

Feb 2023

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS CLASS
Christ Fellowship Baptist Church

CLASS #1: UNDERSTANDING MEMBERSHIP

1. What are the Universal Church and Local Churches? (see Matt 16:13-19; 1 Cor 12:1-11).

The word “church” means an assembly, a gathering, a called out group of people.

The **Universal Church** was birthed when the Holy Spirit began to indwell believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Universal Church consists of all believers throughout time, in all locations, past, present, and future.

When you become a believer, you are added by the Holy Spirit to the Universal Church for all eternity. It is sometimes called the “Invisible Church,” because it includes people who have already died, and those all over the world that you will never meet or see until Heaven. This is what Jesus was talking about when he said, at the first ever mention of the Church... “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” (Matt 16:18). It is a spiritual entity, Christ is its Head (Col 1:18), and all Christians are part of the Body.

The **local church**, or visible church, refers to the individual congregation that gathers together at present. You can join a local church and you can be removed from it, by death, discipline, or moving to another church.

This is a physical entity, consisting of members who join voluntarily, who are **baptized professing believers** in Jesus (so, not babies or unbelievers, more on this later), led by church leaders (more on this later), but Christ is still the Head of every local church.

Christ Fellowship is an Evangelical, Reformed, Southern Baptist church. What that means is that we teach gospel of salvation by faith alone (as opposed to roman Catholic or Greek/Russian/Coptic Orthodox churches), and we teach doctrines that were articulated during the Reformation in the 1500s (more on that later), and that we teach believers baptism (as opposed to infant Christening found in Methodist, Episcopal churches), and that we partner financially with other like-minded churches to support missionaries who further these teachings. Our church has local autonomy, meaning that no governing body, (like the Southern Baptist Convention) holds authority over our church, except the elders recognized by the local church congregation.

2. How do I join a local church? Definition and types of membership (formal vs informal).

As mentioned above, you join the invisible, spiritual, Universal Body of Christ when you become a believer in Christ. But to join a visible, physical, local body/assembly/church of Christians, by following that local church’s procedure for membership. It can differ from church

to church, but should always involve some way of identifying who is in and who is not, and making clear that the membership is for believers who recognize the leadership of that body.

A church might choose to have **informal membership** procedures, for example if it is very small, and everyone knows each other well enough to recognize that they are all believers, and that anyone new is a believer. For example, in Bhutan I met pastors who had churches that consisted of four people. So if a fifth professing, baptized believer joined, it was obvious they were a member. It is up to the leaders of the church to determine how they feel they can be responsible for the flock in their care. As a church grows numerically, formal membership will be more appropriate.

Formal membership is a way of adding a person to the church that enables the leaders to know for whom they are responsible.

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Since leaders will give an account for souls, it is reasonable for them to want to know who those souls are, and to be as sure as they can that those people are true believers.

Also, since members will have some authority (e.g. in church discipline, or voting in a new pastor, or approving the budget, etc.) it is important to know who can vote, and that those people have all been informed of the doctrine of the church they are joining.

This is why we have a membership class: to ensure that you understand what we teach, what your privileges, duties, and responsibilities are.

Joining the Membership at *Christ Fellowship Baptist Church* involves a simple 4-step process:

First, you attend a **class** or watch the recorded class material.

Second, you submit a completed **application form** in which you explain your testimony/profession of faith in Christ (we can help you fill this out).

Third, you **meet with an elder** for you to ask any questions that you have about the material in the membership class (this is a time for you to clarify anything you heard, such as doctrinal questions, duties of members, etc.) The elder may have questions for you too to clarify anything in your application form and to be sure you understand what you are committing to.

Fourth, after the elders approve your application, your name will be read at a communion service, and you will be asked to come up front so the congregation can see you and meet you after the service. You will be asked to **state publicly** that you want to be a member ("I do.")

3. Reasons to Not Join a particular church

a) Lack of knowledge about the church (good reason).

Solution: attend services for a few months, and of course, attend this class.

b) Significant disagreement with doctrine or practices (good reason).

Solution: find another church if possible. If it is not possible, then join the church that teaches most closely to what you believe.

c) Fear of commitment (not such a good reason).

Solution: consider the inconsistency of your choices (you commit to your gym, bank, country club, kids' schools, sports teams, etc.), consider the benefits, duties, privileges.

d) Desire for independence and freedom from accountability (really bad reason).

Solution: repent. Anyone who does not want to be held accountable to the standards of Scripture, are not serious about obeying Christ, and thus probably not a believer. The Bible clearly commands us to submit to spiritual leadership in churches (e.g. Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13).

e) Desire to avoid giving and serving (bad reason).

