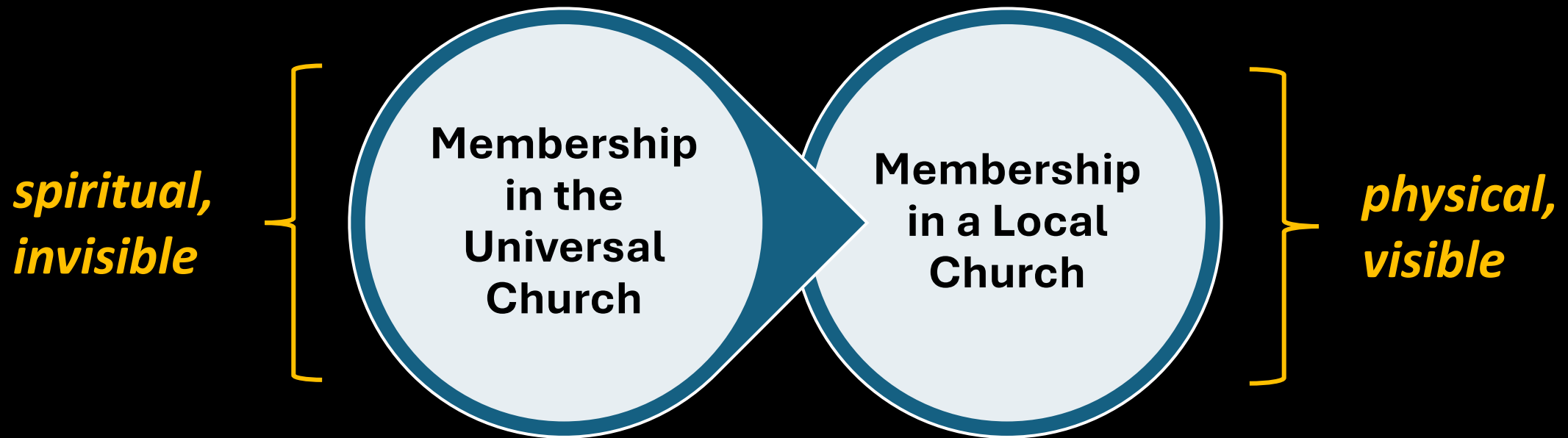
- It was this public identification with the local gathering of the disciples of Jesus that allowed Christians to be targeted by *persecution*:
 - **Acts 8:1** – “. . . And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”
 - **Acts 8:3** – “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”
 - **Acts 9:2** – “and [Saul] asked for letters from him [the high priest] to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

“Any idea . . . of enjoying salvation or
being a Christian in isolation is foreign to
the New Testament writings.”

