**Covenant Membership**

*Understanding the need for formal covenant membership*

Covenant membership means we have officially1 identified with one another, have agreed   
to be accountable to one another, and have committed ourselves to serve and love one another   
under the shepherding oversight of our appointed leaders in the name of Christ.

***Is formal membership biblical?***   
[We are not asking if a particular *process* for formal membership is biblical   
but if the *principle* of formal membership is biblical.]

1. What is formal membership?
   1. It is a special relationship predicated on general membership in the body of Christ   
      (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6).
   2. It is *official* identification with one another in a local church community (Acts 2:41-47; 5:13).
   3. It is a covenant of mutual commitments between individual believers and a local church community as represented by their appointed leaders   
      (1 Corinthians 12:27; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).
2. The nature of our relationship implies formal/official membership.
   1. We *are* in a covenant relationship.
   2. Covenants are publicly recognized mutual commitments.
   3. There are no “common law” covenants.
3. Biblical terminology and imagery imply formal membership.
   1. Body imagery (there is a defined body).
   2. Family imagery (there is a shared name).
   3. Sheep/flock imagery (there are fences): Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 3:2.
   4. Allotment language (there is a specified portion given): 1 Peter 3:3.
   5. Citizenship language.
   6. In and Out language (there must be defined parameters to have an in or out):   
      1 Corinthians 5:2 and 12-13.
   7. Whole church language (there is a knowable set): Acts 15:22; 1 Corinthians 14:23.
4. Church relationships strongly imply formal membership.
   1. Relationships between leaders and members: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13;   
      1 Timothy 3 and 5:17-22; Titus 1:5f; Hebrews 13:17.
   2. Relationships between the church and its members: Matthew 18:17 (listen to the church);   
      1 Corinthians 5:4-5; 2 Corinthians 2:6.
   3. Relationships among the members: Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 6:5; Galatians 6:10.
5. Church practices strongly imply formal membership.
   1. Baptism: Acts 2:41 and 47.
   2. The Lord’s Supper: “Covenant in blood”; 1 Corinthians 10:15-18.
   3. Discipline: Matt. 18:15-20 (2 or 3 are gathered in the context of discipline); 2 Corinthians 2:6.
   4. Benevolence: Acts 6:1f; 1 Timothy 5:9.

1. The word *official* is meant to communicate that the church is a structured organization that is under the authority of Christ and that is organized by the rules and principles He gave in His written Word to us. Churches have appointed leaders who meet specified qualifications (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7). They are composed of members who have Spirit-appointed gifts that are used in conjunction with one another in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:40). They perform specific duties like the preaching of the Word and church discipline, and they celebrate the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The church is not whatever we make it to be, and union with it and participation in it are not matters of personal preference. Churches and their practices are authorized, organized, and governed by our Lord Jesus.