Solution: repent. The Bible tells all Christians—not just those who are formal members— to give financially for the support of the gospel ministry (1 Cor 9:1-18; 2 Cor 9:1-15) and to serve other believer (1 Pet 4:10).

f) Don't see it as a biblical requirement (good reason).

Solution: the next point in this class!

4. Biblical defense of membership

a) Examples in Scripture:

In Acts 2 the first church was born with 120 believers, then 3,000, then 5,000, so the membership was formalized with lists. We see this in that the church knew who the widows were (Acts 6), were told to nominate servants (Acts 6), and referred to new converts as those “being added” to the church. In the epistles there are letters addressed to the elders and deacons of particular churches (e.g. Rom 16:1), there are instructions on who to put on lists (1 Tim 6), who can serve as elders and deacons (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). And the command to put people out of the church requires that there is a list of who is in the church and who is out (1 Cor 5). And the messages in Revelation are addressed to specific congregations of believers, and sent by their designated messengers.

b) Pictures of the church in Scripture:

The church is referred to as a flock, household, building, body, and citizenry. All of these are images of tightly-knit units of formal connection in which the presence or absence of a member would be significant and noticed (just think of a lost sheep, missing brick in a building, missing family member, severed body part, paperwork process of valuable citizenship).

c) Inability to obey the many corporate commands “one anothers.”

These include commands about participating in communion, church discipline, public reading of Scripture, corporate prayer, and singing to one another. These commands cannot be obeyed properly as an individual who is not part of a group.

d) Inability to obey commands that require expanded resources.

E.g. supporting missionaries (Matt 28), and caring for all qualified widows (1 Tim 6) and paying pastors (1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 9). Individuals cannot obey these commands without being part of a church.

e) The command to submit to leadership and make their task easier to bear (Heb 13:17).

If the elders of a church request that you apply for formal membership, then Christ wants you to do so, or to find a church where you are willing to submit to the leaders.

5. Privileges of membership

- a) Service (giving and receiving) including teaching positions and missions trips
- b) Counseling
- c) Funerals and weddings
- d) Financial aid when needed
- e) Being held accountable through discipline

6. Responsibilities of membership

- a) Attendance (Heb 10:24-27)
- b) Financial support (1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 9)
- c) Serving (1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10)
- d) Discipline (Matt 18; 1 Cor 5)
- e) Maintaining a good witness to outsiders (1 Cor 5)
- f) Worship (e.g. participating in the singing, prayer, fellowship, hospitality)
- g) Hospitality (1 Pet 4:9; Heb 13:2)
- h) Evangelism (Matt 28)

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CLASS #2: DISTINCTIVES

1. Understanding Agreement in Essentials vs Non-essentials.

Essential agreement is required in fundamentals of Evangelical teaching, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the inerrancy of Scripture.

In **essentials**, we **require agreement** for membership.

In **non-essential** doctrines, we require only that you **not teach against or cause divisions** about areas in which you disagree with the church's teachings or practices. You may at any time seek discussion with elders regarding any doctrinal or practical matter, but do not spread your views to members. The elders are qualified to respond to your concerns. Remember, you are joining us, so do not expect us to change our teachings and practices to suit you.

“What we teach” vs “What we believe.”

We do not all need to believe exactly the same thing on every minute detail. But we have a teaching, and you are expected to respect that we will teach in line with our stated doctrine.

2. Doctrinal Distinctives

a) Believers' baptism. Baptism is for a person who professes faith in Christ, and only those who profess faith in Christ (i.e. not babies or unbelievers). A person is old enough to be baptized when they are old enough to understand, articulate, and live out the gospel. In general, if a person is too young to submit to church discipline, they are too young to be baptized and take communion.

b) Communion for any baptized believers in good standing with their local church. We celebrate the Lord's Table, on the first Sunday of each month, as a remembrance of Christ's death. Since the Lord's Table is reserved for believers, the assumption is that a person has been baptized, or is in the process of applying for baptism if they are taking communion. It is also assumed that they are old enough to be disciplined for unrepentant sin. Thus children should not take communion unless they have been baptized since becoming believers.

c) Governance: The term elder/overseer/pastor is used interchangeably in the New Testament. Our elders are pastors and vice versa. There should be a plurality of elders, meaning a church should if possible have more than one person leading it. Elder rule, which we practice, is a governance by the elders, not a council or presbytery outside the local church, and it is not congregational rule. The congregation of CFBC votes to select and install a new senior pastor, but does not need to vote on decisions made by the eldership.

d) Inerrancy of Scripture. There are no errors in doctrine or history, contained in Scripture.

e) Sufficiency of Scripture. This applies to matters of faith and practice, (special mention of how this relates to psychology and psychiatry).

