

# COVENANT MEMBERSHIP

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH AND WHAT MARKS IT

God designed us for community, and He has chosen to use the local church community as His *primary* instrument to gather, protect, and mature His New Covenant people.

### 1. What is the church?

a. The Universal Church (Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 5:9-10).

*The universal church is the community of all true believers everywhere and for all time.*

b. The Local Church (Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 1:2).

*“A local church is a community of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and shepherd one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.”*

### 2. What forms the church?

John 3:3-6 (Cf. Ezekiel 37:1-14)

Romans 10:14

### 3. What makes a gathering a church?

a. Biblical (gospel) preaching.

b. Biblical practice of the ordinances (baptism and communion).

b.1 Biblical discipline.

c. Biblical leadership.

### 4. What is the mission of the church?

a. To make disciples by calling the nations to faith in Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20; John 13:35; 1 Peter 2:9-12.

It is not the *organization* of the church that does evangelism but the *organism* of the church as each member apart and together fulfills the mission.

b. To make disciples by teaching the precepts of Christ.

Romans 12 and 14 (cf. 14:19); Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Timothy 2:22-26; 3:16-4:5

c. To protect the precepts of Christ and the people of Christ.

● *Protect the precepts*: Philippians 1:16; 1 Timothy 3:15; Jude 1:3

● *Protect the people*: Matthew 18:12-20; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 13:17

## **How We Experience the Church**

Though every believer is a member of the universal church, given its nature, it would be impossible to meaningfully engage in the duties of membership in respect to it. Millions upon millions of believers who have died and are with Christ are still members of the universal church; but we cannot, nor would we need to, bear with them, be patient with them, forgive them, encourage them, pray for them, etc. Millions more who are alive today live around the globe and are entirely unknown to us, making it impossible for us to engage meaningfully with them in any Christian duty other than to pray in general for them.

Even if we were to gather to worship with thousands of believers in our local community, this would represent such an insubstantial portion of the whole as to be inconsequential. Not only that but gathering for corporate worship is only one aspect of engagement with the body of Christ and, of itself, provides no opportunity for fulfillment of the many other duties of believers to one another. For believers to engage in genuine Christian community with one another, fulfilling the mutual duties of membership, they must be connected with one another in committed relationships. God intended this to take place within the context of local churches.