

# FBC CHURCH MEMBERSHIP



## What Is Church Membership?

Many churches view church membership differently. Some of these views include:

- marking out those who can vote and who cannot (congregational setting)
- keeping official church numbers
- making sure people are giving regularly
- safeguarding the church from lawsuits stemming from church discipline cases

Although these and other reasons may be the reasons for membership in other churches, they are not at the heart for why we have a formal membership plan for FBC.

## What is the Biblical basis for formal church membership?

When we speak of “church membership,” we are not speaking of the *spiritual membership* of every Christian into the universal body of Christ (cf. **1 Cor. 12:12-13**).

- Regardless of whether or not a believer has formalized their membership into a local church, he or she is a spiritual member of the body of Christ.

It is our belief that *formal membership* is not commanded or required by each and every local church. In other words, we would not consider it sin for a person to be a *faithful* member of a local church but not a *formal* member.

But, we do believe that the Scriptures give wisdom for *why* this would be beneficial for every Christian – not as a binding, but as a practically wise principle based on implications from Scripture.

### 1. A Commitment to Shepherding Assumes a Defined Flock

One of the primary reasons for FBC to initiate a formal membership is because of the elder’s responsibility to shepherd the flock of God and the member’s responsibility to submit to God’s shepherds.

In other words, God’s plan for shepherding in the local church assumes a defined flock. This implies a role for both shepherd and sheep, as defined below.

**1 Peter 5:1-4** ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

**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.

Elders have the responsibility to shepherd the flock of God in their care. This is God's plan for each and every local church. This happens through:

- *Shepherding* – caring (1 Thes. 2:7-8), feeding (Titus 1:9), protecting (Acts 20:28)
- *Leading* (1 Thes. 5:12)
- *Modeling Christ* (1 Pet. 5:2-3; Titus 2:7)

Members have the responsibility to submit to the church's elders/leaders because God has called them to "keep watch" over their souls.

Formal membership demonstrates a believer's willingness to be shepherded by the elders of a local church and to submit to their leadership. This will help to define the flock for the elders to shepherd.

This does not mean that a person who is not a formal member will not be shepherded. Instead, it simply affirms that a faithful attender has a desire to be defined as a member of the flock.

## 2. A Commitment to a Local Church

Each and every believer is not only a part of the universal church, but is also called to be a faithful part of a local church.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** ~ 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.

The writer of Hebrews gets to the *heart* of N.T. church commitment by exposing the kind of attitude a believer should have when gathered together: *Mutual encouragement to be more like Jesus Christ.*

Formal church membership simply expresses this heart desire and says, "I love the people of this local church and want to be a part of growing together towards Christlikeness."

### 3. Church Discipline Assumes a Defined Church

**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 “church” in verse 17 is the final point of accountability for a professing believer who is under church discipline.

Therefore, the “church” must be defined by a group of people to whom that sinning “brother” is accountable.

And when the sinning “brother” is disciplined out of the church, he must be considered a part of that church if he is to be excluded from it.

- *“If there is no church membership, how can you define the group that will take up this sensitive and weighty matter of exhorting the unrepentant person, and finally rendering a judgment about his standing in the community? It is hard to believe that just anyone who showed up claiming to be a Christian could be a part of that gathering. Surely ‘the church’ must be a definable group to handle such a weighty matter.”* (John Piper, *More Clarifications on the Baptism and Membership Issue*, October 12, 2005 - Fresh Words Edition)

#### Summary

All three points together have raised the importance of a formal membership for FBC. Although it is not mandatory, we believe these verses give support to define a group of members in a local church by way of implication from these Scriptural texts.

- *“So, do not merely attend a church (though you should attend), but join a church. Link arms with other Christians. Find a church you can join, and do it so that non-Christians will hear and see the Gospel, so that weak Christians will be cared for, so that strong Christians will channel their energies in a good way, so that church leaders will be encouraged and helped, so that God will be glorified.”* (Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, p. 164)

There are also some healthy practical implications for having a formal membership in our church:

- Membership protects the doctrinal purity and unity of the church by holding accountable those who teach the Word (i.e. Sunday school teachers, care group leaders, pastors & elders).
- Membership provides a simple vehicle for the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- Membership reflects a high view of biblical ecclesiology which runs contrary to our current American individualism and consumerism mindset.

What will happen to those who do not choose to become formal members of FBC?

- We will continue to carry out our biblical responsibilities to those who are faithful members and not formal members... our hearts towards them will not change.
- We will also hold all attenders accountable to God's Word despite their membership status... being a non-member of FBC does not mean that a believer automatically becomes a "free agent" Christian.

