

Is Church Membership Biblical?

How many membership cards are you currently carrying? Do you have a library membership, a grocery store preferred-customer card, a gym membership, and perhaps others? Most organizations require membership and keep track of their members. We have so many membership that we can become weary of them. This weariness leads some people to groan when the church, which is a spiritual institution, requires official membership. Thus, it is increasingly common for Christians to question whether church membership is a biblical practice.

As Bereans, Christians are right to ask if church membership is biblical, especially since no one can cite chapter and verse to prove a multistep process for joining the church and being counted on her rolls. IF you seek an explicit command in the Bible that insists your name must be included on the membership rolls of a particular church, you will seek in vain. So, then, why do some churches insist on an official process to join their membership while others do not? The biblical answer to this question will not be direct, but indirect. Just as a canvas provides a necessary backdrop to a work of art, so the Bible assumes the necessity of formal church membership in order to fulfill the commands and to apply the promises of Scripture with regard to the church.

We define formal church membership as *a covenant made by a public vow in which a person commits himself or herself to a local body of believers under the authority of a well-defined group of church leaders*. This results in an official record of members who belong to a local church. We will demonstrate the requirement for formal church membership by proving from Scripture that the church is a visible

community, that every Christian must be a member of this community, and that such membership necessitates vows and rolls. Then we will conclude by answering three common objections against formal membership as we have defined it.