—Allan Stibbs, *God's Church*, 92

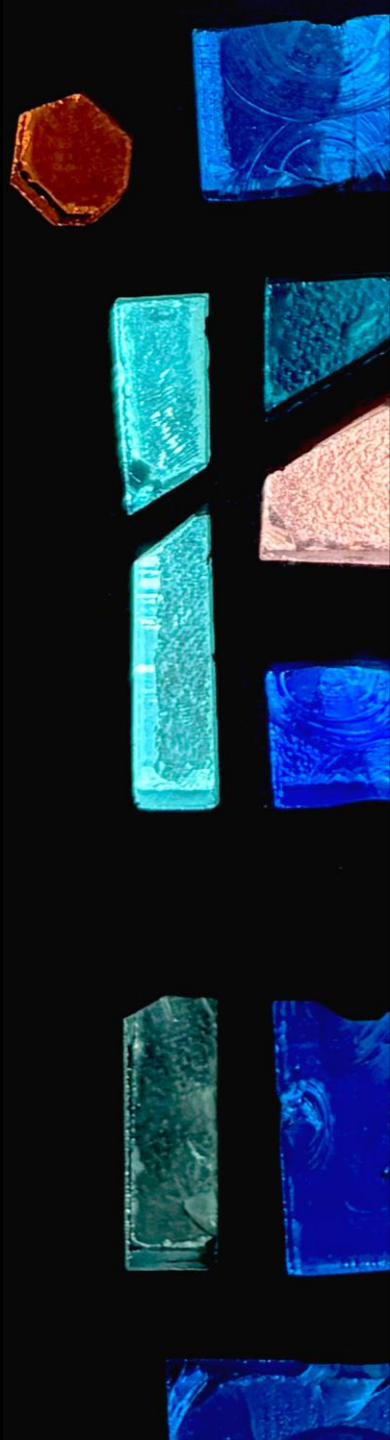


- This affirmation of identity that local church membership provides has an important purpose: it contributes to the *assurance of salvation*.
- Mark Dever: “Membership in a local church is intended to be a testimony to our membership in the universal church” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 131).



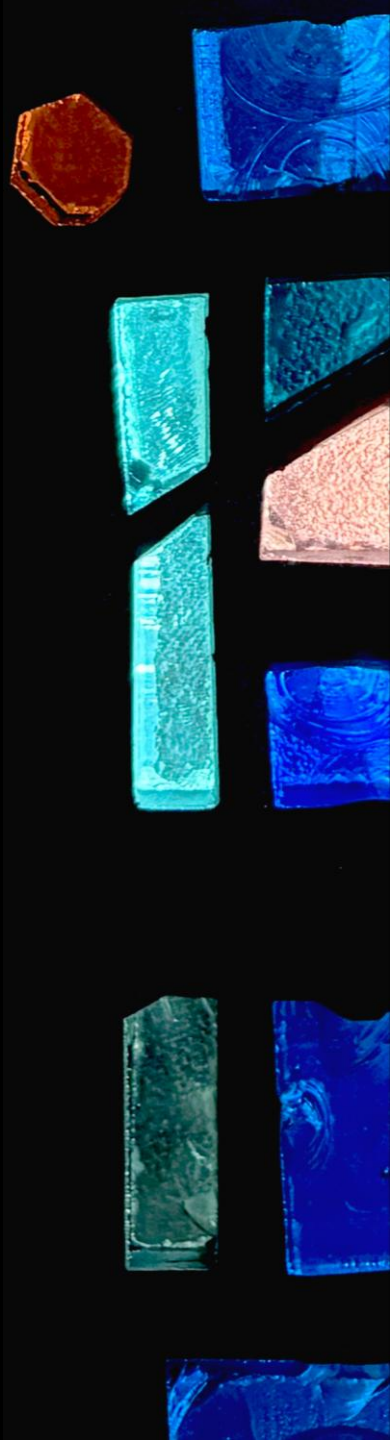
“When you join a church, you make it visible. You give a living demonstration of the spiritual reality of the body of Christ. You show that even though you are an individual, you are a part of the body; you are joined together with others. You take the body of Christ out of the realm of the theoretical (1 Cor 12:27) and give it a meaning that people can see.”

—Donald Whitney, “Why Join a Church?”



Biblical Christianity is lived out in the context of the local church.

To identify as a biblical Christian requires identifying meaningfully with a biblical church.



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II. AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNITY

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- Pursuing membership in a local church recognizes that a disciple of Jesus must live out the *unity* achieved by Christ's redemption.

- **Ephesians 2:11–22** – “. . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. . . .”

