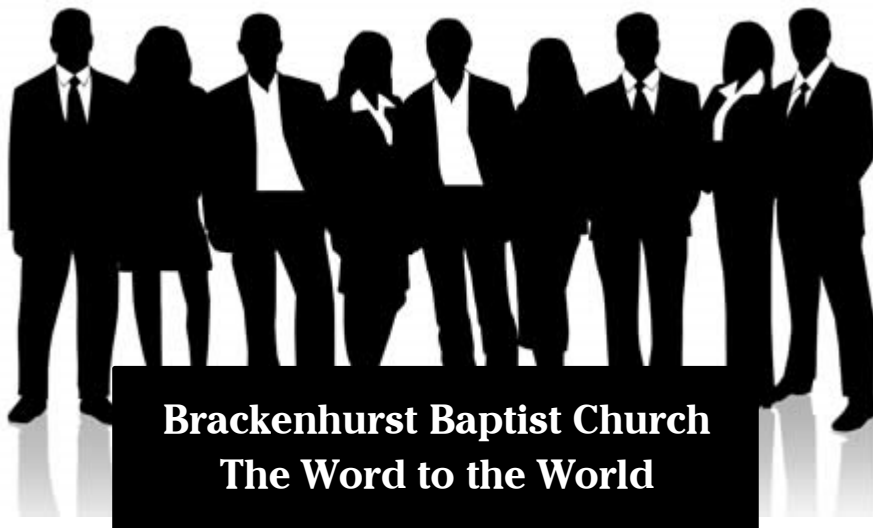




MEANINGFUL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A
HANDBOOK
FOR
PROSPECTIVE
MEMBERS



Brackenhurst Baptist Church
The Word to the World

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased that you have expressed interest in joining the membership of Brackenhurst Baptist Church.

The membership process of BBC involves formal one-on-one discipleship with an existing member of the church. One of the elders will happily arrange for you to be discipled. However, before entering into formal discipleship, we would ask that you read this booklet to understand where you are headed as a prospective church member. We realise that Brackenhurst Baptist Church may not be for everyone, but the ethos presented in this booklet is a fair reflection of who we are and will serve to help you as you make your final decision.

If you have any questions, please feel free to talk to one of the elders.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

A sincere perusal of Scripture reveals that the relationship between the Christian and the church is much more significant than we might realise. In fact, contrary to the practice of many, God not only calls believers to attend church but to bind themselves to a local, Bible-believing congregation in a visible and vital way.

As you proceed through this booklet, you will find a description of what meaningful church membership looks like. However, because the importance of formal church membership is not always assumed in our day and age, we want to begin by establishing the fact that church membership matters—a great deal.

The idea that one can be a Christian and yet *not* be a committed member of a local church is a novelty. It is an idea that has grown in prominence over the past seventy-some years. Before World War II, such an idea was an aberration. However, with a post-war shift to individualism (perhaps arising from the fears of the recent horrors of destructive authoritarianism), there is now a well-entrenched

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scepticism concerning the principle and practice of church membership. Without delving into the many factors behind this development (some helpful resources are recommended at the end of this booklet), we wish simply to present the biblical case that, for the Christian, church membership matters.

Biblical counsellor Jay Adams was once asked at a conference whether the local church should exercise discipline on those who attend but are not members of the church. He caused a stir—but an important one—when he answered, “Of course not: Church discipline is only for Christians!” His point was that it is a given that Christians are identifiable and accountable members of a local congregation. He was affirming the biblical principle that church membership matters.

Of course, many would respond to Jay Adams that the Bible nowhere commands church “membership” and that this is merely a manmade requirement. It is true that there is no text that commands, “You shall join a church.” But the absence of such a statement no more mitigates against church membership than the absence of a command for a husband to live in his home with his wife mitigates against the wise counsel that a husband and wife should share the same home! There is plenty of revelation that, when honestly evaluated, leads to this practice. The same can be said of church membership. Consider the following.

