



Membership

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The Significance of Membership

Membership at The Church at South Mountain means belonging to King Jesus and being committed to His people and purposes. Membership in the Kingdom of God is serious business. It is so serious that God uses the word "covenant" in the Bible to explain the nature of His relationship with us. (*Luke 22:20; 1 Cor.11:25*)

Our individual covenant with God is a powerful agreement. It is one that displays what God means to us and changes how we live (*2 Cor.5:17*). Once we enter into this covenant with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we become a part of His church and join with other believers who have placed themselves under God's guidance to live and carry out the work of ministry (*John 15:16*).

Why is Membership Important?

There are three main reasons why membership is important:

1. God has appointed pastors to watch over your soul. (*Heb.13:17*)
2. Spiritual growth is connected to body life. (*Eph.4:11-16*)
3. Encouragement is needed because of a hostile world and the deceitfulness of sin. (*Heb.3:12, 10:23-25*)

The Symbol of Membership

In the Old Testament, circumcision is the public symbol of covenant with God. Circumcision indicated an agreement to live under God's authority. For God's people today, baptism indicates the same commitment to God's authority (*Rom.6:3-4*).

In South America, a 12-year-old girl had been put out on the streets by her Muslim family. The pastor who met her assumed that she was rejected by her family because she had become a Christian. "Oh no," she explained. "They have known for some time that I am a Christian. They did not throw me out until I was baptized!" Unfortunately, this girl's Muslim family understood the power of baptism more clearly than many Christians. Baptism is a clear and public statement about who has ultimate authority in our lives.

Whether we realize it or not, God's symbols are powerful. THEY MEAN SOMETHING. We cannot ignore their meaning.

Our Purpose Statement: Why We Exist

The purpose for our existence is related to who we belong to...and the church belongs to Christ (*Col.1:18*). He has already established the purposes and they're not negotiable.

What Are We Called To Do?

1. To be a God-exalting church (*Eph.3:20-21*)
2. To be a teaching church (*Acts 20:27, 32; 2 Tim.3:16-17*)
3. To be a fellowshipping church (*2 Tim.2:22*)
4. To be an examining church (*2 Cor.13:5*)
5. To be a praying church (*Rom.15:30; 1 Tim.2:1*)
6. To be sharing church (*Gal.6:2,9-10*)
7. To be an witnessing church (*Acts 1:8; Matt.28:18-20*)
8. To be a guardian of the truth (*1 Tim.3:15*)

How Do We Accomplish Our Mission?

1. By making consistent corporate worship a priority (*Heb.10:25*)
2. By submitting to the preaching of God's Word (*2 Tim.4:1-2; 1 Tim.4:13, 5:17*)
3. By growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ and making disciples (*2 Pet.3:18*)
4. By encouraging and stimulating the brethren at CASM (*Heb.10:24*)
5. By partaking of the Lord's Supper (*1 Cor.11:23ff*)
6. By participating in giving to the Lord's work (*1 Cor.16:1; 2 Cor.9:6-7*)

7. By participating in church discipline (*Matt.18:15ff*)
8. By supporting their pastor(s) (*1 Tim.5:10*)
9. By praying for/with the congregation (*Rom.15:30; 1 Tim.2:1*)
10. By finding at least one place of service (*1 Pet.4:10; Gal.5:13*)
11. By submitting to the Elders at CASM (*Heb.13:17*)
12. By sharing the Gospel in the everyday course of life (*Matt.28:18-20*)
13. By living a godly and fruitful Christian life (*John 15:16; 1 Pet.1:14ff*)

How Is the Church Supported?

God's way of taking care of his people and fulfilling his gospel agenda is through biblical Stewardship and the tithes and offerings of His people. Stewardship is the management of all that God has given to us for our good and His glory (*1 Cor.4:2*). GOD OWNS IT ALL and has entrusted some to you (*Ps.24:1*). As a reflection of gratitude, obedience, worship and participation, God calls His people to bring 10% to the storehouse and offerings as He prospers. (*Lev.27:30; Deut.14:28-29; Prov.3:10; Mal.3:8-11*)

The storehouse uses God's resources to

- support its shepherds and ministries. (*1 Cor.9:1-14; 2 Cor.9:10-15*)
- supply the needs of the saints. (*2 Cor.9:12*)
- support the work of missions. (*Acts 1:8; Phil.4:15-18*)

What Are Our Values?