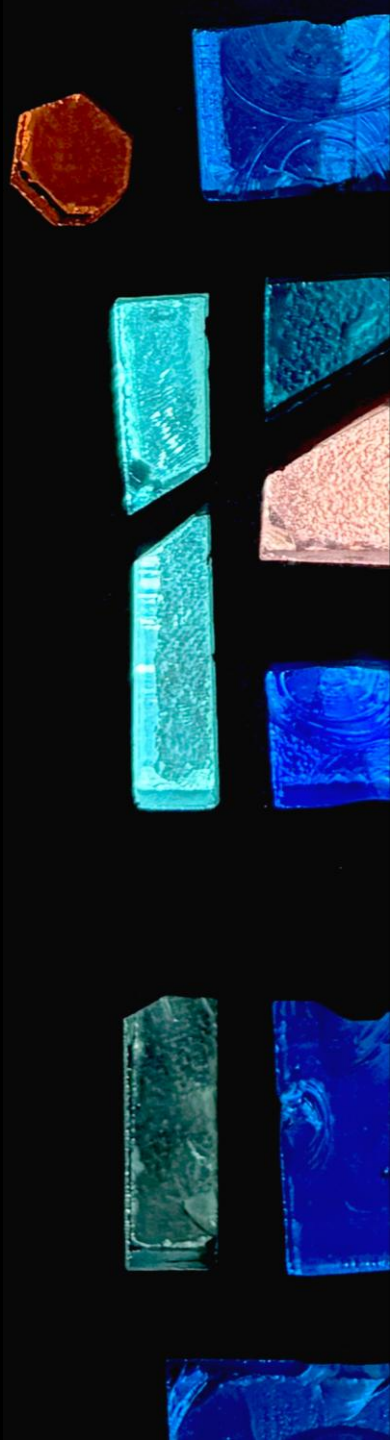
- **Ephesians 4:1–3** – “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”



- **1 Corinthians 1:2** – “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”
- **1 Corinthians 1:10** – “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”
- **1 Corinthians 11:33** – “So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat [the Lord’s Supper], wait for one another.”
- **1 Corinthians 12:1–31**

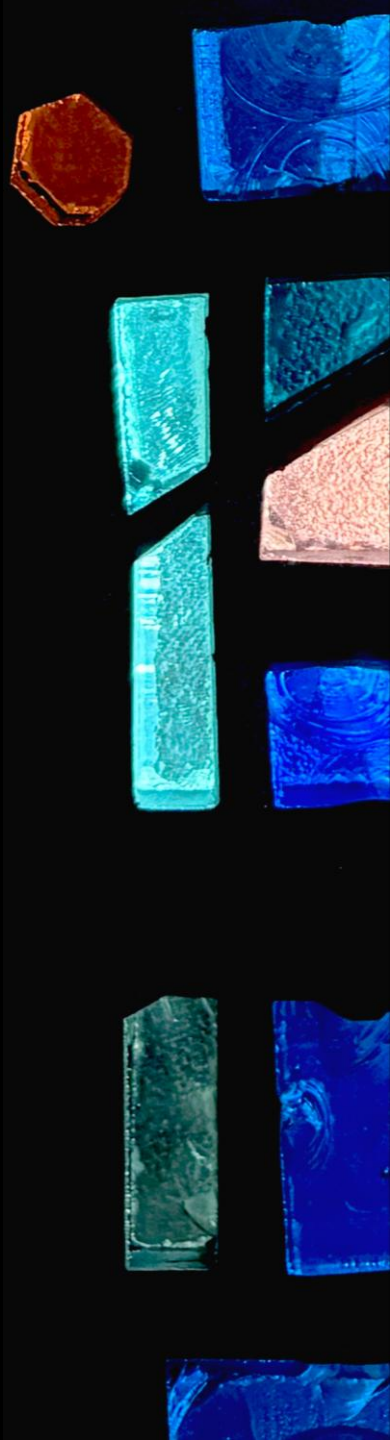
“Christianity is a corporate matter, and
the Christian life can be fully realized only
in relation to others.”

—Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1058



**The reconciliation established by Christ's atonement is
not a mere abstract or vertical idea.**

**To join a local church is to acknowledge your duty to
live out the peace of redemption through healthy
relationships with other believers.**



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III. AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF COMMITMENT

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“To become a member of a church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes. These purposes include receiving instruction from God’s Word (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–31; 1 Pet 4:10–11), participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38–42), and proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost (Matt 28:18–20).”

