

Contents

1. What is the church?.....	1
2. What is church membership?	3
3. Did New Testament churches have church membership?	7
4. Why is church membership threatening to some?	10
5. Why does church membership matter?	12
6. How does someone become a member of Faith Bible Church?	17

So what I want to do tonight is ask some questions about church membership, and then attempt to answer them. OK, these questions are there on your note sheets. They're all typed out for you, there are six questions that we are going to go through tonight. Let's start with the first one.

1. What is the church?

We're talking about church membership. We should understand what the church is first of all, right? The word church in the Greek is ecclesia, ecclesia. Ecclesia is defined as a called-out assembly or congregation. A called-out assembly or congregation. That is, people that are called-out of the world. We've been saved by Christ. We are called out, we were called by Christ to be a part of His family as children of God and we are a called out people, who assemble or congregate, that's why we call them congregations, because we congregate, that's what that Greek word means.

The Bible says church (that we're talking about) is a called-out assembly or congregation. We can say the church is a local assembly of people with something in common. We gather together because we have something in common. What is our commonality? Christ. Right? We are believers in Christ. We want to know more about Christ, we come to worship Christ. The church is a regular assembly of people at a certain location with a specific purpose. We gather at a location with a specific purpose. That's why doing church online is not church. We are not gathering at a location with other people who worship God. It's not church.

In Christian context, you could say that church is a group of people, who are in Christ, who regularly assemble for the purpose of worshipping God. We assemble, we gather together to worship God. Now, you have two aspects of the church:

- You've got the universal church -- that is all who are believers in the world right now – the universal church.
- Then you have the local church. The local church. That is, those who are believers in a certain area who meet together regularly to worship God together. That's the local church, and that is who Paul writes his letters to.

Notice this...Paul does not write to the universal church. Paul never writes a letter to the universal church. He's always writing to a group of people...the local church. This is how you are to function as a local church as he writes to Timothy and Titus, and even in 1 Corinthians, this is how you are to 'do

church' in the local church. Every congregation is to do it that way. Therefore, local churches are the expression of the universal church. Local churches are the expression of the universal church.

One author says this: "The church is the society of those elected, called, redeemed, sanctified, and glorified in Jesus Christ." That's who we are. A society of those elected, called, redeemed, sanctified, glorified in Christ. The church is a collection of people who regularly gather together for worship, to be edified. Who worship God and to be edified.

Why? Why do we do it that way? Because that's how God has ordained it. That's what God has told us in His Word what we are to do. Listen to Proverbs 18:1, Solomon says this:

*He who separates himself seeks his own desire,
He quarrels against all sound wisdom.*

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, understands that we cannot separate ourselves. We can't. We need the local church. Because when you isolate yourself, when you separate yourself, you are missing out on sound wisdom. Because there is wisdom in the collection of believers as they gather together, there's wisdom that is there.

Within the church we are collectively gathering together, as a church, an assembly of people. We are a congregation. We come together, worship God, we don't do it on our own. In fact, there are 47 verses in the New Testament, 47 verses in the New Testament that give commands with the words *one another* in them.

One another, which tells us that we are not to live the Christian life alone, right? Why are there 47 verses that talk about *one another*? Because that's what God has ordained for His church - to be with one another. To be gathered together collectively. You're to live the Christian life, not alone, but we are to live it with one another.

Many people believe the lie that they can be on their own, doing Christianity on their own. It doesn't work like that. That's not how God has ordained the Christian life. Christ has established the local church to oversee your Christian life and help you through it. That's what we're here for. To help each other. To help you in your Christian life, and to oversee your Christian life. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18

"...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Christ said He would build it. Christ has established the church. He is the head of the church. Now who makes up the church? Who makes up this local assembly?

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 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. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

Paul goes on to say in verse 18 (1 Cor 12:18)

18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

And further in 1 Cor 12:19-26

19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Let's look into what he says as he continues on in verse 27, 1 Corinthians 12:27, he says

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it
Verse 28.

28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

What does Paul do? He goes from this...individual Christians...then he goes right in to say you are individual members of it...and God has appointed in the church. Who does he point these individual members to? The local church. He appoints them to the church.

Paul does talk about individual members in the church, but then he connects them right to the local church. That's what he's doing. He doesn't tell them they can live however they want to live as Christians. He puts them right into the place of the church.

And so although the church is made up of individual Christians, the church is, as we have said, a called out assembly or congregation. It's the gathering together of these individuals who have been saved by Christ. We're called to gather together.

That's why you can't have church in your living room watching a TV or computer screen. Doesn't work like that. You don't have church in your living room. You can't have church on your own. Church happens when we gather together as a body of believers collectively to worship God. It's that assembly of called-out ones that makes up the church. So that's the local church. That's what the church is, number 2.

