



Amelia

BAPTIST CHURCH

GOD-GLORIFYING ◆ GOSPEL-DRIVEN

Membership Matters



Jesus said, "I will build My church" – Matthew 16:18
If Jesus is committed to the church, should we be any less committed to it?
(Mark Dever)

Chances are, you have decided to download this Membership Packet for one of several reasons. Either you are seriously considering joining ABC in the near future, or you are curious as to who we are as a local church and why we have membership at all, or you are simply seeking to refresh your understanding of biblical church membership. Whatever the case, a healthy understanding of church membership matters because as we will see, membership is both biblical and essential to our lives as followers of Christ.

Intro Question

What comes to mind when you think of the words "Church Membership" and why?

Over the last century, the understanding of biblical church membership has become more and more diluted and confused because of a lack of biblical teaching and proper application. Here are some examples of what people tend to think church membership is:

- Membership is a voluntary social club that meets periodically
- Membership simply involves Sunday morning attendance (SS and/or Worship Service)
- Membership is about a person's name on a roll/social status rather than being present
- Membership allows one to have a cemetery plot when a person dies
- Membership allows one to participate on a church sports team
- Membership gives a person the right to exercise their authority whenever the church votes
- Membership is personal rather than community based
- Membership is about what a person gets out of the church rather than what they can give

This type thinking can greatly affect a church's overall health and its calling to make disciples because the common theme throughout these membership misunderstandings is that of our own selfishness. We are constantly looking to see what we can get out of certain organizations and we are very hesitant to commit to something that will cost us greatly – time, energy, money, vulnerability, etc.

But when it comes to following Christ, this is what Jesus states in Matthew 16:24-25, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life, will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* Jesus calls every follower of His to set aside their own desires for the sake of pursuing Him in order to advance His kingdom.....not our own.

Yet this still leaves us with the question of what exactly church member is and whether or not it is biblical? So in order for us to understand the nature of church membership, we must first seek to understand the living organism called the "Church".

Discussion Question

How would you define the word "church"?



Church

The word church does not simply refer to an organizational unit of any particular religion. You won't hear anyone speak of Buddhist "churches" or Jewish "churches". In that sense, the word "church" is a thoroughly Christian word with a deep Christian meaning. So what does this word mean?

Church = Greek word is "*Ekklesia*" which means "*assembly of those who have been called out*". This word occurs 114 times in the New Testament.

According to the New Testament, the church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The word "church" has nothing to do with a building, and everything to do with a people who have been saved by God.

- Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:15-20, Acts 5:11, Acts 8:2, Acts 9:31, Acts 11:22-26, Acts 16:5, Introductions of Paul's letters to various churches, Romans 16:5, Revelation 2-3 (7 churches addressed by Christ)

A few passages in the New Testament seem to refer to the church universally, but the overwhelming majority of references to the church are to a local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to Christ and committed to each other. Now that we've defined what a church is, we need to ask whether or not membership is biblical.

Church Membership

Is church membership a biblical idea? In our westernized understanding of church, no. Open up the New Testament, and you won't find a story about people who move to a city, check out a few churches, then decide to join one. From what we can tell, nobody went church shopping because there was only one church in town. In addition to this, the New Testament never uses the phrase "church membership". So instead of looking for a particular phrase, we must look at the actions and expectations set forth in the New Testament with regards to a local church body.

So here are several interactions we see taking place in the New Testament...

1. ***Enrolling of Widows*** - 1 Timothy 5
2. ***Exercising of Church Discipline*** - Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1 & 2 Corinthians 2:6
3. ***Doctrinal Unity*** - 1 John 2:19
4. ***Gather Regularly*** - Hebrews 10:23-25
5. ***Spiritual Oversight*** - 1 Peter 5:1-5
6. ***Use of Spiritual Gifts*** - Romans 12:3-8 & 1 Corinthians 12



From these texts of Scripture, we can clearly see that the New Testament supports the idea of a defined membership within a local church. It is nearly impossible for a church to enroll widows, exercise church discipline on wayward believers, keep one another accountable in the weekly gathering, provide spiritual oversight and care for the flock, and utilize spiritual gifts for the edification of the body apart from a clear and defined roll on who is and isn't a covenant member and follower of Christ.