—“A GCC Distinctive: Church Membership”

- This *commitment* manifests itself in the personal investment in corporate activities:
 - the weekly gathering on the Lord’s Day for worship
 - the fulfillment of the one-anothers
 - the exercise of spiritual gifts
 - the participation in the Lord’s Supper

- **Acts 20:7** – “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.”
- **1 Corinthians 12:4–7** – “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
- **1 Corinthians 16:2** – “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”

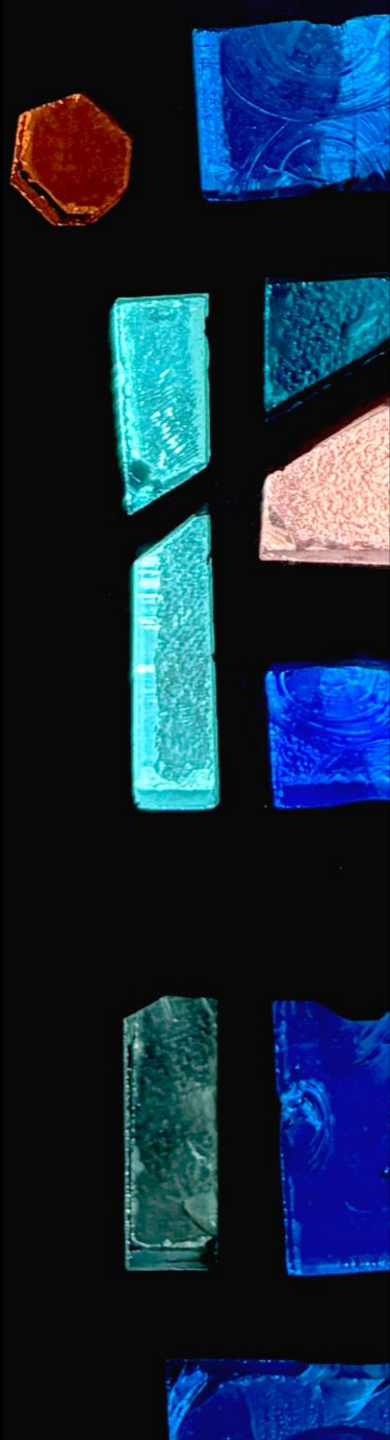
- **Colossians 3:16** – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”



- **Hebrews 10:23–25** – “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

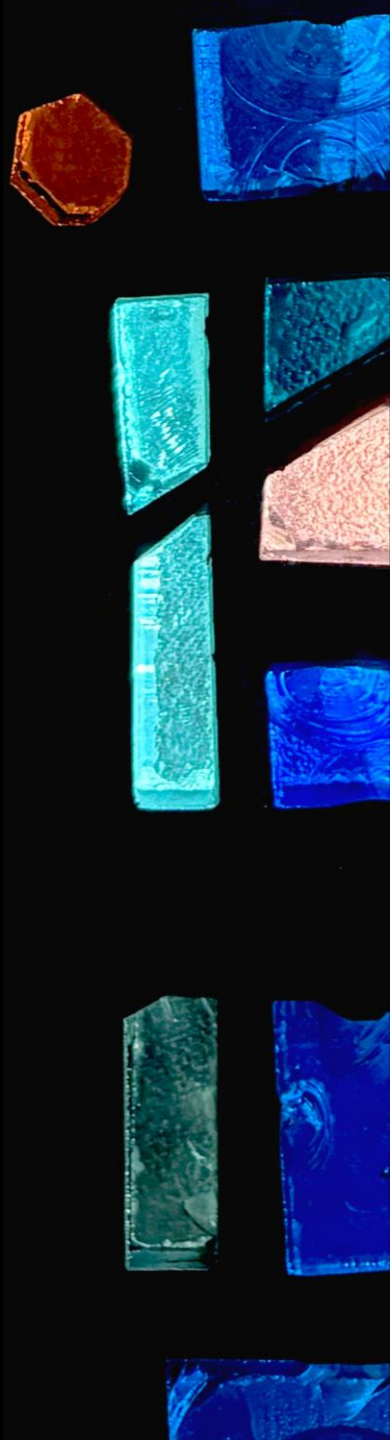
“When you join a church you make it clear whose side you’re on. You’re telling the family of God that you’re part of the family too, and that you don’t want to be considered on the ‘outside’ (1 Corinthians 5:12–13) any longer.”