2. What is church membership?

What, then, is church membership? Simply put, church membership is a commitment to be identified with God's people. That is the church. And submit to God's ordained leaders in the church. To be committed. Membership is a commitment to be identified with God's people and to submit to God's ordained leaders in the church.

Now some people might say, "Well, I can do that and not be a member of the church. I can be committed to God's people, and submit to God's ordained leaders, and I can do all of that and not be a member of a church." But I would argue that you can't. Why?

Because first, commitment implies making a covenant or a contract, right? When we make a commitment, we make a covenant or we make a contract, and that shows this commitment. Everything that we do in life, when you make a commitment, you're making a contract. You're making a covenant.

- You made a covenant with your spouse before you got married, or when you got married, right? It was a covenant, before God, and you had to go to local courthouse, and you had to sign a document there, right? You even made it with the state and said 'we are one.' You made a contract, you made a covenant before God with your spouse, to say we are committed to each other.
- You made a commitment to be accountable to pay your mortgage when you signed your life away. Remember that? All those papers...we just did that recently, you just sign, and sign, and sign and sign. Just here's my blood...you can have it, right? That's what you want to do by the end of that thing... But you sign your life away for that mortgage, saying, I am committed to paying this thing. I will pay it off.
- Some of you made a commitment when you signed up for a gym membership. You committed to joining the gym for a year or whatever they duped you into. You were there in that gym and you've told them you will not only pay for that membership every year, but you will also abide by their rules. You can't just walk into the gym and do whatever you want to do in there. There are rules and things that you have to abide by in there, but you make that commitment to go and do that.
- People make a commitment to the Country Club or whatever other club you decide to join, and you said that you want to be a part of that club and you will pay their fees and you will abide by their guidelines. You made a commitment.

There are many other commitments that we make in life, but sadly many Christians today run away from making a commitment to their local church. It's sad. The place where they are fed God's Word, where they're edified, where they are loved, where they're cared for, where they are shepherded, and they don't want to make a commitment to God's church.

They'll commit to all these other people, and all these other places in life, except for the local church. It's sad to see that the church, that Christ was committed to purchasing with His own blood, that that church is reluctant to be committed to Him.

And that's what happens when people say "I don't want to be a church member. I don't want to make a commitment." You are saying I don't want to be committed to God's people. The people for whom God has redeemed... the people for whom Christ purchased with His own blood.

Listen, if there's one commitment you're going to make on this Earth, that commitment should be to the local church because that is the expression of all of those in whom God has saved. The local church is the expression of that. Why would you not want to be committed to that?

Now, church membership is not only a commitment, but it's also an act of submission. It's an act of submission.

Jonathan Leeman says this: Christ does not call us to join a church but to submit to a church. Not to join a church, but to submit to a church. And that is what is going on in church membership. You are making a commitment to submit to the leaders of the local church. Now I understand submission is a bad word in our culture, right? We don't like to hear this word submission. Submission to many people implies weakness, or dependence on someone else. And in this "me" culture, the world has taught people to be independent and self-reliant. You can do it all on your own. You don't need anyone else. You just go do your thing.

But that's not how God has established His church. He's established leaders -- that is elders -- within the local church and He calls believers to submit to them.

Listen to Titus chapter 1:5:

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you...

Paul tells Timothy, I left you there because your job, Titus, is to appoint elders there in the local city in the local church. Then 1 Peter 5:1-2 says this.

5:1 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, 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;

Peter tells the elders in the church, 'your job is to exercise oversight in the church, and you are to shepherd the flock of God.' Notice what he says there...*among you*. Those are people within the local church. Those that are members within your church, those people, those are the ones in whom you are called to shepherd. The elders of Faith Bible Church are not called to shepherd anyone at the church down the street. That's not our job. They're not among us. They need to have their own elders who are shepherding their people.

Hebrews 13:17 says this:

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.

The author of Hebrews tells you, tells the sheep, to obey your leaders and submit to them. That is what you were called to do.

1 Corinthians 16:15-16 says this:

15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

So he tells even the Corinthians, you must be in subjection to these men. These leaders within the church. God has established leaders, specifically elders, in His church, and He calls for the people to be in submission to them. Why? Because they keep watch over your soul. That's our job as elders...is to keep watch over your soul. That's what God has called us to do.

This is how God has ordained His church. God doesn't just save people and then tell them to try and figure it out on their own... 'It's great-- you repented of your sin, and put your faith in Me...all right.. off you go, good luck.' God doesn't do that. He's established His church (and namely the local church) so that believers can be committed to the church and submit to the church as God has established it.