Even the Lord Jesus Himself reveals to us in Revelation 3:5 & 21:27 that there is a book, the Lamb's book of life, which includes all of those who have truly been redeemed by Christ. Despite the fact that the local church is fallible and can/does make mistakes, it is important that we seek to reflect the character of God. Therefore, we want our earthly records to approximate, as much as possible, heaven's own records.

Discussion Question

Other than being biblical, why does church membership matter?

Joining a local gospel-centered church will not save you any more than your good works, your education, your culture, your friendships, your financial contributions, or your baptism will save you. But the local church matters because the Christian life is not to be lived alone. Or as many like to say, "There is no such thing as a lone-ranger Christian." We were saved by God into the family of God. So there is something unique and essential about the local church that helps us to strive to live our lives for Jesus. Other than being biblical, here are a few practical reasons why membership matters:

1. ***To Assure Ourselves*** - 2 Peter 1:3-11 & 1 John 3:1-24
2. ***Evangelize the World*** - Matthew 28:16-20 & Acts 1:8
3. ***Expose False Gospels*** - Galatians 1:6-9 & 1 John 2:19
4. ***Edify the Body*** - Ephesians 4:1-16 & Hebrews 10:19-31
5. ***Glorify God*** - 1 Corinthians 10:31 & 1 Peter 2:12

The idea of a clearly defined community of people is central to God's action in both the Old & New Testaments. As demonstrated with Noah and his family, Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel, and finally the New Testament church, God has chosen to maintain a distinct and separate people for the purpose of displaying His character and His gospel. God has always intended for a sharp, bright line to distinguish those who trust in Him from those who do not. The lives of Christians together display visibly the gospel that they proclaim audibly.

Therefore, the church and its membership matters because God has designed the church to be the vehicle by which His people grow, His gospel is proclaimed, and His name glorified in the midst of a broken world.



The local church enables the world to look upon the canvas of God's people and see an authentic painting of Christ's love and holiness, not a forgery.
(Jonathan Leeman)

We live in a day and age where local churches are everywhere! Regardless of size, theology, and overall health, the landscape of America is dotted with local assemblies of professing Christians. But clearly these assemblies are not all the same. So what makes these individual churches distinct? What does their history tell us about how they emerged as a local body? And more importantly, are they grounded in the gospel of Christ in order to be a faithful witness to the surrounding culture? Questions like these matter because it is essential for one to understand the identity of a local church prior to joining. The identity of an organization will shape and influence its members. And the same is true for the local church. With the breadth of local churches across America, it is crucial that we join a local body that seeks to be faithful to the gospel while upholding the authority of the Scriptures. This will benefit our souls greatly.

Intro Question

How does a church's history affect your membership today?

The Historical Beginnings of ABC

There are several reasons for why a local church becomes established in a community. But the primary reason is that of being planted in an area where there is currently no faithful gospel witness. And such was the case for Amelia Baptist.

In June of 1914, a Christian man by the name of Dr. John W. Marshall felt compelled by the Spirit of God to reach the younger generation in the heart of Amelia County with the gospel. So he secured the use of Clark's School House so that people could gather together on Sunday afternoons. The services simply consisted of singing hymns, praying, and studying the Bible together. After several meetings, he organized three Sunday School classes so that the adults, youth, and children could all be instructed in the teachings of the Bible.

On **December 10th, 1914** the thirty or so attendees constituted their fellowship as Amelia Baptist Church. During this meeting, the group elected the Reverend W.M. Hall as the first pastor of ABC. He was also the pastor of Arbor Baptist, Mt. Hope Baptist, and Graceland Baptist. In addition to his election as pastor, Professor Robert Terrell read aloud the Hiscox's Articles of Faith and the Church Covenant; both of which were adopted by the church body.

During the first 9 years, Amelia Baptist witnessed much change with regards to those who were coming to faith in Christ and where the church was to meet for its weekly services. On July 23rd, 1916 Amelia Baptist conducted their first baptismal service in Judge Southall's pond. At this service, there were 9 people who were publically professing their faith in Christ by way of baptism. And as the church grew during this time, the group moved from the Clark's School House to the Amelia High School, and from the High School to the Courthouse. It was not until September of 1922 when work began on the church building that stands today. And it was finished in August of 1923.

This early legacy reminds us that the gospel was central to the founding of Amelia Baptist Church.