—Donald Whitney, “Why Join a Church?”



“Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal way to make that commitment.”

—“A GCC Distinctive: Church Membership”



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IV. AN ACCEPTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Men *of the Word*

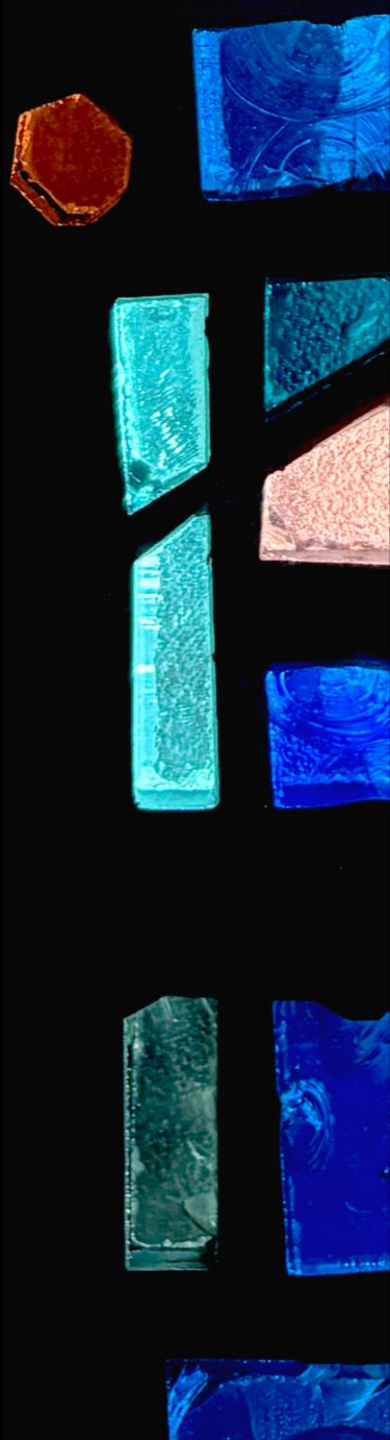
- Abstaining from membership in a local church allows one to make claims about “a relationship with Jesus” without answering to anyone for what he believes or how he lives.
- Pursuing membership in a local church recognizes the need for personal accountability regarding one’s life and doctrine—an accountability to the other members in general and to the elders in particular.
 - **Matthew 18:15–17** – “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 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.”

- The exercise of such accountability is *meaningless* if there is no way to identify those who are “within” and those who are “outside” the church.
 - **1 Corinthians 5:1–13** – “. . . I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.”

- No one in membership is exempt from this accountability—not even elders:
 - **1 Timothy 5:19–20** – “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.”
- Admittedly, some professing Christians do not want to be *included* in the local church because they fear being *excluded*.
- Christians who are unaccountable in life and doctrine prove to be some of the greatest obstacles to gospel ministry.

To reject membership in the local church is a tacit rejection of the practice of church discipline, and a tacit assertion that a professing Christian can live and believe as he pleases.

Local church membership acknowledges the need for accountability in the Christian life.



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V. AN ASSISTANCE TO LEADERSHIP

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- Shepherds must know the sheep for which they are responsible.
- Apart from some kind of meaningful membership list, the overseers of a local church would either be responsible for *no one* or for *everyone*.



- **Acts 20:28–30** – “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

- **Hebrews 13:17** – “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”



- **1 Peter 5:2** – “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.”