9Marks is an excellent ministry, has lots of resources for local church ministry, and it defines church membership as this:

“church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian, characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian discipleship.”

OK, so first of all, it lands on the oversight of the church, to disciple the believers, to disciple the members within the church, and the Christian’s submission, to living out his or her discipleship, in the care of the church. The Christian is to submit to the leaders in the church, and to then live out their discipleship (what they have been learning in the church, how they have been cared for, and care for others within the local church.) It's a two-way thing that's going on here. The elders give oversight and you submit. The elders disciple, and care for you, and feed you, and love you, and you then pour yourself out into the local church, so that others might be edified.

Jonathan Leeman goes on...he says this:

The local church is the authority on Earth that Jesus has instituted to officially affirm and give shape to my Christian life and yours.

There's authority within the Christian church within the local church. Now the authority doesn't rest in the elders. The authority rests where? In the Word of God. This is where the authority lies.

We are called as elders to teach the Word of God, and to lead you and to direct you. But all believers are called to submit to the leadership of their local church. And look, I don't say this just because I'm the pastor of the church.

If I was not the pastor of a church, I'd be a member at a church. And I'd submit to the eldership there, and I'd serve the local church, and I'd do whatever it takes. Whatever I can do to serve in that local church. In fact, being an elder in the local church is not something that we take lightly. This is not an easy role. The elders, as we gather together, almost on a weekly basis to discuss things that are going on in the church, we don't do it for a title. We don't do it for some recognition in the church. But we do it because God has called us to this weighty task. And it is a heavy task.

We understand the heavy responsibility that God has put upon us to lead His people. We don't take it lightly.

So church membership is a commitment to be identified with God's people and to submit to God's ordained leaders in the church. That's what church membership is. #3, let's look at our third question.

3. Did New Testament churches have church membership?

We have church membership at Faith Bible Church and many other churches in America have membership. What about the New Testament church? Did they have church membership? Well, we're going to be in the Book of Acts, so if you would open your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 1. We're going to go through kind of an overview of the Book of Acts, because this is obviously where the church began. This is where it all started in the Book of Acts. In Acts chapter 1, look at what it says in verse 12.

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:12-14)

Now, in Acts chapter 1 the church hasn't started yet, right? The church doesn't start until Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes. But at this point they know who they are, right? We've got a list of names and people who are there. They're identified for us. Who are these people that are gathered together there? The apostles are there, with Mary as well...the mother of Jesus, Jesus' brothers, and some of the other women... they know who's there and who has gathered there.

Look at Acts chapter 2:1:

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acting as a church, they were gathered together, right? In one place. They weren't scattered around. They were there in one place, and we know what happens there in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and the church is started. The church begins on the day of Pentecost.

Peter then gets up and Peter begins to preach. And what do the people ask? Look at verse 37. Acts chapter 2:37. Now Peter preaches a pretty harsh sermon here and you would think... 'All right, well he just lost everybody'---and he basically tells these Jews---'it's your fault that Jesus died, you guys are the ones who crucified Him' and you would think everybody just leaves right scatters. It's a harsh message that he preaches to them. But look what happens in verse 37:

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do? (Acts 2:37)

He preaches the gospel. And they ask 'what shall we do?' and look at what happens in verse 38:

38 Peter said to them, "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 2:38)

Now notice what Peter says here. They ask what to do, and he says repent. Repent and do what? Be baptized. Notice this baptism, though, is when? After the church has started. This is not the same baptism that John was baptizing people with, because what was John baptizing them with? A baptism of repentance, to prepare their heart to receive the King when He comes... to receive the Messiah when He

comes. But the church is established and they repent and believe. And what does he say for them to do? Be baptized.

In what? In response to your salvation. Not to prepare your heart for salvation. Now we see baptism in the local church where they are being baptized in response to their salvation. That's the first act of obedience that happens for a believer right there. Baptism. Baptism. And why does he tell them to be baptized? Because he's telling them you need to make a public commitment and identify with Christ through baptism. That's what baptism is right? Baptism is a public confession before other people, to say, 'I identify with you.' We're going to have a baptism this summer, and those that are being baptized are going to be go under the water, and they're going to come up. And when that happens, what they're saying to everyone that's gathered around there is, 'I'm one of you. And I'm identified with you, with the church, because I've received the same salvation that you have. We're in this together.'

That's what's going on there. That's what Peter says. Repent and be baptized. Then look at Acts chapter 2:41.

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about" (how many?) "three thousand souls."

How do you know? What did they do? They counted them. They knew who was there. They knew the people. 3000.