Discussion Question

Why does doctrine matter in the life of a local church?

Our Doctrinal Distinctives

In the Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy, he encourages him as a fellow minister of the gospel to keep a close watch on both his life and his doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16). Why does he say this? Paul finishes that statement by saying that Timothy will ensure the salvation of both himself and his hearers. In essence, doctrine matters because it communicates to us the essential truths of God and His works in the Bible. These essential truths contain how one is saved by God and forgiven of their sin. And one's life matters because the life confirms whether or not one has truly been saved by God. So for Timothy, a pastor, he must hold fast to the only message that saves and reflect the reality of that salvation in his daily life.

- ***Doctrine Drives Devotion!***

It is particularly important for our churches to have sound theology in one special area—in our understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel. The gospel is the heart of Christianity, and so it should be at the heart of our churches as well. So what do we believe about the gospel?

- 1.) **God** – God is holy and perfectly righteous. In the beginning He created all things and everything was considered good. And in God's perfect world, He also set forth a standard of righteousness, which was based upon His perfect character. (Genesis 1-2)
- 2.) **Man** – God originally created man (Adam & Eve) in the garden and they obeyed God perfectly. Yet, due to the temptations of the serpent (Satan), man rebelled against God in the garden by disobeying His commands. Ever since Genesis 3, our world, and more specially, our hearts, have been infected with sin. We no longer desire to obey or even acknowledge God as the sovereign Lord over all. The consequences for our sin is death, both physical and spiritual, as a result of God's judgment against us for our sin. (Genesis 3, Romans 1-3:23)
- 3.) **Christ** – Despite our sin, God takes the initiative to restore our broken relationship with Him by sending His one and only perfect Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to live a perfect life – a life we were supposed to live, die sacrificially upon a cross for our sin – a death we deserved because of our sin, and rise from the dead by the power of God proving He has the power over sin and death so that we might be forgiven. (John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15)
- 4.) **Response** – In light of this good news, that Christ has come to pay the penalty for our sin and offers us both forgiveness and eternal life, God calls every one of us to respond by repenting of our sin before God and truly believing in Christ. (Mark 1:14-15, John 3:16, Romans 10:5-13)

The gospel is the very bedrock of why we are a local church. It is because of our faith in Christ that we are welcomed into the family of God and united as a body of believers. The gospel is the very message that called this church into existence here in Amelia, VA and it has sustained us since our founding in 1914. The gospel means everything to us and we want it to mean everything to you as well.



Church membership is not an incidental or optional matter for the Christian. Rather, it's an essential and important aspect of the Christian life. According to Scripture, being a part of a local church brings with it tremendous privileges, and serious responsibilities, that can be fulfilled in no other way.

(Wayne Mack)

Some people decide to dismiss the idea of church membership altogether because they think that it means someone has to jump through hoops in order to become a member. Or they might think that church membership is about upholding a certain standard of behavior which seems to go against the idea of God's free grace. It's not hard to see why people tend to think this way. Typically, membership in most organizations involves meeting some kind of standard. You have to be rich enough for the country club, cool enough for the in-crowd, smart enough for the debate team, fast enough for the football team, and caring enough for the charity society. We must understand that to be a member of something is, by definition, to be something that others are not. Membership is exclusive by its nature and that is especially true for the local church. Because of the people within a local church and who they represent, there are certain biblical expectations for church members.

Intro Question

What comes to mind when you think of the expectations for church members?

What Is Expected?

Several questions arise when we think about church membership – How does an individual know he or she belongs to the church? How can one become a part of the local church? And what is entailed by church membership?

Fundamentally, church membership entails a life of **Repentance & Belief** in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is intended to be the community of those who have truly been born again. It does not make sense to welcome non-believers into the fellowship when the fellowship is set apart by God for His people. In light of this fact, the grace of God in our lives as believers is to be demonstrated publicly through two special acts within the community of faith:

- 1.) **Baptism By Immersion** - This is what the Bible presents as the first step for the Christian, and the assumption in the New Testament is that all Christians have been baptized. In Romans 6, for instance, Paul is assuming that the Christians to whom he is writing have all been baptized. This universal practice was rooted in the command of Christ recorded in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and is written about in the book of Acts and throughout the New Testament.
- 2.) **Affirm the Statement of Faith & Church Covenant** - In order to join the fellowship at ABC, one must be in agreement with the statement of faith and the church covenant (mentioned below). These two documents serve as the “written bedrock” of who we are as a local body. The statement of faith displays what we believe about the teachings of the Bible and the covenant reflects the biblical picture on how Christians should conduct their lives. Potential members publically affirm this during one of our members meetings (business meetings).