Many problems in the church today stem from our failure to take seriously God's sovereign authority over us. Jesus has given His church the authority to overcome Satan in the world (*Matt.16:19*). However, He has not given the church independent authority. The church derives its authority from the Lord. Since God is the source of the church's authority, He holds the church accountable to function according to His authority.

God takes His sovereign role very seriously. In fact, if the church operates apart from His authority, God says He will withdraw His presence, leaving it powerless (*Rev.2:5, 16*). A powerless church cannot come up with solutions to the world's problems, cannot keep its members from sin, and cannot impact society as God intends. So, one of God's purposes for the church is to provide an accountability system for His people.

Agreeing to become a part of the church is a serious decision. It is not to be taken lightly. If we say we belong to Jesus, we must participate in His church—the only institution designed to accomplish the will of God in society. To say that we love the Lord but choose not to be a part of His church is contradictory. A Christian without a church home is like an orphan. So, to be a member of God's church is to participate in an accountable community of believers who function under the Lordship of Christ (*Col.1:18*), and to be responsible to live by the guidelines God established long ago in Scripture (*Matt.18:15ff*).

The first instruction is to recognize the family relationship between believers.

Second, we are not to judge our brother just because he does something we don't like. We are not dealing with personalities or preferences. We are dealing with sin, a violation of God's standards as revealed in Scripture.

Third, we are to correct our erring brother as quickly and privately as possible. Also, we don't tell anyone else about our brother's sin—not even someone else in the church.

Fourth, if the person is willing to repent of his sin, we provide the support and keep the matter quiet. If the brother says "that's my business, stay out of it," then,

Fifth, bring two or three witnesses of fact not rumor, the fact of an action or attitude. The witnesses must realize the seriousness of the matter, because they will be judged by the same standard.

Sixth, if the brother won't listen, then the church leadership and family must get involved. The goal is restoration. The options are limited because he has had two chances to turn from this clear sin. At this point the church has the authority and responsibility make the sin public and call every church member to go after the erring member, calling him to repentance. This is done by withholding fellowship and continuing to admonish him to turn from the sin. (*2 Thess.3:14-15*)

What Is Our Structure?

For Governing God's People

The biblical pattern for church government in the New Testament is a plurality of God-ordained elders. It is the only model given in the Bible and nowhere do we find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by one pastor. (*1 Tim.3:1-7, 5:17; 1*

Thess.5:12; 1 Pet.5:1-5; Acts 20:17-18, Titus 1:5-9)

The elders do not operate by majority rule or vote. If all the elders are guided by the same Spirit and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make. *(1 Cor.1:10; Eph.4:3; Phil.1:27, 2:2)*

Answering Key Questions About the Ministry

What Type of Church Are We?

We are a Bible-based Christian fellowship. We do not have any denominational affiliation, but we do participate in missions and with other ministries of like faith and order.

Where Do I Go or Who Do I Call If I Need Help?

Every member is assigned a deacon who calls you every other week to pray with and for you and to see how you are doing. In the case of an emergency or if you cannot contact your deacon, our pastors are available to assist you.

What is the Process of Membership?

1. Attend membership class
2. Profess a clear personal testimony of saving faith
3. Be baptized, if necessary
4. You are welcomed and acknowledged as a church member publicly

What We Believe Concerning Baptism

"The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament." F.F. Bruce

BAPTISM DEFINED

There are many interpretations as to the meaning of baptism. Some would teach that baptism is for infants. Others would say that baptism is to be administered through the sprinkling of water on the head. Still others would say that baptism is needed for salvation. With so many varied teachings on this very important subject, it is crucial that we begin by biblically defining what baptism is.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for baptize is "baptizo", which means, "to submerge or immerse." Baptism is a symbol of our identification in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is then best portrayed by immersion. This is seen not only in the meaning of the word itself but by the fact that converts' entire bodies were immersed in water.

And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water... (Matt.3:16)

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And whenthey came up out of the water... (Acts 8:38-39)

Baptism not only identifies the convert with Christ, it also is the visible means of identifying the repentant with a local body of believers. When a person becomes a member of the body of Christ, he or she also must identify with a local church. When an individual responds to the call of salvation, that person must be baptized and initiated into the Christian community, just as the New Testament believers did *(Acts 2:41)*. **[1]** That is why baptism is a requirement for membership at The Church at South Mountain.