Then look at verse 42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

and then look at verse 45:

and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:45-47)

You see the church there? What are they doing? They're living life together. They're having meals. They're at each other's homes. They're doing things together. They're not isolated, they're not on their own. They come together as a local church. Peter then preaches again. The people hear the gospel, and look at Acts chapter 4:3. Acts chapter 4 in verse 3, after Peter and John are preaching, proclaiming Christ. Verse 3:

And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the message" (that Peter was preaching, those that heard the message) "believed; and the number of the men came to be about" (how many?) "five thousand." (Acts 4:3-4)

How do you know 5000? Because they counted them. They knew who it was. They knew the people that were being saved. Then at the end of Acts chapter 4 we see the church in Jerusalem. They're all united, sharing things with one another. Not a single person in the church had need of anything. And that's what happens in church membership, when you become a part of a local church, we take care of one

another, right? We love each other. We care for each other. That's what we're called to do. That's what the local church was doing. The early church. They're caring for one another.

And if you think they're trying to 'pad the membership roll' in the church...then we come to Acts chapter 5. Look at Acts chapter 5. Who is this all about? Ananias and Sapphira...what did they do? They lied to the Holy Spirit. They lied to God. And what did God do? Kill them...dead, dropped over, on the spot. Trying to 'pad the membership roll there, are you guys?' Nope, we're just preaching Christ here. Ananias and Sapphira come in and they lie to the Holy Spirit and look what happens in verse 11:

"And great fear came over the whole" (who?) "church" (Acts 5:11)
Ecclesia ... and over all who heard these things, great fear came over them. Not only the church, but even those outside of the church that saw what was going on in the church.

What happened to Ananias and Sapphira? Oh, they died. God killed them. Why? Because they lied. Oh, stay away from that place, right? Wait wait wait wait. But listen, we're here to preach the gospel to you. Come and be a part of us. That was the message, right? That's what Peter is proclaiming...continuing to preach the gospel.

And then you go to Acts chapter 6, and you have a dispute about Hellenistic widows not being taken care of, in Acts chapter 6. And there in Acts chapter 6, who did they choose to serve these widows? Seven men. Look at Acts chapter 6 in verse 5.

The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. (Acts 6:5)

Notice what's going on there. They list them out. Why? Because they know who they are. They know who's in the local church, they know who these seven men are.

Then persecution happens and we meet a man named Saul, who would later be called Paul. We meet Saul, who begins to persecute the church and look at Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8 in verse 3.

"But Saul began ravaging" (who?) "the church," (ecclesia) "entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." (Acts 8:3)

How was it that Saul was able to go house to house to get these Christians? Because he knew who they were. Because they identified themselves with the local church. He knew who they were. So he goes to their house. Drags them out and persecutes them. These aren't just random people hanging out at home waiting for the next podcast to be posted. Or waiting to watch the next sermon online. It's not what's going on with these people in the early church. They were an ecclesia.

They were gathered together with one another, and identified themselves with each other, and therefore those who were outside of the church, that wanted to persecute the church, could look and pick them all out. How were they able to pick them out? Because they saw them gathered together. They knew they were a part of it. They're a part of the local church. They identified themselves with the local church.

Look at Acts chapter 11. Acts chapter 11 in verse 26. Barnabas goes to find Paul, verse 25:

And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;” (that is Paul) “26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with” (who?) “the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

Now all of a sudden we got a title for these people that gather together. As the ecclesia, now we call them little Christs. They're like little Christ running around. Who are these people? They're Christians. They met with this church, though. Notice that... Paul and Barnabas met with the church. How did they know who to meet with? Because they identified themselves as the local church. So they met with them.

Look at Acts chapter 12 in verse 1:

12:1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. (Acts 12:1)

How did Herod arrest them? Because he knew who they were, right? They were those who were a part of the local church. In Acts chapter 14, on Paul's first missionary journey, he traveled to Antioch and look at Acts chapter 14 in verse 27. Look at what it says there:

When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

Paul arrives and what does he do? Gathers up the church. How is he able to gather the church? Because they knew who they were. It's like our email system, right? We know who you are. Emailing the church...we've got an announcement for you. We don't just email it out to the city of White Bear Lake. Right? We send emails out to the local church. And they gathered that church together, and they're able to gather them together because they know who they are.

And then as you continue to read all throughout the rest of Acts, what is it all about? The apostles preaching the gospel and establishing local church congregations, that's what it's all about. Paul continues on with the second missionary journey and a third missionary journey, and they're going around and they're preaching the gospel and establishing churches.