The Body of Christ

The principle of the Body of Christ demands church membership. If the Christian is a member of the Body of Christ organically (see 1 Corinthians 12), then it is fair to conclude that the Christian should be

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a member of the church organisationally. In fact, to claim to be a member of a local church organically and yet to reject an organisational identity is hypocrisy. Such a scenario is more akin to a lifeless and useless amputated arm than it is to a connected and fruitfully functioning one.

The Bride of Christ

The principle of the Bride of Christ gives another motivation for church membership. The believer is married to Christ. This marriage requires loving identity with Him. Many in our day claim that they do not need a marriage license to live together in a committed relationship. But of course they do. In fact, this is actually the ultimate reason why they *refuse* to have a formal, legally recognised ceremony. Without such a formal agreement, one can leave the relationship with impunity—or so they think. Sadly, too many Christians treat the local church little better than a harlot. She is used for what they can get from her but there is little or no commitment to care for her. This may sound harsh, but it is, in fact, the truth.

Church Discipline

The expectation of church discipline (addressed later) also argues for formal church membership. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to the church about a sinning member who needed to be disciplined out of the fellowship. He gave instructions: “*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together ... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*” (vv. 4–5). An obvious question arises: How would they know when they were “*gathered together*”? Would there

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not need to be a recognisable, definable people? Certainly. If you argue against church membership, then logically we should be allowing Christians to go from church to church to participate in their affairs. Of course, that would be ridiculous. Membership matters.

The Task of the Elders

Consider further the task of the elders to “*shepherd the church of God*” (Acts 20:28). This is a responsibility for which the elders will give an account to God (1 Peter 5:1–4). Does this not imply that there is a “definable” group of sheep for whom the under-shepherds are responsible? And is it not legitimate to conclude that they can only be responsible for an identifiable group of people who have willingly and formally submitted themselves to be shepherded? Does this not clearly imply that these Christians have made themselves formally accountable as members of that local church? After all, if membership does not matter, then elders have the impossible task of shepherding every Christian everywhere!

Covenantal Christianity

We could develop this further and argue that the covenantal character of the Christian life demands formal church membership. Christians are in covenantal relationship with God through the new covenant instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are thereby His people because He is our God (Hebrews 8:10). When believers are united by Christ into a local body, they are united in this covenantal relationship to one another. A summary look at the covenants in Scripture leads us to the obvious conclusion that they were publicly

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and formally recognised. The same principle holds for the Christian under the new covenant. Christians are expected to carry out biblically defined covenantal responsibilities in relation to one another. This requires formal accountability. In other words, membership matters. In fact, we can conclude that those who argue against such formal membership simply underscore the reality that, if *everyone* is a member, then in fact *no one* is a member. And if no one is a member, then what's the point?

I understand that many Christians have been hurt by the local church. That is to be lamented. Nevertheless, the solution is not to avoid mutual accountability and reject formal membership. Rather, Christians need to obey the Lord and identify with that which He loves—the church—and help her to be lovelier. A lack of accountability can make life easier. But the Christian is called to a cross, not to comfort. And so if you want to mature as a Christian, then seek meaningful membership in a local church that is seeking to please her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. As you do, you will come to appreciate the biblical principle that membership matters.

ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24–25).

These verses require more than the Christian merely regularly attending worship services, but they do not require less. Believers go to church.

BBC, sadly, is in some ways a *unique* local church. For example, its members are well-known by the eldership and by fellow members. When someone is absent from the services for a significant amount of time (like, say, one or two weeks!) their absence is noticed. It is assumed that church members will be desirous and committed to gathering for corporate worship. This expectation leads to the *expectancy* of engaging in meaningful worship of our God. Though the Sunday evening service has a lower attendance than the morning service, the difference is not significant. Further, our Sunday evening prayer meeting is attended by, on average, 30–40% of the adult

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membership. Though this is not nearly what we would like to see ultimately, we are encouraged by this growing commitment to corporate prayer.

We regularly observe the Lord's Supper (in our case, usually three out of four Sundays per month). Normally this is held in the evening—for a couple of reasons. *First*, we believe that this ordinance should be prioritised. An effort is therefore called for to participate in this meal. In an age of drive-through fast food, we are seeking to savour this significant Supper. *Second*, Communion was instituted as a *Supper* rather than a *breakfast!* The meal was instituted “*on the same night in which He was betrayed*” (1 Corinthians 11:23).

