

Church Membership

These things are believed to be true by those Christians meeting together at Providence Chapel

What is a Christian?

According to the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesian churches, Christians are saints (v.1), they are faithful because they are in Christ Jesus (v.1), their Father is God (v.2), they are blessed with spiritual blessings (v.3), they are chosen by God to be holy and stand before their Father without blame and in love (v.4), and they are predestined to be adopted into their Father's family in accordance with the Father's good pleasure (v.5). All this was done to them and for them in order that God would receive praise for the display of His wonderful attributes (v.6). They are those who have been redeemed by the shed blood of Jesus (v.7), their sins are forgiven (v.7), and their Father has done all these things in grace, which is abundant and without measure (vs.7&8). They are not those who have discovered on their own the gospel but to whom the Gospel has been made known by God (v.9). Their sure end is to be gathered together in Christ (v.10). They are those who have an inheritance - eternal life - the down payment of which is the Holy Spirit by whom they now live an abundant life (v.11-14). They are those who have believed the Gospel, trusting in Christ for their salvation (v.13). It is the Father's will that they should know what He has accomplished for them, and that they should continue with Him even to the end of time (vs.17-21). Their head is no mere man, but Christ Himself (v.22). They are the body of Christ, and the fullness of Him (v.23). This is not a complete description of a Christian, but it is sufficient to show that all the work is of God. Therefore, Christians belong to Him and owe all that they are and all that they do to Him, in order that He may receive all the glory that is due His name. He alone has the right to do with them and to them of His good pleasure.

What is a Community of Believers or Church?

God, who does all things in keeping with His essence, which is love (1 John 4:8), has seen fit to bring Christians together in groups. The Scriptural evidence of this is abundant; one example should suffice. Revelation 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands..."

This letter was to be read to a group of Christians who were meeting together in Ephesus. They were working together and had done much in the name of Christ (vs. 2-3). They also had shortcomings and are told as a group to repent (vs. 4-5). It should be noted here that the Greek word translated church in the New Testament is *ecclesia*, the "called out" ones. The church is not an organization, although she should be organized in all that she does (1 Corinthians 14:40). She is not a building, even if the church meets in a building (Acts 2:46).

The "called out" ones have been charged with guarding and passing on the whole counsel of God. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Who are the Members of a Church?

It should be obvious that in order to work together to this end (guarding and passing on the truth) it is necessary that the “called out” ones know with whom it is they are working. Yet nowhere in the Scriptures do we find an instruction either given directly or given by implication that we should maintain some list of members. However, there is ample evidence that there are members and that they are known to one another as members, not because their names are on a list, but because of how they interact with another (1 Corinthians 12).

The essential ways in which the “called out” ones interact with one another, according to Scripture, are these:

- Their interaction and fellowship are based on their common Savior, Christ Jesus (1 John 1:3).
- The Father’s love works in them to love their Father by loving one another (1 John 4).
- Loving one another includes the following:
 - Continuing in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42).
 - Continuing in fellowship (Acts 2:42).
 - Continuing to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together (Acts 2:42).
 - Continuing in prayer for one another (Acts 2:42).
 - Continuing to give to one another as needs arise (Acts 2:44-45).
 - Continuing to go together to take the Gospel to the lost (Acts 2:46).
 - Continuing to be part of the lives of one another by spending time together during corporate worship, as well as times outside of corporate worship (Acts 2:46).
 - Continuing to be thankful to their Father for all He has done and given (Acts 2:46).
 - Continuing to praise God together (Acts 2:47).
 - Following the example and commandments of Jesus, the new Lawgiver (Galatians 6:2), in all things whether confessing sins, forgiving, submitting to one another, rebuking, admonishing, comforting, exhorting, reproving, teaching, or ministering in any other way by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 13:34).
- They meet together, being filled with the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of the corporate worship (Ephesians 5:18–21).
- They make public confession of their new life in Christ by being baptized (Acts 2:41).
- They recognize the mark of God on one another and, therefore, they do not exclude any of God’s children from their fellowship on the basis of non-essential doctrine, skin color, economic status, societal status or any of the other ways that the world creates barriers between people (Revelation 7:2-3, Ephesians 2:11-22).
- They neither create artificial non-Scriptural sects or denominations, nor do they adopt names that would necessarily create obstacles to fellowship between believers, but, instead, they maintain the unity that is theirs in Christ Jesus their Lord (1 Corinthians 1:11-31, Ephesians 4:3).
- They joyfully give money without compulsion as led by the Spirit in order to support the ministry of the body (2 Corinthians 9).
- They minister to elders in physical things as the elders minister to them in spiritual things (1 Corinthians 9:1-14, 1 Timothy 5:17–18).
- They check to see that all the teaching is according to Scripture (Acts 17:11).

These are the criteria that will be used by those of us meeting together under the name of Providence Chapel to determine who is a member of our local body of believers.