In fact, in Ephesus, if you remember as we studied 1 Timothy 5, Paul tells Timothy to put widows on the what? *List*. (1 Tim 5:9) Remember that? Put them on *the list*. The early church had membership. They knew who they were. They knew who the believers were. They were able to gather them up together because they knew who the believers were. They had membership, maybe not as formal as ours, but they have membership. And the believers identified with their local church, and they submitted to the leadership of that local church. So, was there church membership in the early church? Yes, there was. They knew who the believers were.

Now I know that there are things that happen in people's lives that would deter them from becoming a member. They somehow feel threatened by the church and therefore they don't want to become a member. Which leads to question #4.

4. Why is church membership threatening to some?

Or we could ask this, why would some people not want to join a local church? Six reasons.

1. Because they're holding on to sin that they don't want exposed. They're holding on to sin that they don't want exposed. They know if I joined the local church, my sin is going to be exposed. Yeah, if you're believer in Christ, that's a good thing. It's a good thing to have your sin exposed, so that brothers and sisters can come alongside you and help you and love you and point you in the right direction. It's a good thing for us to have our sin exposed, but people don't want to join local churches because they don't want to have their sin exposed.
2. Because they're afraid to be held accountable to others. They're afraid to be held accountable to others. They know that if they join the local church, they're going to be held accountable for how they live their life. That's right, you will, because that's the job of the local church, is to hold each other accountable.
3. Some are threatened to join a church because they're afraid to offer their life in service to the church. They're afraid to offer their life in service to the church. They have a "consumer mentality" and they want the church to serve them. But they don't want to serve others. They want the church to meet all of their needs. They don't want to serve their own local church and serve others as God has called us to do in His Word.
4. They're afraid to give and be invested. They're afraid to give and be invested. If I join that local church, I know that I'm supposed to give to that local church. Give of my time and my talents and my resources. If I do that, then I'm going to be invested in that church. That's right, that should be the place that every believer is invested into. The local church. We need to be invested in the local church and in one another's lives, but people won't join a church or they're afraid to join a church because they don't want to give and be invested.
5. They think they might get hurt by the church at some point in their life. They think they might get hurt by the church at some point in their life. And let me just say now *there is no perfect church*. If you're looking for a perfect church, or if anyone is looking for the perfect church, you won't find it. Faith Bible Church is not a perfect church. Why? Because we're sinners. And you won't find any other perfect church. Why? Because everybody else in every other church are sinners. Now we strive to be *Biblical*. We desire to be Biblical. We take everything back to the Word of God, and that's what we want to do. But we understand and we know we're not a perfect church and you're not going to find a perfect church. We're going to be a Biblical church, though. That's why we're called Faith Bible Church. Because we go by the Bible. If you've been hurt by a church, don't let that experience cause you to now be disobedient to the Lord and not join a local church. God calls you to be a part of the local church and to join a local church.
6. People won't submit or join a local church because they don't want to submit to the leadership that God has established. They don't want to submit to the leadership that God has established. God has called elders to be the leaders in His church. Very, very clear in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus, Paul tells Timothy and Titus what they are to do and how they are to establish leadership in the local church. And he says you are to establish elders there. Elders are seen in the book of Acts in 1 Timothy, in Titus, in James, and in 1 Peter, and in 2 John, and in 3 John. Elders throughout the New Testament. Because God has ordained and established for elders to be the leaders in the local church. Sadly, people don't want to submit to that leadership of a local church.

But listen, you should not be threatened by church membership. Believers should not be threatened by church membership. We should run to the church, and desire to be members of the local church, rather

than run away from it, right? We should run *to it*. This is the only place that we gather together to meet around the Word of God. To hear from Him, as we gather together with brothers and sisters in Christ, to gather together corporately. It's the only time of the week that we do this...is right here. Don't be threatened by this. Run to the local church. Be a part of a local church. That's what God has called us to do.

Now #5. Question #5 which is the title of this whole thing tonight.

5. Why does church membership matter?

Why does church membership matter? I'm going to give you 10 reasons why church membership matters.