Perhaps another unique practice is that BBC does not acknowledge the category of “adherents.” Rather, we emphasise church *membership*. And so if one is not undergoing the membership process, then attendees are viewed as visitors. Some have been visiting for decades.

Our midweek small group meetings—Grace Groups—take place at various times during the week. The overwhelming majority of our membership is meaningfully committed to these.

All of the above combine as the Scriptural norm for Christians. In other words, the biblical norm for Christians is *meaningful church membership*. Yes, the biblical instruction to believers highlights that *assembling is required*. And, unlike the false advertisements of many toys, the Bible makes it clear that *much* assembling is required.

This is the intentional ethos that, as a congregation, we have for decades sought to inculcate. Jesus, who is the final and the fullest revelation of the Father (Hebrews 1:1–2), *commands* us to be intentional and committed members of His local church (Hebrew 10:19–25). And those who love Jesus are motivated to keep His

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commandments (John 14:15). We therefore are committed to gathering with one another.

In Hebrews 10 the writer is simply reiterating the common biblical teaching that the Christian is not a lone ranger. Rather, he or she draws near to God *corporately* as well as individually. To change the metaphor, an isolated sheep is not a healthy sheep. When professing sheep separate themselves from the flock, we can legitimately conclude that some disease is at work (Proverbs 18:1).

In an age characterised by individualism, church membership is not a welcome practice. Some see it as intrusive and legalistic, while others view it as a needless relic of the past. But neither attitude is biblical and therefore neither attitude is healthy. Again, to neglect or refuse church membership is not a sign of health; it is rather an indication of spiritual illness. BBC aspires to be healthy. We desire the best for God's people. A committed and communing congregation is our Christ-driven passion. And this requires assembling.

We are always blessed to hear when someone is considering BBC as their potential church home. But someone desiring to become a member of BBC should understand that we expect nothing less than what Christ expects of *His* church. The revelation of His expectations is found throughout the New Testament.

Just as under the old covenant God had rules to govern the lives of His people, so He does under the new covenant. The rules are to be individually obeyed in the context of a corporately caring and communing congregation of disciples of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that, among other biblical expectations, the community of faith of BBC assumes that those who become members will behave like members. For instance, they will be characterised by relational connection rather than as an isolated (amputated) appendage of the

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Body. Let me repeat: It is assumed that church members will assemble with other members.

Members will expectantly assemble for the corporate worship services on the Lord Day—morning and evening. Church members will gladly gather for Family Bible Hour. Church members will be happily committed to intentionally connect their children to the church by various means, including involvement in the various children's and youth ministries. There is the expectation that church members will purposefully assemble with others in a Grace Group. It is assumed, in other words, that those who profess love for the Lord will love what He loves (Ephesians 5:25). And, like Jesus, they will love the church "*to the end*" (John 13:1). Through thick and thin, members of BBC will persevere *with* and *in* this community of faith.

If this sounds intense to you, then you have the biblical sense of what being a church member requires. But this intensity is in the context of being *intentional* to love and to follow Christ. And there is no greater way to live. So, if BBC is your desired church family, then be *encouraged* that much assembling is required.

COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

The uniform teaching throughout the New Testament is that the Lord's Supper is reserved for disciples of Christ. By biblical definition that means that the person has been baptised upon a credible profession of faith and is walking in fellowship with the Lord. It also means by extension that such an individual is a member of a local church. In other words, disciples of Jesus Christ are baptised members of a local church who gather around the Lord's truth and the Lord's Table.

The Lord's Supper is commonly referred to as "Communion." This is a special word that conjures images of closeness and intimacy; it evokes the idea of *relationship*. It is significant that it was in association with this meal that John "*leaned on [Jesus'] breast*" (John 21:20). It is a meal of deep spiritual and relational significance. At this meal we hear, as it were, God affirming His covenant with us. We are reminded that we are His people and that He is our God. Therefore, to claim that you are Christian and yet consistently reject the Supper offered by the Saviour is absurd. It is wrongheaded in its thinking,

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hypocritical in its testimony, and perhaps ultimately damning in the end.