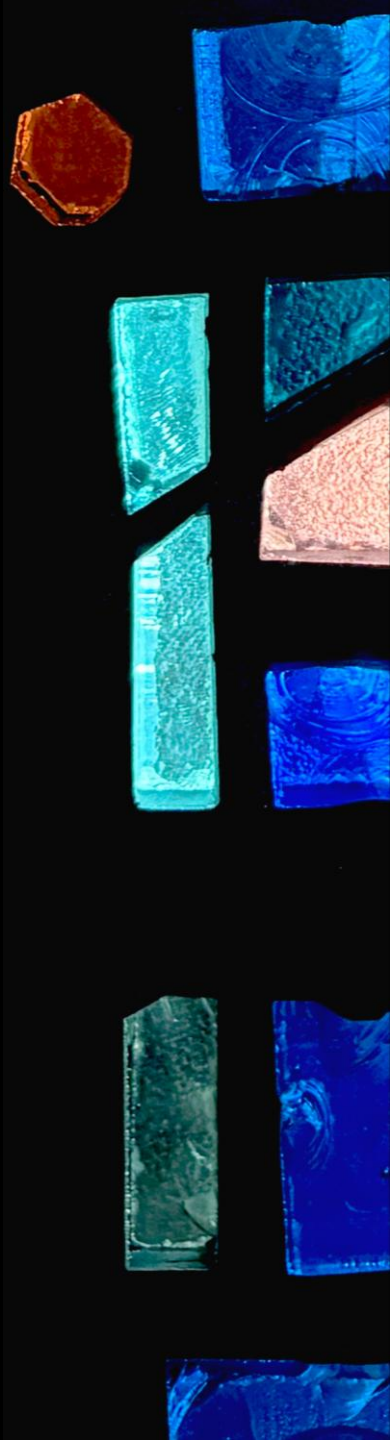
“Those responsibilities [of oversight] require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership in the local church. Elders can shepherd the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are; they can provide oversight only if they know those for whom they are responsible; and they can fulfill their duty to shepherd the flock only if they know who is part of the flock and who is not.

“The elders of a church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are primarily responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders, and this is done through church membership.”

—“A GCC Distinctive: Church Membership”

Successful leadership by necessity requires a clear understanding of those who need to be led.

Membership in the church enables those in leadership to recognize their obligations and fulfill their responsibilities appropriately.



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VI. AN ADVOCACY OF REPUTATION

Men *of the* Word

- Membership in a local church is a commitment to guard and honor the testimony of that assembly—*corporately*, of the church as a whole, and *individually*, of its particular members.
- This advocacy is accomplished in two ways:
 - 1) Through the member's own testimony toward those outside the assembly.
 - 2) Through the member's efforts to support and defend the assembly's interests.
- Charles Spurgeon: "The church is not perfect, but woe to the man who finds pleasure in pointing out her imperfections."

352 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord



- 1. I love Thy king - dom, Lord, The house of Thine a - bode,
- 2. I love Thy Church, O God! Her walls be - fore Thee stand,
- 3. For her my tears shall fall; For her my prayers as - cend;
- 4. Be - yond my high - est joy I prize her heav'n - ly ways,
- 5. Sure as Thy truth shall last, To Zi - on shall be giv'n



The Church our blest Re - deem - er saved With His own pre - cious blood.
Dear as the ap - ple of Thine eye, And grav - en on Thy hand.
To her my cares and toils be giv'n Till toils and cares shall end.
Her sweet com - mun - ion, sol - emn vows, Her hymns of love and praise.
The bright - est glo - ries earth can yield, And bright - er bliss of heav'n.