1. Number one, **because you need to be obedient to the Lord and devoted to His church**, Romans 12:10 says: *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; God commands us to be devoted to one another, and to show devotion to each other through church membership.* That is, we say to each other publicly, through membership, 'I am committed to you, and I want you to be committed to me.' You see that? That's what's going on in church membership. I am here to be committed to you, and I want you to be committed to me. That's what happens when those members come up here...the new members come up here and they give the affirmation of commitment. That's exactly what they are saying, and that's why at the end of that, I ask the congregation, will you be committed to them? I will. That's the way it's supposed to be, because God tells us in Romans 12:10 *be devoted to one another.* We are called to be devoted to one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says: *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 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.* God commands us to be devoted to each other and to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, and to encourage one another. And we can only obey this commandment if we are devoted to one another in the local church. And we show this devotion through church membership. He also tells us that we should not forsake the assembling with one another. Simply put, when the church meets you should be there. That's what God says. If the church is meeting, be there. If the church doors are open, show up. That's what God calls us to do. Why? Because God commands you to be devoted to the church.
2. Number two, **you need to sit under the consistent preaching of God's Word.** Membership matters because you need to sit under the consistent preaching of God's Word. Acts 2:42 says they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching the early church. They're devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching -- and the church today is called to listen to the preaching of God's Word, as the pastor is called to stand up and to preach God's Word. That's what goes on. We studied that in 2 Timothy chapter 4, right? As Paul commands Timothy, "*Preach the word in season and out of season*" (2 Tim 4:2) all the time Timothy preach God's word and the church is to sit under the consistent preaching of God's word. Notice I said that consistent preaching of God's Word. It's not a bunch of 1-off messages...not from this church, and that church, and this pastor, and that pastor...No. You need to be under the consistent preaching of God's Word. That's why we exposit the Word line by line. That's why we're going through the book of Mark right now, verse by verse, word by word, right? That's what we're doing, because we want to see what God has to say to us ... not what I have to say. What does God say to us? And that happens when you sit

under the consistent preaching of God's Word. And I know many of you have loved it. You've told me. You love going through the gospel of Mark and then the next book that we pick up...you're going to tell me 'I love going through this', yeah, because that's how it's supposed to be, right? We go through and exposit the Word, line by line, to see what God has to say.

3. Number three. **Membership matters because you need to be in fellowship with other believers weekly.** You need to be in fellowship with other believers weekly. Acts chapter 2:42, *and they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles, teaching and to fellowship.* The Greek word for fellowship is the word *koinonia*. It refers here to a close association involving mutual involvement and relationships. There are mutual relationships, *koinonia*, fellowship, relationships that are going on. That's why we have coffee and donuts afterwards, so you can have fellowship with one another so you can build relationships with each other, because we need each other. We need each other and we need to build relationship with each other.
4. Number 4. **Membership matters because you need to be edified by other believers in the body.** You need to be edified by other believers in the body. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.* We're devoted to each other and our members of the church. We use our spiritual gifts to build one another up. That's what we're called to do -- to edify other believers in the body -- and let me tell you this, when you are not here on Sunday morning, not only are you missing out on being edified, but you're missing out on edifying someone else. That's why it's so important to be here on Sunday mornings when the church meets. Look now, I understand you go on vacation and you have... we get that... we understand that... But if you just wake up one morning and just go, 'You know, today's not the day, I'm tired, I don't think I'm going to show up.' You're missing out on being edified. And you're missing out on blessing someone else, and edifying them. We need edification from other believers and that's why church membership is so important.
5. Number 5. **Membership matters because you need to have accountability in your life.** You need to have accountability in your life. You need fellow believers who will hold you accountable. James 5:16: *therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.* You need to have brothers and sisters in your life that you confess sin to. You need that. God calls us to do that. Confess our sins to one another. Why? So that sin can be dealt with and God's church can be pure. God wants His church to be pure. MacArthur says: "the writer" (that is James) "was well aware that sin is most dangerous to an isolated believer. Sin seeks to remain private and secret, but God wants it exposed and dealt with in the loving fellowship of other believers." That's why it's so important to be a part of a local church. Confess your sins to one another. You don't just confess your sins to random Christians, right? You're not just going to walk into a random church on Sunday morning, and go: 'Hey person, I don't know you, but I'm new here, I got a bunch of sins, I gotta confess.' We don't do that. Maybe you grew up doing that in the Catholic church...but you're out of there, Praise the Lord, you're here, but we don't confess our sins to random people, we confess our sins to people that we know, members in the church. And they hold you accountable. And they also pray for you. And that's a part of that accountability. And look, isn't it good to know that other people are praying for you? I love getting those text messages or those emails: 'hey - praying for you this week pastor Ace.'

And it's so good to know that people are praying. And that's what happens in church membership. You also need spiritual leaders to hold you accountable. Hebrews 13:17, *obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls, as to those who will give an account.* The job of the elders is to watch over your soul, and you need these spiritual leaders to hold you accountable because we love you, and we care for you, and we want to correct you, and to help you to stay on the straight and narrow path. We want to point you to Christ because we love you.

