



membership frequently asked questions¹

Does being a member of a church mean I'm a Christian?

No. Turning from your sin and trusting in Christ makes you a Christian, not being a member of a church.

However, church membership is meant to be a church's corporate affirmation of your profession of faith in Christ. Membership is supposed to be the church saying, "We've looked at your life. We've heard your testimony and your explanation of the gospel. You look like a Christian to us, so we're happy to affirm you as a Christian, welcome you as a brother in Christ, and care for you and watch over you."

So, while church membership is no guarantee that a person is a Christian, it should offer genuine Christians some assurance of their salvation.

What's the difference between a member and somebody who just "goes to church" every week?

We make a distinction between "members" and "guests." If you're not a member, then you're technically a guest that remains to a certain extent separated from our church family, and separated from the maturity, protection, accountability, and care that comes with being an active part of the church. This may not make much difference for visitors and non-Christians, but Christians who consume rather than commit to a local church do a disservice to Jesus' body (the church) and themselves.

Members, on the other hand, participate as the church: sacrificing time, talents, and treasure; committing to the care and community of their fellow members; and submitting to the authority God has established to lead our congregation.

¹ This material is an adaptation of material available from: <http://www.9marks.org/answers/does-being-member-church-mean-i'm-christian> and <http://www.marshallchurch.org/about/membership-faq>



Why should I become a member?

Sacred City Church is a family, adopted by God (Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:5). We care for each other, pray for each other, and serve together. If you're already a Christian, if you're already in a Missional Community, if you're already giving of your finances and your time, then you're already fulfilling some functions of a member. Without making an official commitment, however, we cannot provide the same level of pastoral care and community support, in part because we may not know who you are, and in part because the Bible requires that we take care of our family first (Eph. 2:19 cf. Gal. 6:10).

If you're not a Christian, don't worry about membership until you've been reconciled to God through Jesus. If you are a Christian who has spent a lot of time at Sacred City Church, however, search your heart and identify your hesitation. There may be valid reasons to abstain from Sacred City membership. But we're rebels by our cursed nature; if you bristle at the very idea of becoming a member, ask yourself why—and don't hesitate to speak with a pastor.

What are the benefits of being a member? Scripture calls us a body, a family, a household—being a Christian is not a solo effort. Jesus works through the church (Eph. 2:10), the church is Jesus' body (1 Cor. 12:27), and apart from Jesus, you can do nothing (John 15).

This isn't a country club, and it isn't Planet Fitness. Again, members are the church. "In love [God] predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:19).

You don't join for the perks—although members do enjoy greater access to The City, and certain volunteer opportunities are only available to members. The benefit is that we get to worship Jesus together, serve in His kingdom, and be children of God! We enjoy the guidance that his Word provides, and, when sin comes between us, we enjoy the reconciliation Jesus' blood provides.



Isn't the idea of membership just a modern American idea?

Hardly.

1. The ancient Romans understood each citizen to be a member of their society in the same way that our hands, eyes, feet, and so on are all members of our body.
2. The New Testament asserts that Christians are members of one another because we are all members of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5).
3. The New Testament church was composed of people who had publicly joined themselves to the church such that Paul can assume that the Corinthian church will know who is "inside" and who is "outside" (1 Cor. 5:12-13).
4. The church in Corinth excluded an unrepentant sinner "by the will of the majority" (2 Cor. 2:6), which presupposes a defined group of people, all of whom together had the right to act as a church.
5. Even the idea of excluding someone from the church because of unrepentant sin (see Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, and 2 Cor. 2:6) presupposes that there is some defined body to which a person belongs. If there were no formal membership in the New Testament, then Jesus and Paul's teaching about church discipline would be meaningless. If someone doesn't formally belong, how can they be kicked out?

Is church membership wrongly exclusive?

Tolerance and inclusivity are the quintessential postmodern virtues. It seems that the only way to be genuinely wrong in contemporary western society is to ever exclude anyone. Contemporary westerners are born cherishing particular conceptions of diversity, inclusion, and tolerance.

The problem is that *all* people are born sinners and therefore are excluded from the favor and fellowship of God. All people are born children of God's wrath (Eph. 2:3). So before we start arguing about whether or not church membership is wrongly exclusive, it needs to be said that the Bible portrays God as excluding *all of us* from fellowship with himself because of our sin. And the Bible teaches that all those who do not turn from their sin and trust in Christ will experience not only God's exclusion after they die, but his active punishment for their sins.



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So is church membership exclusive? In one sense, yes, of course it is. Church membership is intended to draw a clear, bright line between the church and the world.

But is it *wrongly* exclusive? Not inherently (though right principles can be wrongly applied). Church membership is meant to *include* only Christians in order that the church would corporately draw a picture of the gospel it preaches. A clear distinction between the church and the world actually serves non-Christians by clarifying and commending the gospel. In fact a wrongly *inclusive* approach to church membership is just what non-Christians *don't* need, because it confuses the gospel, blurs the line between Christian and non-Christian, and can even help deceive non-Christians into thinking they're Christians when their lives demonstrate no fruit of having turned from their sin and trusted in Christ.