ARTICLE III – Church Covenant

Adopted 1914

Having been, as we trust, brought by divine grace to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and to give ourselves wholly to Him, we do now solemnly and joyfully covenant with each other, to walk together in Him, with brotherly love, to His glory, as our common Lord. We do therefore, in His strength, engage--

That we will exercise a Christian care and watchfulness over each other, and faithfully warn, exhort, and admonish each other as occasion may require:

That we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but will uphold the public worship of God, and the ordinances of His house:

That we will not omit closet and family religion at home, nor neglect the great duty of religiously training our children, and those under our care, for the service of Christ, and the enjoyment of heaven:

That, as we are the light of the world, and the salt of the earth, we will seek divine aid to enable us to deny ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to walk circumspectly in the world, that we may win the souls of men:

That we will cheerfully contribute of our property, according as God has prospered us, for the maintenance of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, for the support of the poor, and to spread the Gospel over the earth:

That we will in all conditions, even till death, strive to live to the glory of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

(Hebrews 13:21)

*This covenant is read aloud by both new member(s) and current members at our business meetings.



The responsibilities and duties of members of a local church are simply the responsibilities and duties of all Christians. Biblically, there should be no difference from church to church on what is expected of members. So what are the responsibilities of church members? Here are several important responsibilities and expectations that Pastor Mark Dever (Capitol Hill Baptist in DC) lays out for church members:

- **Attend Services Regularly** - In Hebrews 10:25 we read that we should “*not neglect meeting together*” (ESV). That means we should regularly attend the weekly meetings of the church.
- **Attend Communion Particularly** - The Lord Jesus instituted a meal (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22) that His followers would partake of together to remember the gospel and yearn for His return. This meal is not to be taken flippantly. Rather, it is to be taken in joyful reverence (1 Corinthians 11) as we assess our own relationship with the Lord and our relationships with others. At ABC, we take this meal on the first Sunday of every month.
- **Attend Members Meetings Consistently** - As a congregational church, the members’ meeting is an important time in our lives together. It is the meeting of the church for making decisions as a church body.
- **Pray Regularly** - Or, as Paul says, “without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). If your church has a membership directory, consider using it as a prayer list.
- **Give Regularly** - Scripture is full of instructions about giving. For example, Solomon taught that we should, “*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops*” (Prov. 3:9 or Matthew 6, 2 Corinthians 8)

If the church is a building, then we must be bricks in it; if the church is a body, then we are its members; if the church is the household of faith, then we are part of that household. Sheep are in a flock, and branches on a vine. Biblically, if we are Christians we must be members of a church. The membership is not simply a record of a statement we once made or of affection toward a familiar place. It must be the reflection of a living commitment or it is worthless.



Another way to help describe what is expected of the members here at ABC is by what is outlined in the Amelia Baptist Vision statement. This vision directs us to why we exist as a local church and how we best carry out that vision.

Amelia Baptist Vision

Why Do We Exist?

Amelia Baptist Church exists to glorify God by being faithful to the task of making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is done through....

Gathering Together Around the Word

All throughout the OT & NT we see the people of God gathering together regularly in order to hear from the Word of the Lord as well as to encourage one another to look to the Lord who is their hope. Therefore, it is essential that we seek to gather together on a regular basis so that a familial bond would be cultivated within the body of Christ and God's people would be edified through His Word. Through Christ, God has united us together as the family of God. So it only makes sense that we would promote the gathering of the people of God for worship.

- John 17:20-23, Acts 2:42-47, Ephesians 4:1-6, Heb. 10:24-25

Growing Together In the Word

When God's people meet together, it is always for a purpose. And one of those purposes is to know God more intimately so that our love for Him and for others would deepen. Within the body of Christ, God has given us various "means of grace" (Lord's Supper, Baptism, Prayer, Study, Worship, etc.) so that we might come to a greater knowledge of who He is. And the primary means of grace to help us grow is His Word.