6. Number 6. **Church membership is important because you need to be a part of God's church in corporate worship.** You need to be a part of corporate worship. That is, as we've already read in Hebrews 10:24 that we *don't forsake the assembling together* that we're a part of the corporate worship. And if you aren't a part of the corporate worship and you're a member of Faith Bible Church, listen carefully, we will come after you. We will. Not in a harsh way. In a loving way. Some of you have received emails or phone calls or text messages saying hey we missed you this week on Sunday service. Why do we do that? Because we love you. Because we don't want you to stray. We don't want you to miss out on corporate worship. And why do people usually miss out on corporate worship? One of two reasons. Are you ready for them?
 - i. Number one. Because of a sin issue. They won't go to corporate worship because they have sin in their life. But we want to help you. When you have sin in your life, come and confess it. Come talk to us. We're here to help you. We love you. We care for you. So, people won't come to church because of a sin issue.
 - ii. Or number 2, because of a tragedy in their life. Because of a tragedy, maybe they lost a loved one or they lost a job, and they stay at home and they weep. Look, we want to weep with you. That's what we're called to do -- to help you, to love you, to care for you in those times. Don't let those take you away from corporate worship. If you're going through a tragedy, something in your life... I remember there was a lady at Grace Community Church. Her husband was an usher there and he died, I think it was on a Thursday or Friday... and Sunday morning she was in Sunday school teaching little kids. And many people went up to her. I know one of the teachers that went up to her and said, 'Why are you here?' and she said, where else am I going to go? These are the people that love me. They care for me. That's a woman who understood church membership, who understood the local church and the importance of the local church. She ran to her local church and that's what we're called to do. You need to be a part of corporate worship.
7. Number 7. **Membership matters because you need to hear testimonies of new believers.** Some new members give their testimonies. So they come up and they give their testimonies... you need to hear those so that you can get to know them better. You need to hear the testimonies of other people in the church and that happens through fellowship. We need to hear what God is doing in the lives of other people within the church, so that #1 -- you know how to pray for them, and #2, you know how to encourage them. That's what we're called to do as we gather together... *To stimulate one another to love and good deeds* (Heb 10:24). You need to hear testimonies of other believers.
8. Number 8. **You need to partake of communion.** Membership matters because you need to partake of communion and be confronted with your sin on a regular basis. Now, some churches will not allow you to take communion if you are not a member of their church. Did

you know that? You're not a member of their church, they say, 'Nope, it's not for you'. You can't take that here. We don't do that here, but I understand why they do it. Because communion is a serious time for the church. It's a serious matter. Communion is a serious time where we reflect on the death of Christ for us, and we are therefore confronted with our own sin, right? On what He paid for when He went to the cross for us. My sin. I'm confronted with my own sin and we all need to be confronted with our own sin on a regular basis, right? So that we can confess it and repent of it. Membership matters because you need to be taking communion on a regular basis with the church. This is an ordinance that Christ is given to His church and you need to be obedient to take of it when the church gathers to partake of it. And that's the only time that we partake of communion is when we are gathered together as a corporate body. We don't partake of communion outside of the corporate gathering of the church. We won't do communion at a men's retreat. We won't do communion at a women's retreat. We will only do communion when the church is corporately gathered, because that's what Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians. When you are gathered together, this is what you are to do. So communion only happens when you're gathered together in the local church.

9. Number 9. **Membership matters because you need to see God working in the life of His church.** You need to see God working in the life of His church. What do I mean by this?
 - i. First you need to see material results in the local church. Material results. As you give to the local church, you need to see those resources used for the glory of God. You get to see the results of what happens when God's people worship God through giving when you are a member of a local church. If you're just jumping from church to church, you don't get to see what's going on. You may have given to that church and then off you go and you go to another church and you have no clue what's happened back there at that other church, and then you show up to the next church and you give something there and then off you go, and you go to another church and you never get to see what happened to that church or that church. But when you're a church member, you give to that church and then you get to see the results of that. You get to see what God does with His resources, because that's what they are...they're God's. So you get to see material results.
 - ii. and second you get to see spiritual results of what God is doing. You get to see people come to faith in Christ. You get to witness fellow brothers and sisters grow in Christ. And here's the thing, you even get to watch your pastor grow. I'm not perfect. I'm not glorified. There's a lot more glorification that can happen here. A lot more sanctification that can happen here. There's a lot more that needs to happen. I don't know it all. I desire to grow, and guess what? you are going to get to see that happen, as you are a member of a local church of this local church of Faith Bible Church.
10. Finally, number 10. **Membership matters because you need protection.** Because you need protection. 1 Peter 5:8 says: *"be of sober spirit be on the alert, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."* You know that? You have an enemy. And you know what his job is? To devour you. That's what he wants to do. But in the local church there is protection. That's the job of the elders. We are to lead, feed and protect the flock of God. To lead, feed and protect the flock of God. Paul in Acts chapter 20 calls the elders of the Ephesian church together. How did you know who they were? Because they were part of the local church. They were church members in Ephesus and he calls these elders together. And he says to them (Acts 20:28) *"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. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” He warns the elders and says ‘look, there are going to be people within your own flock who are going to rise up...what is your job then elders? Get rid of them. That's the job of the elders, not the job of the flock, not the job of the people. It's the job of the elders that if a false teacher rises up, they are to go and confront that false teacher and get him out of the church. To guard and protect. Because there's an adversary who wants to devour you, and you know how he devours you? Through false teachers. He will devour you through false teachers. That's who he wants you to listen to. But our job as elders is to say ‘no, don't listen to those false teachers. You need to come and listen to the truth. To the Word of God. You need protection.’