Baptism likewise is an ordinance that the Christian and the local church is to take seriously. It, like Communion, is *not* an option.

Every case of a conversion in the book of Acts involved the same four elements: *repentance* from sin, *belief* in the Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed in *baptism*, accompanied by the indwelling of the *Holy Spirit*. For one therefore to claim to be a Christian and yet refuse to be baptised is clearly contrary to the biblical norm and expectation.

As a local church, we are persuaded that the Lord has mandated baptism by immersion of the professing Christian. It is for this reason that no one is admitted as a member of the church apart from such obedience. But we must be clear here: Going through the motions may get you wet, and it may lead to your name being on the membership list, but it is no guarantee that you are a Christian.

It is tragic to witness those who have proved to have been only “lying in the water”—in more ways than one.

Our baptisms include a series of questions, culminating in the individual publicly professing to follow the Lord as His faithful disciple. But how sad it is when an individual, having been covered with water (symbolising death) subsequently disappears, rarely to be seen again. To treat one’s profession of Christ as Lord with such contempt can be damning. For even though such a person may not be taking the Lord seriously, nevertheless the Lord takes them seriously. He will hold them accountable for every idle word, including the idle word of an empty confession (Matthew 12:36).

The point to be emphasised, both with the Lord’s Supper and baptism, is that these ordinances are about “connection,” they are about a covenantal confession and commitment. And since they are

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carried out in the context of the local church, they are about the “communion of the saints.” To refuse to exercise these means of grace is to reject Christ and His Body. At the risk of being misunderstood, the local church is washed together and dines together. As a congregation, our desire is to foster such communion of the saints. In fact, when church members ignore such relational gifts, we grow deeply concerned.

Now, I can almost hear the cacophony of accusations of “legalism”! But let’s not be so quick. The Bible clearly teaches that one’s profession of faith is evidenced by works. Without Holy Spirit-produced works we can conclude that faith is dead (James 2:26). And so, if there is no meaningful (as defined by Scripture) expression of the communion of the saints, we might be wise to be suspicious about a profession of faith. Faith *works*. And therefore faith *worships*—in communion with the saints.

When a wife/mother prepares a meal for the family, it is rude to deliberately refuse to gather to partake. In my home, there are times when a family member is unable to be at the meal due to some other responsibility. But I can’t think of a single time when notice was *not* given. In fact, in most cases, real and thoughtful effort is made to be in attendance for the supper. Yet far too many Christians treat the Lord’s Supper with less respect than they would for their family meals.

At BBC, the expectation is that church members will honour the Lord, as well His brothers and sisters, and pitch up—well-washed—for the meal. We only admit to the Table those who are baptised, and who give evidence that they are committed to being washed *together* by the Word, as a member of a local church. In other words,

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communion is *for* the saints; it is an expression of the communion of the saints.

If someone professes to be saved and yet is not hungry for the meal prepared by the Lord, then something is seriously wrong with their appetite. They evidently are not spiritually healthy and require help. And it is this health to which BBC is deeply committed. As a congregation, we are hungry together and we help together that we might be healthy and truly happy (“blessed”) *together*.

Sadly, there are far too many churches that are quite content with a membership that is fairly careless and therefore neglectful of membership privileges and attendant responsibilities. The result is a “bunch” rather than a body. But only a body can truly appreciate and experience the communion of the saints. For those looking for a carefree membership with little or no expectation, you truly do not know what you are missing. There is nothing like biblical and therefore meaningful fellowship.

As Christians partner together in the local church for worshipful service, they will increasingly appreciate that the ordinances prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ are *not* ordinary. In fact, a proper appreciation of both baptism and the Lord’s Supper is an extraordinary blessing when observed in the context of the communion of the saints.