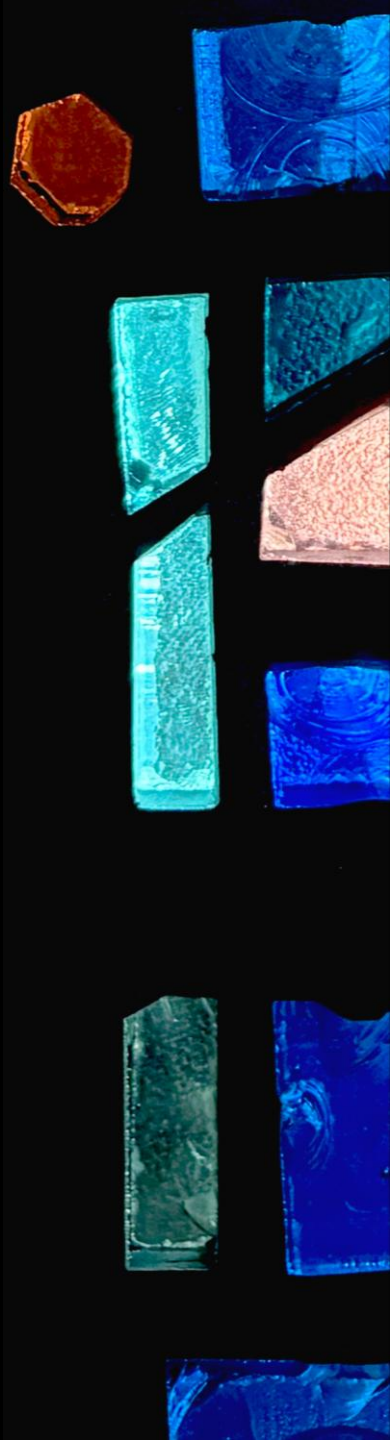
Words: Timothy Dwight
Music: Aaron Williams

“I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord” by Timothy Dwight

“For her my tears shall fall
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.”

**To join the membership of a local church is to
take its name—its identity.**

**With that membership comes the obligation to
honor others who have taken that same name,
and the privilege of being honored by them.**



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VII. AN ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

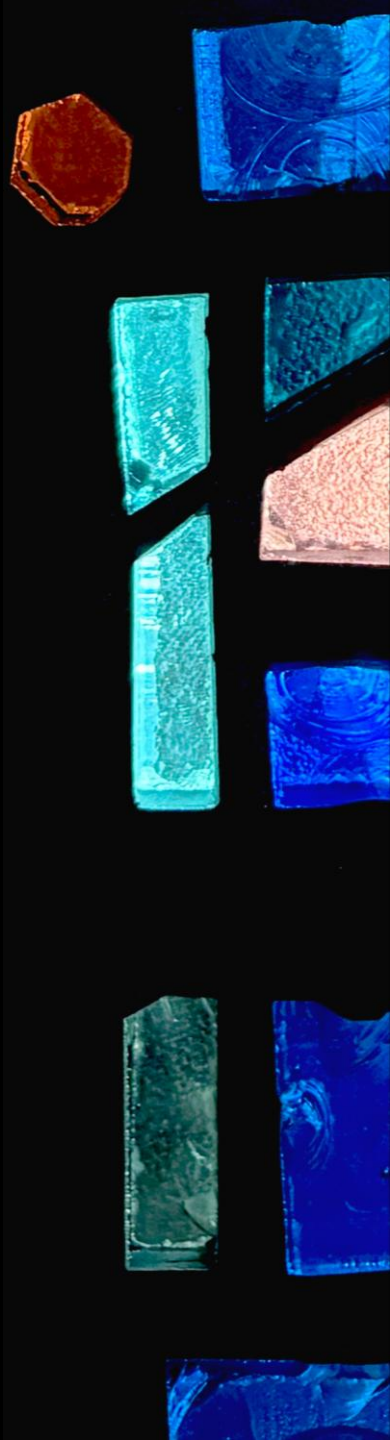
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- Membership in a local church identifies those who are genuine candidates for the provision of the church's specialized spiritual and material resources.
- The first challenge to unity in the early church revolved around *membership*.
 - **Acts 6:1–7** – “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. . . . ‘Brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.’ . . . The statement found approval with the whole congregation”

- An assembly's membership roll allows for further distinctions in the prioritization of this assistance:
 - **1 Timothy 5:9, 16** – “A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”
- A membership roll determines how the church's resources can be wisely used to provide *counseling*, to celebrate *weddings*, to host *funerals* or *memorial services*, and to provide *financial aid* to those experiencing unusual hardship.
- A “deacons' fund” and other church resources will be quickly exhausted, or applied with partiality, if no objective limitations exist.

Membership in a local church provides access to resources for times of calamity or special need.

It is the practical reminder that “you are not alone,” whether in times of sorrow or times of rejoicing.



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IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

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Tonight's resources will be
posted on-line at
gracechurch.org/motw