- John 15:1-5, John 17:17-18, Ephesians 3:14-19, Colossians 2:6-7, Hebrews 6:1-2, 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Going Together With the Word

As believers in Christ we cannot allow the grace of God in our hearts to become stagnant. Rather, we must be motivated by the grace of God to be obedient to the Great Commission. And when we go, we go as the Christ's body together into a lost world that is in need of hope and redemption. We bring the light into darkness.

- Matthew 28:16-20, John 1:6-8, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14-17, 1 Peter 2:9

This simple vision helps to outline not only our mission statement on making disciples, but it also communicates how we go about fulfilling that task. In our pursuit of fulfilling the mission Christ has given to us, we embrace the great responsibility placed upon us as members of the body.



So what does the process look like to become a member at ABC? Well, here is a picture of how one becomes a member according to the ABC Bylaws:

ARTICLE IV- Membership

Section 1. Definition: Membership in this church may be acquired by the vote of this church as follows:

1. Baptism – any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and giving evidence of a change of heart may, upon baptism, be received into membership; baptism being by immersion only.
2. Letter – any person who has been immersed upon profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ may be received on a letter from a Baptist church of like faith and order.
3. Statement – any person, to whom the ordinance of baptism by immersion has been administered, may be received upon the satisfactory statement of his or her experience and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Proxy – any person who is physically prohibited from appearing before the church to seek church membership should make explicit his or her desire for church membership in the presence of the pastor and one or more deacons.

Section 2. Method: All persons who wish to be received into the membership of this church, whether by baptism or otherwise, shall present themselves for membership during a public worship service. Action upon such requests shall be taken at a regular business meeting after the duration of at least four weeks during which time the pastor and at least two deacons will have conferred with the candidates with regard to their relationship with Christ, church polity, the Church Covenant, and the relationship of the church to the Southern Baptist Convention. If a business meeting is not scheduled within 30 days after a new member has gone forward to be recognized as a candidate for membership, then a called business meeting will be held the next Sunday for the purpose of voting on their membership.

Section 3. Education: All persons received into the membership of this church shall receive a copy of the Church Manual, containing its Covenant and Rules of Order, to the end that they may act understandingly as to the responsibilities assumed.

Section 4. Duties: Church members are expected, first of all, to be faithful in all of the duties essential to the Christian life and to uphold the commitments outlined in the church covenant. Upon a vote of approval into membership, members should be encouraged to exercise their gifts to help in the overall ministry of the church in the edification of the body and the advancement of the gospel.

In order for a new member to serve as an officer, teacher, committee chair, or work with minors, they must have demonstrated faithfulness to the church body for at least six months after a vote of approval into

membership. After this designated time, it will be up to the discretion of the pastor and nominating committee as to whether or not a member is qualified to serve in this capacity. All nominations are contingent upon church approval at a business meeting. And those who desire to work with minors must also have completed a background check prior to serving in this capacity.

In regards to new members serving on specific committees and non-leadership positions within the ministry of the church, it will be up to the discretion of the pastor and nominating committee as to whether or not a member is qualified to serve in this capacity. All nominations are contingent upon church approval at a business meeting.

Non-members, who are faithful both in attendance and participation, may serve the church body in a “servant” role at the discretion of the pastor, nominating committee, and church approval. “Servant” roles are limited to any committees other than Bylaws, Finance, Auditing, Tellers, Nominating, Personnel, Board of Directors, and Children’s/Youth ministry.

Section 5. Termination: Membership in this church may be terminated by the vote of this church as follows:

1. Letter of transfer to a Baptist church of like faith and order. The letter shall state that the member is in good standing. It shall be sent to the church to which the member desires to unite.
2. Any person desiring to join a non-Baptist church should notify this church, and upon notice to the Pastor of the church, which he or she seeks to join, the member’s name shall be dropped from our roll.
3. In the event of persistent breach of a member’s covenant vows, he or she may be excluded. No action shall be taken, however, until the matter shall have been fully considered by the Deacons, and the member given an opportunity to answer. In any such disciplinary action, the church and the Deacons shall be guided by teaching of the New Testament and shall always endeavor to effect reconciliation and restoration of the member. Any person whose membership has been terminated may be restored.