## What will it mean for someone to become a member of FBC?

Primarily, becoming a formal member of FBC will mean that a believer is committing him/herself to FBC as their local church and the biblical priorities of every Christian. This involves the following commitments for a *baptized believer* (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38) who desires to be a member of FBC:

### **1. Commitment to Exalt God**

- By pursuing Christlikeness in holiness, humility, and love for God through His Word and His Spirit (*Heb. 11:6; Psa. 42:1; 2 Pet. 1:2-8; Phil. 2:1-7; Matt. 22:37-38*).
- By faithfully pursuing the worship of God with the corporate body (*John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3*).

### **2. Commitment to Edify the Saints**

- Commitment to Shepherding
  - \* By being shepherded by the elders and submitting to their leadership for the church (*1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17*).
  - \* By being accountable to the local church for my Christian witness and testimony both in the church and in the world (*Matt. 18:15-17*).
  - \* By applying the "one anothers" in my family, my Care Group, and the church.
- By practicing the 'one anothers' among the body of Christ here at FBC.
- By seeking to encourage and exhort each other towards Christlikeness with Christian love (*Rom. 12:9-13*).

### **3. Commitment to Fellowship**

- By regularly and faithfully participating in the gatherings of FBC – i.e. worship services, Care Groups, other activities and events (*Heb. 10:24-25*).

- By refraining from gossip and slander and seeking reconciliation when fellowship with a fellow believer has been broken (*Rom. 12:17-19; Eph. 4:31-32*).
- By affirming the doctrinal commitments of our church and striving to protect the unity of the faith (*Eph. 4:14-16; 1 Thes. 5:19-22*).

#### 4. Commitment to Serve

- By praying regularly for the needs of others (*Jam. 5:16*).
- By serving through the use of my spiritual gifts (*1 Pet. 4:10-11*).
- By giving regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially to the needs and mission of our church (*2 Cor. 9:6-9*).

#### 5. Commitment to Evangelize the Lost

- By praying for the salvation of souls (*Rom. 10:1; Col. 4:2-4*).
- By showing and sharing the Gospel of Christ with those unbelievers (*Matt. 5:16; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 4:5-6*).
- By actively supporting the local and global missions efforts of FBC (*Matt. 28:19-20*)

### What is the FBC Member Covenant?

Having been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up myself wholly to Him, and having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit upon my profession of faith, I do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully make the following covenant before God and with the body of believers at FBC:

I commit myself to *exalt God* by pursuing Christlikeness in holiness, humility, and love for God through His Word and His Spirit (*Heb. 11:6; Psa. 42:1; 2 Pet. 1:2-8; Phil. 2:1-7; Matt. 22:37-38*). I will also endeavor to faithfully pursue the worship of God with the corporate body (*John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3*).

I commit myself to *edify the saints* of Faith Bible Church by being committed to **shepherding, fellowship, and service**.

I commit myself to the biblical concept of **shepherding** by being shepherded by the elders personally and submitting to their leadership for the church (*1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17*); by being accountable to the local church for my Christian witness and testimony both in the church and in the world (*Matt. 18:15-17*); and by applying the "one anothers" in my family, my Care Group, and the church.

I commit myself to **fellowship** by regularly and faithfully participating in the gatherings of FBC – i.e. worship services, Care Groups, other activities and events (*Heb. 10:24-25*); by seeking to encourage and admonish one other towards Christlikeness with Christian love (*Rom. 12:9-13*); and by refraining from gossip and

slander and seeking reconciliation when fellowship with a fellow believer has been broken (Rom. 12:17-19; Eph. 4:31-32).

I commit myself to **serve** by praying regularly for the needs of others (Jam. 5:16); by serving through the use of my spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:10-11); by giving regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially to the needs and mission of our church (2 Cor. 9:6-9); and by affirming the doctrinal commitments of our church and striving to protect the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:14-16; 1 Thes. 5:19-22).

I commit myself to *evangelize the lost* by praying for the salvation of souls (Rom. 10:1; Col. 4:2-4); by showing and sharing the Gospel of Christ with unbelievers (Matt. 5:16; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 4:5-6); and by actively supporting the local and global missions efforts of FBC (Matt. 28:19-20).

I will, when I move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where I can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

I, the undersigned party, wish to become a member of Faith Bible Church and wholeheartedly agree to abide by the Membership Covenant. I have read the Bylaws of Faith Bible Church of South Orange County, including those dealing with biblical counseling, confidentiality, and conflict resolution, as well as its What We Teach statement. I understand that this church is governed by these documents, and I hereby covenant and agree to be bound by the policies and procedures set forth in them.

### What is the "process" for membership at FBC?

The following "process" will be mandatory for every attender to become a formal member of FBC:

- Participate in FBC's Membership Class (2 classes)
  - \* Fill out a Membership Application
  
- Get interviewed by a leader/elder of FBC
  - \* Christian testimony
  - \* Believer's baptism
  - \* Affirm & Sign FBC's Membership Covenant
  - \* Affirm FBC's Bylaws & What We Teach Statement (discuss any
  - \* disagreements with these statements)
  
- Be publicly affirmed as an FBC Member at a meeting of the church family.