And God has established protection in the local church under the oversight of the elders. And that's why Solomon says in Proverbs 18:1 “he who separates himself seeks his own desires. He quarrels against all sound wisdom. He goes on. Before that. Solomon says in Proverbs 11:14, where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Who are those counselors? The elders of the church who love you and care for you and want to protect you. And if you come out from under that sound, wisdom and counsel and leading and teaching of the elders of the church, you will find yourself quarreling and in much danger, because the enemy will be after you. And what is he going to do? Devour you. That's what he wants to do.

This is also why we require people to be members if they want to serve in any type of leadership role at Faith Bible Church. You must be a member. Membership allows the elders to guard the flock and not allow someone to come in and teach or lead people astray. Church membership is that guardian, that protection that we have. You need protection and one of the ways that we do that is through membership. It's why we only allow members to serve in Children's ministry as well, right? Because we want to guard and protect our children. We want to know who it is that is up there with our kids. Because we love them, and we care for them, and we will guard them and protect them.

And the one of the ways that we do that is through church membership. We also do it through background checks as well. Because we want to know who is serving our kids. We want to protect our children. But you need protection too. That's why church membership is so important. So membership matters. It's very important in the life of the local church. And look, don't you want to be with the people whom you know are committed? I do. I want to be together with people whom I know are committed. I don't want to go join the local softball team, and halfway through the season, half the team is gone and we've got to forfeit the rest of the season. Right? It's not commitment. I want to be a part of a people who are committed. And the way that we show commitment is through church membership. Finally, quickly, number 6

6. How does someone become a member of Faith Bible Church?

1. First, you must be saved. You must be saved. It's why on the membership application, this question is asked: "Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" And you check "yes" or "no." The church is made up of only believers. Now does this mean that unbelievers won't get in? No, they will. That's why Paul had to address Timothy and call men out by name, right? Get rid of them. They're under church discipline...get them out of the church. He knows that apostates will come in. But church membership guards and protects against that. The leaders of the people thought that the church in Ephesus...they were believers and they turned out to be apostates and were therefore excommunicated from the church, which implies what? That they were members of the church. Because you can't be excommunicated from something you're not a part of. You see that? You can't be excommunicated from something you're not a part of. That's part of church discipline. Matthew 18 talks about the four steps of church discipline. Titus 3:10 says, reject a factious man after a first and second warning. Get him out of the church. So church discipline implies that there's church membership. So first you must be saved.
2. Second, you must be baptized. Why baptism? Because it's one of the two ordinances that Christ established before he ascended, and so it's really the first act of obedience in the life of a Christian. You get saved and then you get baptized. That's how it goes. That's the model of the New Testament. What is baptism? It's an outward sign of an inward reality. It's a public proclamation of the faith that someone has in Christ. You get baptized to show publicly what has happened to you spiritually. It's a public proclamation, and what you are saying in baptism is, 'I am with them, I identify with them.'
3. Third, in order to be a member you need to attend a membership class. It's about a three hour class. It will help you understand the church and get to know you.
4. Fourth, you need to fill out an application and have an interview.
5. Then fifth, you publicly confess that you desire to be a member of Faith Bible Church, and that's why we have the affirmation of commitment where the members come up here and they respond with "I will" after they have read the questions to them. So that's how you become a member of Faith Bible Church.

And that's the importance of church membership and why it matters. It is so important for the local church. Now here's the thing...real quick in closing. For those of you that aren't members, we have a membership class coming up --- April 17th at 9:00 o'clock at our house. Sign up in the back, over there...sign up on that sheet. Put your email down there, and I will email you out the location, so that way you guys can come over, and we'll have membership class for you, and you could begin this process of membership. Sign up in the back.

Let's close in prayer. Father, thank You so much for our time together tonight in Your Word and studying this amazing topic. So important for us to understand. We thank You for Christ, who established the church, and I pray that you would help us to love each other more that we would be devoted to one another that we would care for each other and that we would be a church who glorifies Christ in all that we say and do. We love you and we praise you in Christ name. Amen.