

Biblical Church Membership

Church Membership Class, Eureka Baptist Church

By: Pastor Matthew Homan

Question 1: What is the Church?

General Definition:

“The church is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him by serving him in this world.” -David Platt.

“A group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.” – Jonathan Leeman

Eight Characteristics of the Church:

1) The Church is a creation by Jesus.

Matthew 16:18 – “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

2) The Church is both universal and local.

Ephesians 5:25 – Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

1 Corinthians 1:2 – To the church of God that is in Corinth...

Out of the 109 times the New Testament church is mentioned in the NT, at least 90 of them refer to a specific local gathering of believers.

3) The Church is both visible and invisible.

2 Timothy 2:19 – But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

Acts 20:29-30 – ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

4) The Church is an assembling of people, not a building.

1 Peter 2:9-10 – ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Greek Word “Ekklesia”: Mentioned 114 times in the New Testament. 109 times it refers to a Christian assembly.

5) The Church is both institutional and organic.

- **Institutional:**

- **Each church should have overseers and deacons.**

See 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

- **Each church should practice baptism and the Lord's Supper.**

See Matthew 28:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

- **Jesus requires the church to demarcate who is a believer and who is not a believer.**

Matthew 18:17 – 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.

- **Organic:**

- **Evangelism should overflow from our passion for Jesus.**

See John 4, the Samaritan woman at the well.

- **Through the Spirit community naturally grows between believers.**

Acts 2:42-44 – ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

6) The Church is a covenant community, not a business or club.

1 Corinthians 12:26 – If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

7) The Church is the Gospel made visible.

- **Through the preaching of the Gospel**

Matthew 28:19-20 – ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- **Through our love for one another in the church.**

John 13:35 – By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

- **Through the ordinances we regularly observe, baptism and the Lord’s Table.**

Luke 22:18-20 – ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

- **Through church membership.**

Matthew 16:19 – I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:17-18 – ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.

8) The Church is temporary.

Matthew 28:20b – And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

John Piper: “Mission exists because worship doesn’t.” – So does the Church.

Question 2: Why Should We Cherish the Church?

Because We Cherish God...

1) God has purposed us for community.

Genesis 2:18 – Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

John 17:22-24 – ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

2) God has purposed the Church to proclaim the Gospel.

Matthew 28:19-20 – ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

3) God has purposed the Church to protect the Gospel.

Titus 1:5-9 – ⁵This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

1 Timothy 6:20 – Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.”

Acts 17:11 – Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

4) God has purposed the Church to promote His glory.

Ephesians 3:9-11 – ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord

Because We Cherish Jesus...

1) Jesus purchased the Church

Acts 20:28 – 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.

2) Jesus pursued the Church as His bride.

Revelation 19:7 – Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.

Ephesians 5:25 – Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

3) Jesus personifies the Church.

Acts 9:4 – And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Because We Cherish the Spirit...

1) The Spirit is propelling the Church.

Ephesians 2:20-22 – ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Question 3: How Can We Cheapen the Church?

1) “But times have changed.” – Liberalism

Psalms 119:89 – Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

2) “I can worship God alone.” – Individualism

Hebrews 10:25 – 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.

3) “It’s working, so it must be right. It’s not working, so it must be wrong.” – Pragmatism

John 1:11 – He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

4) “My way or the highway!” – Authoritarianism

1 Peter 5:2-3 – ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

5) “But we’ve always done it this way.” – Traditionalism

Matthew 15:6b – So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

6) “You’re sitting in my seat.” – Egotism

Philippians 2:3 – Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

7) “I’ll ask for forgiveness later.” – Easy-Believism

1 John 3:10 – By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

8) “Jesus is cool with my sin.” – Antinomianism

Romans 6:1-2 – What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

9) “I’m a Christian because I go to church.” – Legalism

1 John 4:19 – We love because he first loved us.

10) **“America is the shining city on a hill.” – Unbiblical Patriotism**

Matthew 5:14-16 – ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

11) **“Your church is down the road.” – Ethnocentrism**

Revelation 5:9 – And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Question 4: Who Are the People of the Church?

What We Were...

1) We were disobedient.

Titus 3:3a – For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient...

2) We were slaves to sin.

Romans 6:17a – But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin...

3) We were dead.

Ephesians 2:1 – And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...

4) We were darkness.

Ephesians 5:8 – For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

5) We were haters of light.

John 3:20 – For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

6) We were children of wrath.

Ephesians 2:3 – Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

7) We were condemned.

John 3:18 – 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.

What God Has Done...

1) The Father planned our salvation.