f) Expository Preaching

g) Young earth, we teach a literal, six-day creation of a mature earth with age. Just as Adam was created with maturity and age, so was the planet and the Universe. There is a difference between the tenets of the Theory of Evolution, which we reject, and the evidence of adaption within species, which we accept (dogs can be bred into various different kinds, but they cannot evolve to be cats or birds, etc.)

h) Cessation of the revelatory charismatic gifts, including prophecy, words of knowledge, and tongues. Miraculous healing can happen at any time, but the miraculous “gift of healings,” in which a person can heal anyone at any time at will, is no longer functioning since the closing of the canon of Scripture, since it was a gift used to authenticate revelation by prophecy or Apostleship. There is no more office Apostle, although messengers/delegates of churches are sometimes called apostles, but do not possess the authority that the Apostles did.

i) Gender distinctions and roles.

Gender distinctions (Gen 1:27 refers to assigned biology; Gal 3:28 refers to complete equality spiritual privilege and standing; 1 Tim 2:8-15 refers to distinct roles in church teaching and leadership; Eph 5:22-24 & 1 Pet 3:1-7 & 1 Cor 11:3 refers to complimentary roles in marriage).

We teach male doctrinal leadership in church. Thus elders/pastors will all be men. Women may teach other women, and children, but they may not hold authority over, or teach men (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12). This applies to church settings, not schools, businesses, the military, etc.

j) Sanctity of life. Abortion and euthanasia are forms of murder, and are not permitted by God’s word.

k) Sanctity of marriage. Marriage is a lifetime commitment between one biological male and one biological female in a heterosexual monogamous commitment that has been made publicly, with witnesses, and ratified legally.

l) Divorce and remarriage. Marriage is permanent until death. Exceptions for adultery and abandonment are permitted by God as explained in Matt 19 (adultery) and 1 Cor 7 (abandonment).

m) Eschatology: we teach a Futurist interpretation of Revelation, Premillennial return of Christ, and a pre-tribulational rapture (1 Thess 4:17), expectation of a future for a restored nation of Israel and bodily return of Christ to establish a 1,000-year earthly kingdom (Micah 4; Isa 11; Rev 20).

3. Practical Distinctives

a) Church Discipline (Matt 18:15-20. 1 Cor 5)

Don't join a church that won't remove you for unrepentant sin.

The 4-step **process** is outlined in Matthew 18:15-20.

Confront a sinning person in private (if they repent at any point, the process stops, you have "won your brother" back), if they don't repent then go back to them with other witnesses (to be sure you are not the one who is wrong about whether it is sin or not), then if they don't repent, tell it to the other church members so they can join you in calling the person to repentance, then if they don't repent, remove them from membership (excommunication means they are no longer allowed to take communion; it is not shunning, it is a loving act of calling the person back to repentance).

The **purposes** are explained in 1 Corinthians 5 (purity of the church's witness, prevent spreading of sin to others, causing the sinning one to be without the blessing of the church, so they will repent and come back).

The **goal** of discipline is always full and gracious restoration of the repentant sinner.

b) Dealing with liberties (Rom 14; 1 Cor 10:23-33)

Liberties refers to the so-called grey areas of Christian living, e.g. smoking, drinking, secular music, dating, etc. Some churches make rules or put pressure on people to do or not do certain activities. E.g. "Do not attend movies, to avoid the appearance of evil."

Or "Homeschooling is the only way to protect your children from sinful influences."

Or “Abstain from alcohol to avoid temptation to drunkenness and the appearance of associating with drunks.”

Or “Women may not wear a two-piece swimsuit, and men may not wear an earring.”
(these are all real examples I’ve encountered)

The principles are: don’t sin; be wise about avoiding temptation to sin; be sensitive to tempting others to sin; don’t violate your own conscience; don’t bind another person’s conscience with rules that are not explicitly in the Bible.

Sin is what God says is sin, in Scripture, not what man has added to God’s law, so do not go beyond what is written in Scripture (1 Cor 4:6).

But liberty to participate to the glory of God in an activity, should never be used as a cloak for sin (1 Pet 2:16).

Be sensitive to an uninformed conscience of a new or immature believer, and avoid tempting them to return to their life of sin (“cause offense”), or fall into a violation of their consciences (Rom 14; 1 Cor 10:23-33).

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CLASS #3: REFORMED DISTINCTIVES

1. The 5 Solas Of The Reformation

We are Reformed, meaning we teach the doctrines articulated in the Reformation of the 1500s when true believers left the apostate Roman Catholic Church, and Anglican Church, and returned to the biblical teachings and practices of the Apostles and early church.