HUMILITY, HEARING AND HEALING

Church discipline is God's gift to the church for the maturity of her members and the purity of her body. Matthew 18 requires that those who refuse to submit to church discipline are to be treated as unbelievers, that is, those who are outside of God's community of grace.

Matthew 18 is a chapter about saving fellow Christians. The chapter starts with Jesus' disciples wanting to know, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (v. 1). Their motive for the question seems to be personal glory: How can I get the spotlight onto *me*? How can I be the *most* important, the *most* respected, the *most* admired? How can I satisfy my ungodly appetite for being the *greatest*?

Jesus answers with a practical illustration. He calls a child into their midst. "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (vv. 2–3). It seems like a contradiction: The smallest is the greatest.

The point that Jesus is making is that little children can't make it on their own in this world. They are intensely dependent on others to

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survive and find satisfaction. “Independence” would destroy them. God’s grownup children are no different. We need the help of others and they need us. One particular area in which we need help with is our war against sin. Sin has the power to destroy and we could either push others towards destruction, for which there is a grave warning (v. 6), or we could save them from destruction. Saving them is what Jesus talks about next.

Christians, like children are naturally prone to do foolish things. Some of our behaviour, if not stopped, may eventually lead to our destruction. Christians, like children, need others who care enough to intervene when they pursue harmful activities.

In vv. 7–9, Jesus instructs us to deal severely with our own sin to avoid bringing ultimate harm to ourselves. However, in this grave process, we should not be alone. When fellow Christians see us sin, they should care enough to save us (v. 15). We need each other to bring us back to a place of safety (vv. 12–14).

Confrontation is painful to both those on the giving and the receiving end: “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). The pain involved, sadly, often prompts us to rather preserve our own popularity than preserve the lives of others through selfless love. Exposing sin is awkward and painful, but if we can see the value of it, we will not avoid the encounter.

A further problem with Christians, like children, is that we do not always hear after the first painful confrontation. Despite the real threat that sin holds, we do not necessarily see the danger, even when someone else points it out. Love covers over a multitude of sins—but only those that have been dealt with (James 5:19–20). If

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there is a prideful unwillingness to confess and deal with sin then it needs to be exposed. “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). If someone does not take personal responsibility for his sin, either by downplaying it or blaming others, we need to try harder to make them hear; we need to make them feel more pain. The pain is increased by telling one or two others and taking them along to confront the sinner. We do not increase pain because we have run out of patience or our love has run dry; on the contrary, pain is a severe expression of love: “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (v. 15). Following this, if he does not want to listen, the whole congregation needs to be informed of the matter.

Should this step be unsuccessful in producing repentance, the next step must be to isolate the person from fellowship. “Isolation”—that is, withdrawal of fellowship—is the final step to inflict pain. Although this may seem harsh, we need to remember that this is *God’s* prescription to secure the benefit of the person acknowledging his or her sin and then repenting. Such repentance results in reconciliation. But it also serves another important purpose: In the Old Testament, isolation was meant to prevent spreading of physical and spiritual disease. When Paul calls the Corinthian church to address those who are guilty of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, revilement, drunkenness, or swindling, he borrows a phrase used often in Deuteronomy: “Purge the evil person from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:13). The message is clear: The church should deliberately avoid conversation with unrepentant sinners—conversation, that is, which implies that all is well. We are not helping the sick by declaring them to be well.

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The final step is painful but not without hope. Some believers will respond by listening and then we need to forgive them. Peter asks Jesus about this in v. 21: How often do we need to forgive? Jesus shows how quickly and comprehensively the process of discipline can come to an end: As soon as the sin is repented of, the record is wiped clean, not just seven times but seventy times seven times (or seven times in one day, according to Luke 17:4). Even if the fellow-believer sins repeatedly, if he earnestly confesses his sin, the record is clean, and the process is stopped. If the sinner humbles himself like a child and acknowledges his dependence on God and others, forgiveness is complete.

Jesus encourages His followers by fully endorsing this step: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (vv. 18–19).