Ephesians 1:4 – Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

2) The Son purchased our salvation.

Ephesians 1:7 – In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

3) The Father drew us.

John 6:44a - No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

4) We must respond to God's calling with repenting faith.

Mark 1:15 – “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

5) The Spirit sealed our salvation.

Ephesians 1:13 – In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

What We Now Are...

1) We are spiritually alive.

John 3:36a – Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life...

2) We are a new creation.

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

3) We are forgiven.

Colossians 1:14 – In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

4) We are reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18 – All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

5) We are children of God.

1 John 3:1a – See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

6) We are ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:20a – Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

Question 5: Is Church Membership Biblical?

1. Membership is implied by the word “member.”

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 – ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

2. Membership is implied by the elders’ responsibility to care for specific sheep.

Acts 20:28 – 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.

1 Peter 5:2-3 – ²shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

3. Membership is implied by the congregation’s responsibility to submit to specific leadership.

Hebrews 13:17 – Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

- This may seem cultic, but church membership is voluntary.
- This may seem cultic, but you are called to ultimately obey Christ.
- This may seem cultic, but the Bible refers to multiple elders in each local church.
- This may seem cultic, but the congregation’s members choose the church leadership.

4. Membership is implied by the congregation’s responsibility to choose leaders.

Acts 6:2-3 – ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

5. Membership is implied by church discipline.

Matthew 18:15-20 – ¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4-5, 9-13 – It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you... ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord... ⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

The irony is that many who believe in church membership do not practice or like church discipline, the strongest argument for church membership.

Question 6: What Are the Prerequisites and Responsibilities of Members?

Prerequisites:

1. The candidate must be a born-again Christian.

1 Corinthians 1:2 – To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

2. The candidate must be biblically baptized.

Acts 2:41 – So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

3. The candidate must be in good standing.

1 John 3:9-10 – No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

John 15:8 – By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Responsibilities:

1. Regularly participate in church.

Hebrews 10:24-25 – ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ 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.

2. Pray for the church.

2 Thessalonians 3:1 – Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you.

James 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

3. Vote at business meetings.

2 Corinthians 2:6 – For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough.

4. Be a cheerful giver to the finances of the church.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 – ⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 – ¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

5. Work for unity where possible. Avoid unnecessary divisiveness.

Galatians 5:19-21 – ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

6. Hold one another accountable.

Galatians 6:1– Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

7. Follow the church leaders as they follow Christ.

Hebrews 13:17 –Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls...

8. Utilize your spiritual gifts.

Romans 12:6-8 –⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

9. Do the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-12 – ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

“Wow, should we really be telling candidates all of this? Won’t it scare people away from joining the church?” And the answer...Yes! Where there is a church that expects very little of the church membership, there you will find members that think very little of church membership. Was it not Jesus who said, “Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me”?— High expectations and high invitation. No marriage would be served well by little expectations and little commitment. How much more should the Bride of Christ, the Church, be committed to Christ?

Question 7: When is it Proper to Leave a Local Church?

1. When the member moves.

1 Corinthians 14:26 – ...when you come together...

If a member relocates then he is not able to come together with his congregation.

2. When essential doctrines are distorted or ignored.

Galatians 1:6-8 – ⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

3. When there are unaddressed moral failures of church leaders.

1 Timothy 3:2-3 – ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

4. When there is a toxic spiritual atmosphere.

Romans 12:18 – If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Sometimes it is not possible to be at peace with some members in an unhealthy church.

Psalm 23:1-3 – The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul.

With a shepherd's heart, the pastor may lead a member to greener pastures, another church.

Tips When Considering Leaving the Membership:

- If you believe you have a legitimate reason that is not listed above, exercise caution, seek counsel, pray often to God.
- A commitment to church membership should not be easily broken. Try to avoid church-hopping. Be married to a church. Do not date a church.
- Talk to the pastor during the decision process for counsel and to express concerns.
- Ask if your motives are pure for desiring to leave? Are you running from sin?
- Do everything within your power to reconcile broken relationships.
- If you do leave, do not cause unnecessary division. Even Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement in Acts 15 and separated cordially.
- If you are leaving because you are not satisfied, first contemplate how you see God working in the church and how you can help the church improve.
- Think in terms of trajectory, not the current state of the church. Do the problems have the potential to improve? Where is the church headed?
- Upon departure, you should express your membership in the universal church by committing to another local church within a reasonable amount of time.
- College students may want to consider dual membership as an exception, to be connected while away at school.

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Parts of this material have been adapted and inspired from David Platt's teaching "The Body of Christ" from his Secret Church series.