BAPTISM EXEMPLIFIED

In Matthew 3:13-17, we see baptism beautifully and powerfully exemplified. This is the account of the baptism of Jesus Christ Himself. In verse 14, we see that John the Baptist tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. His reason was just the opposite of why he refused to baptize the religious leaders *(3:7)*. They refused to repent. Jesus, by contrast, needed no repentance and John was fully aware of His sinless nature. In John's mind, Jesus was too worthy of baptism, especially at his hands. It was John who said of Jesus, "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" *(John 1:27)*.

Jesus tells John in verse 15 to go ahead and baptize Him. He then gives the reason for allowing John to baptize Him, "for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus came into the world to identify with men; and to identify with men is to identify with sin. He could not purchase righteousness for people if He did not identify with man's sin. The One who had no sin took His place among those with no righteousness of their own and submitted to a baptism for sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

In baptism, Jesus also exemplified for His followers a model of obedience. The Scripture commands believers to be baptized. Jesus set the standard to follow by submitting Himself to this ordinance. Because of the example of the Lord and the command of the Word, believers do not have the option of being baptized or not.

BAPTISM ILLUSTRATED

Paul gives a wonderful illustration of baptism in Romans 6:3-5. By turning from sin and placing faith in Jesus, all Christians have been immersed into the person of Christ. Believers are united and identified with Him (*1 Cor.6:17; Gal.3:27*). Water baptism illustrates the reality that we have been united with Jesus.

Kenneth Wuest defines this use of "baptizo" in Romans 6:3, "baptized into Christ Jesus" as "the introduction or placing of a person into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to his previous environment or condition."^[2]

We are united with Christ specifically in his death and resurrection (*Rom.3:4-5*). This is an amazing truth that all believers need to have penetrate their hearts. With these two power packed verses, Paul shows the impossibility of a true Christian continuing to live the way he did before they were saved. The believer has died, been buried, and now through Christ walks in the newness of life (*Gal.2:20*). The word newness refers to a new quality and character. A person who comes to Christ savingly is given a new disposition, a new heart.

The believer's baptism into Christ Jesus happens at the moment of salvation for the repentant sinner who turns to Jesus. This baptism is a permanent immersion into Him. This is the spiritual immersion of believers into Christ through the Holy Spirit. As previously stated, water baptism by immersion is the only mode of baptism that truly symbolizes the reality that believers are permanently placed into a union with the Lord Jesus. No other mode (sprinkling, dipping) accurately depicts this. In this passage of Romans 6, Paul is not making the case for water baptism. That is done elsewhere in Scripture (*Matt.28:19; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor.1:13-17*). What Paul is doing is using the physical analogy of water baptism to teach the spiritual reality of the believer's immersion into Christ. Water baptism is the outward identification of an inward reality.

The Apostle Peter taught this union with Christ using the word baptism as well. He writes in 1 Peter 3:20-21,

...who were once disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely into the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM DEMONSTRATED

Water baptism is a public symbol of faith in God. Therefore, baptism is only for professing believers. The Bible gives no support to an unbeliever being baptized. In fact, the New Testament records only believers taking the step of baptism (*Matt 3:6; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 8:12, 10:47-48*).

One account of baptism demonstrated is found in Acts 8:25-39. The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of great power and prestige as evidenced by his position of being in charge of the queen's treasure. Despite all the worldly success he had, there was an emptiness in his life. He made the long journey to Jerusalem to try to find and worship the true God. He did not find God through Judaism because the text says he was returning to Ethiopia still searching (*Acts 8:28*). The eunuch responded to the light he had and the Lord sent Philip to give him the revelation of Christ. Philip did not address the man's felt needs, nor did he take a survey to find out what the man needed. Acts 8:35 reads, "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

We see in verse 37 that the man placed his faith in Jesus Christ for his salvation. Right then, Philip takes the man and baptizes him. He does not do this to save him, but to bear witness of his salvation and his new identification and union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, the call and command is to outwardly testify of the inner reality that has taken place in your life. That public testimony is water baptism.

^[1] Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 325

^[2] Kenneth Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament*, pp. 96-97

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