To summarise then: To attain greatness, we need to humble ourselves to become like children. Children are dependent on others for their survival and joy. We need each other’s help because of our proneness to sin. Since sin is destructive and may eventually lead to our eternal condemnation, we need to deal severely with our own sin. When we see our brother sin, we need to lovingly pursue him, even if we need to go to great lengths to do so. We need to care enough to confront. If he hears us, we have all gained as he is brought back to safety. If he won’t listen, we need to take one or two others along to speak to him. If he still won’t listen then we need to tell it to the congregation. If he still won’t listen, he needs to be treated as an outsider. If, however, he at any stage repents, we need to forgive him completely. It is this God-prescribed humility that heals.

ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

The strength of the church of Jesus Christ lies in the ministry of its members. Every member of our local church should be a minister. “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Every believer in Jesus Christ has partaken of God’s saving grace and should therefore be involved in the ministry of working out this grace towards other believers and towards the lost world.

This final section has nothing to do with Pink Floyd; its focus is an entirely more significant Rock Group: the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 2:1–10 the apostle writes to some scattered believers who were undergoing severe trials in order to encourage them to persevere *in* and *for* Christ. The theme of this letter is suffering to the glory of God. Like rocks, they were to be immovable.

As Peter writes he is concerned that his readers realise their enormous privileges in Christ; and that their “inheritance” would serve them well as they faced suffering for their faith.

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Things were heating up in the early 60s, and soon Nero would morph into a madman exerting his arrogant fury on the church. Peter wanted these Christians to know that they should continue to identify with Jesus Christ who, though He was rejected by men, was chosen of God to be the Saviour of the world and the Head of the church (2:1-4). It is in this context that Peter reminds believers that they are significant “living stones” whom God has chosen and personally shaped to fit perfectly into the church He is building. They were significant bricks in this temple of God; a temple that would stand throughout eternity.

This passage (vv. 4-10) would have been particularly meaningful to Gentile Christians, for Peter was making it clear that they were *meaningful* members of God’s temple. This privilege of being the dwelling place of God was not limited to Jewish believers but was the privilege of *all* believers. They were “living stones” who, like their Jewish brothers and sisters, *mattered*.

Every Christian, and therefore every church member (since, as we have seen, the New Testament knows nothing of Christians who are not church members), is personally chosen by God as a “living stone” in the temple that Christ is building. And each one uniquely matters. We each have unique gifts that, when bonded to other bricks, make for a beautiful temple to the glory of God.

Note that Christians are “living” or “lively” stones. When Titus destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD the *true* temple was actually unscathed. The “dead stones” that Herod had used in the building of that historic structure were pulled to the ground, never to rise again. But the *church* of Jesus Christ, the *temple* of God, was alive and well; and from 70 AD beyond it would continue to be built up by the life-giving gospel through the power of God. This is precisely what

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Peter is saying in this passage. He is encouraging his readers that they are a part of a world-impacting structure, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as “living stones,” each believer has the privileged responsibility to “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5).

In continuity with the old covenant temple, our sacrifices are to be acceptable (as defined by God’s Word), but in *contrast* to the old covenant, our sacrifices are offered through the glorious and perfect High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage speaks to several issues, including God’s free and sovereign grace in choosing us to be bricks in the wall. Every time someone is born again, we are witnessing God adding another brick to the wall. Every time we heartily “amen” the embracing of a new member at BBC we are observing God’s grace in adding to another brick to our walls locally. And every brick in the wall has a significant purpose to be lovingly and devotedly fulfilled in our congregation.

But we must ask, what do bricks *do*? Well, for one thing, they increase the height of the wall, thus giving added protection from enemies without. Further, each brick is essential for holding up the roof, thus giving strength to what is being built. And with the addition of each brick the structure inches closer to completion. So it is with the local church and the “living stones” that God, the Master Architect, so intentionally and deliberately shapes for the building up of His church.

Every “living stone” is placed in the church for the purpose of further strengthening the local church and protecting her from the world, the flesh and the devil. Each new brick in the wall is added by God to bring His work that much nearer to completion. Each new church member is given for the purpose of the church being built up

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as an increasingly worshipping people. After all, was that not the purpose for the physical temple?