Sola Scriptura – the Bible is the only authority for doctrine, not Popes and councils (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Sola Fide – Faith alone is what saves us, not faith and external deeds such as confession, communion, baptism, penance, and payment for forgiveness called indulgences, (Eph 2:8-10)

Sola Gracia – Grace is a free gift of God not earned by our merit or behavior (Eph 2:8-10)

Solus Christus – Christ is the only mediator between God and man, not a priest, nor Mary, nor any other dead saints (1 Tim 2:5).

Soli Deo Gloria – We honor God alone, not man (i.e. we do not venerate dead saints, not honor leaders as “His Holiness” or “Father/Pope” (Matt 23:9).

2. The 5 Doctrines of Grace

The doctrines of grace are a hallmark of Reformed theology, and is held by man, but not all Baptists, as well as Presbyterians, Lutherans, Calvinists, and others.

It is associated with some of the most effective evangelism and missionary endeavors in history. Respected historical figures who held to these views include: Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyan, John Newton, John Owen, John Knox, William Carey, William Perkins, William Wilberforce, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, David Brainerd, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, R. C. Sproul, John Piper, John MacArthur, and Steve Lawson (the founding pastor of this church).

a) Total Depravity / Complete Inability

The word “total” refers to the fact that every part of us is affected by sin, our mind, spirit, and body, and thus there is a complete inability of sinners to prepare themselves for salvation.

Rom 3:10-12 teaches that *“there is none righteous ... not even one.”*

1 Cor 2:14 teaches that the unbeliever is “not able” to accept the saving truth:
“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

b) Unconditional Election / Unmerited Grace

“Unconditional election, means that God does not foresee an action or condition on our part that induces Him to save us. Rather, election rests on God’s sovereign decision to save whomever He is pleased to save.”

Eph 1:4-5 *“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...”*

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

All Christians believe that God elected who will be saved; the question is if the election was conditional or unconditional. In other words, did God choose those who made the right decision to accept him, or did he choose people even if they did nothing right?

Did God choose the ones who had a soft heart, who responded rightly, who placed their faith in Christ of their own free will, or did he cause those people to respond rightly, grant them the gift of faith, and cause them to choose him despite their wrong use of their own will?

People do have free will to choose within their nature (a dog has free will whether to bark or not, but it cannot meow or fly or speak English, because it is not in the dog’s nature). In the same way, sinners have free will to choose within their sin nature, but they are not able to choose God, unless he helps them. That way he gets the glory for their choice.

Rom 5:6-8 *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Christ’s salvation is not conditional on us first getting our act together. While we were still helpless, he saved us.

Rom 8:29-30 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those*

whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The same people he foreknew, predestined, and called, he saved, and he makes sure they are glorified in heaven.

Rom 9:10–16 ¹¹*though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹²*she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”* ¹³*As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”* ¹⁴*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!* ¹⁵*For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”* ¹⁶*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.**

So, God’s choice is sovereign, not conditional on our will or our actions. The choice happened before we were born. That way we cannot take credit, but all glory goes to God for our salvation.

c) Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption

All Christians teach that Christ’s atoning work on the cross is limited to believers only—otherwise everyone in the world would be saved. The question is whether Christ died to actually and fully save the church alone, or if he died to potentially enable anyone to be saved, and the final decision is left to the individual, which Christ has no say over.

1 Tim 2:3-4 *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

God also desires that no one ever sin, but his revealed will is not the same as his decreed will, which always happens; so not all people come to the knowledge of the truth, and thus not all people are saved.

1 Tim 4:10 *For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*

Christ is the Savior of all people in one sense, e.g. common grace (Matt 5:45) is available to all people and is achieved by his atonement, but he is the Savior of believers in a special (limited) way, in that he saves them from all their sin for all eternity. This benefit is limited to those who believe, and is not given equally to all people. That’s limited atonement.

d) Irresistible Grace / Effectual Calling

If Christ wants to save an individual, he is able to cause that person to believe, he is able to change their desires so that they choose rightly, desire to submit to Christ's kingship and embrace Christ's offer. The sinner is not able to resist Christ's power to save him.

John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ... 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day... 65 This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

e) Perseverance of the Saints / Eternal Security of Believers

Once a person is a true believer in Christ, that salvation is Christ's responsibility to guard forever. It is not condition to obtain, and it is not conditional to maintain. Christ gave it, and Christ guards it.

John 6:39 *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*

1 Thess 5:23-24 *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

Jude 24 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,*

Rom 8:30 *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

What about people we know were professing believers for a long time and then suddenly "fell away" into apostasy and denied the faith? John gives the answer in ...

1 John 2:19 *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

If you have any questions that you would like addressed before filling out an application form, please feel free to e-mail me directly: archer@cfmobile.org

Soli Deo Gloria!