We need to see that every church member is to be a living member—an active one—not a passive spectator. And so ask yourself, “Am I actively participating in the building up of my local church?” Further, ask, “Am I a living stone or merely a dead weight?” That is important to consider.

In many segments of the church today, church membership is approached with less conviction than is membership of the Rotary Club. Secular clubs often require more from their members than do many local churches. If one becomes a member of such a club, there is the expectation that the member will attend meetings and engage in the various activities that are part and parcel of the organisation’s purpose and ethos. If a member fails to participate, suspension of membership is enacted until the situation is rectified.

Unfortunately, in many churches this is rarely the practice, and those who buck this complacent trend and follow up expectation with accountability are deemed to be “unloving,” “legalistic” or “pharisaical.”

BBC is blessed in that its membership is largely *active*—that is, *present* and *participative*. This is the biblical norm for church members. There is no such thing as an inactive church member. You cannot call yourself a church member but refuse to engage in what the church has to offer. You cannot call yourself a church member but do nothing to build relationships, or refuse to serve and thus support the corporate program of the church. If this describes you, you are not an “inactive” church member; you are a non-member who chooses to attend. An inactive church member is a contradiction in terms.

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Sadly, many churches recognise as members those who rarely darken the door of the church or who have no active relationship with the body of Christ. In fact, these two categories (inactive versus active members) *may* speak to two very different spiritual conditions. And this highlights the eternal importance of how we view membership in the church.

The New Testament's various mandates, metaphors and examples clearly indicate that the only kind of church member is an active one. Our Lord calls upon His sheep to engage in fellowship with the flock and to reproduce other sheep (discipleship) as they fervently serve the Lord. Every member of the body will manifest the reality of their relationship with Christ by exercising (another *active* word) their gifts for the glory of God, and this will be worked out, largely, in connection with the local church. This is the responsibility—indeed, the privilege—of the church member.

One of the strengths of BBC over the years has been its commitment to meaningful church membership. This includes, but is not confined to, church members who faithfully attend our Lord's Day gatherings, morning and evening. It includes meaningful participation in our Grace Groups. It also involves the ministering to one another. In other words, as we use God's Word as our plumb line, we aim to be a church filled with members who are living stones. Such is to be our biblical expectation each time that we see God adding another brick to our walls.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

For those wanting some deeper consideration into the principle of church membership, the following resources are recommended:

Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012)—208 pages (also available in Kindle format)

Jay E. Adams, *The Place of Authority in Christ's Church* (Stanley: Timeless Texts, 2003)—81 pages

Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010)—384 pages (also available in Kindle format)

Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Family of God* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004)—144 pages

Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008)—128 pages (also available in Kindle format)

CHURCH COVENANT

BBC's church covenant is a document outlining the biblical principles of behaviour expected from members of the church. Each member of the church is required to sign the covenant, thereby committing themselves before God and the local church to live according to the principles outlined therein.

Further, by signing the covenant each member asks the church to help hold them accountable to live in accordance with their commitment.

The issue of a church covenant can be contentious. Some have been quick to point out that formal covenants are nowhere to be found in Scripture. While it is true that the practice of signing a church covenant is not clearly shown in Scripture, the principle of submission to a particular local church and the God-ordained leaders of that church is, as we have seen, quite plain. A church covenant simply crystallises in short the type of behaviour that the church (under Christ) expects from each of its members.

The covenant of Brackenhurst Baptist Church reads as follows:

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Having been brought, we trust, by the Spirit of God to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and to give up ourselves to Him; and having been baptised upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we now, relying on His gracious aid, in the presence of God, the angels and this assembly, do solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

- We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- We will walk together in brotherly love, desiring to exercise an affectionate care and prayerful watchfulness over each other, faithfully admonishing and entreating one another as occasion may require; seeking to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportments; strive to avoid anything that could bring unwarranted harm to the Body or jeopardise our own or the faith of another.
- We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, eager to make productive use of the means of grace.
- We will endeavour to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.
- We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavour with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.
- We will seek, by Divine aid, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried

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by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

- We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.



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