

**Sermon Series:** 4 Stakes to Strengthen

**Sermon title:** Church Membership

**Scripture:** Romans 12:3-8

Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church

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Well, we are looking at church strategy and specifically we are envisioning our church like a tent.

We looked at 5 cords of ministry that we need to stretch out a bit and now we are looking at 4 tent stakes that we need to strengthen a bit. Tap in a bit.

**The 4 stakes to strengthen are:**

1. Church Leadership (Elders and Deacons)
2. Church Membership (today)
3. Church Stewardship (next week)
4. Church polity (We won't preach on but it means our church documents and statement of faith).

**Introduction:**

Today, as we look at Church Membership. Church Membership is a confusing thing.

The whole term 'membership' is borrowed from scriptures like we just read in Romans...where Paul uses the language of the human body and says that just as a human body has parts or members so also the church has parts or members.

But since we have ‘memberships’ to Costco or to the Jockey Club or to a gym or to a tennis club....the ideas of those types of ‘memberships’ tend to bleed over and define what church membership is.

So, perhaps the term membership is confusing or has lost its meaning a bit. I will try to redefine it later to help us out.

I want to be very methodical and as clear as possible. So, before we begin..

**let’s pray together.**

As we begin let me give you 3 questions that we want to answer.

- 1. Is Church Membership biblical?**
- 2. What does Meaningful Membership in a local church look like?**
- 3. Why should I commit to a local church?**

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So, let’s begin with the 64,000 dollar question.

**1. Is Church Membership biblical?**

Is it in the Bible?

We don’t have a verse that says “you must sign a card and join a church” in the Bible....

but church membership is so assumed in the Bible that we tend to overlook it. It is there under the surface.

So, let me give you a few ways we see it.

**First**, we see it in **church discipline**.

Church discipline is in the Bible...meaning someone being kicked out of a church...excommunicated...and you can't kick someone out if they aren't in to begin with.

Look at **1 Corinthians 5** we have an issue in the church where a man is in sin and Paul writes in **verse 2** that he should be **“removed from among you”** and in **verse 12** it says **“purge the evil person from among you.”**

And in verse 12..(in context) Paul says that we are to judge those inside the church and not outside the church.

**So, the church has to have some kind of idea of who is in and who is not in.**

Now, interestingly enough in **2 Corinthians 2:6** Paul writes again in relation to this guy who sinned and now says this: **‘this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him.’**

So, what we see from this discipline case is that the church in Corinth not only knew who was in and who was out but they actually had a majority vote by the church.

That can't happen unless they had some kind of church "membership".

Jesus himself mentioned this in **Matthew 18:15-17**  
**15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

Now, when Jesus says 'tell it to the church', do you think he means every believer in Hong Kong?

Does he mean to tell a person's sin to the universal church on the planet?

So, the Bible in church discipline issues speaks to church membership because we have to know who is a part or member of us and who is not.

**Secondly**, we see membership in passages dealing with **church leadership**.

**Hebrews 13:17** says “**Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.**”

**1 Peter 5** says that the Elders are to shepherd and oversee “**those in their charge**” and “**when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**”

The leaders of a local church will have to give an account for their flock!

**Question:** Who will I give an account for?

Every visitor?

Every person who comes in the door?

Am I accountable before God for the believes who attend Island ECC? or KIBC?

No, I am accountable for the members of CBIBC.  
Those who have united with this fellowship.

**Thirdly**, we see church membership in the Bible’s commands for **mutual responsibility to one another.**

This is the strongest support for church membership.

The Bible contains about 43 one another passages.

Who are we to ‘one another’? Every believer in Hong Kong? Every believer in the world?

Let's look at some of them.

**John 13:34**- just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

**Romans 12:10**- Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.  
[Both of Greek words denote a family relationship]

**Galatians 6:2**- Bear one another's burdens.

**Ephesians 4:32**- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Ephesians 5:19**- addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Colossians 3:13**- endure one another and if anyone has a complaint against one another, forgiving one another as the Lord has forgiven you.

**Hebrews 3:13**- Exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

**Hebrews 10:24**- Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet

together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

**James 5:16-** Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

Now, how in the world can we obey the commands to “one another”.....if the scripture is meaning we have to do with to every believer on the planet?  
Or the whole city?

These **COMMANDS** are what believers are to obey within their local church.

So, church membership is in the Bible.

We see it in relation to:

- **Church Discipline issues**, who is in and who's not.
- **Church Leader's responsibility before God-** being held accountable for their specific flock requires that they know who is in their flock and who isn't.
- **Believer's responsibility before God to one another**...one another can only happen in the context of a local church.

## **2. What does meaningful membership look like?**

I think the best way to answer this is to give you a definition,

my definition that I have come up with by chewing on this and looking at other's definitions and trying to simplify and clarify it for us.

**Church Membership is a covenant between a group of local believers who are committed to 'one another' one another.**

Let's break this down a bit.

It's a **covenant**.

It's a *partnership* between a person and a group of believers. It's *mutual*. You are *agreeing* to *belong* to this church, support this church and serve the people in this church....and the church is *committing* to care and love and 'one another' you and watch over your soul.

It's a two way street.

It's between **a group of local believers**.

A person can't obey the one another passages with a group of people in another country or another city or a church they don't attend on a regular basis.

You can't love, forgive, confess sin to, bear burdens with, encourage, spur one another on and pray for one another...if you never see or spend time with those people.

Your official church membership should be with the people you worship with.



## **Committed.**

There are various reasons why commitment is hard for people.

Fear is probably the most common.

Fear of losing free time.

Fear of the church asking me to do things.

Fear of authority.

Fear of having to give up some of my money to the church.

Fear of people getting to know me.

Instead of asking whether church membership is biblical, we should ask “**Is it biblical to be COMMITTED to a church?**”

Instead of asking what does church membership mean, we should probably ask,

“What does it mean to commit to a local church?”

**Because church membership is about commitment!**

Committing to a group of people.

Committing to give of myself.

Committing to let others speak into my life.

Committing to be faithful to attend and not skip out when I want to travel or sleep in or hike or go swimming.

Committing to ‘one another’ one another!

So, here’s a definition for you....

**Church Membership is a covenant between a group of local believers who are committed to 'one another' one another.**

Lastly,

**3. Why should I be a church member? Or why should I commit to a local church?**

Firstly, because **YOU NEED IT** desperately.

Don't fool yourself.

Don't be naive.

You need others.

You need others to one another you!

You need others to be in your face.

Don't hide.

Don't hide behind busyness. Stop giving excuses.

**YOU.....NEED..... OTHERS.**

**Hebrews 3:12-14** says “**2 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**

The remedy for falling into sin and the help you need to be faithful to the end.....is given here.....

it is “**exhort one another**”.

Commit to a church so that the church can ‘one another’ you.

Secondly, because **WE NEED YOU** desperately.

Did you know that if you’re a Christian that you have gifts by the Holy Spirit that some church needs.

So there’s a church somewhere that is dismembered, walking around without an eye or without a leg.

**Romans 12:4-6** says, “**For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, LET US USE THEM.**”

So, in conclusion.... **Church Membership is a covenant between a group of local believers who are committed to ‘one another’ one another.**

Where’s your church membership? Is it here? If not, why not? [**PAUSE**]

Are you seeing church membership as a covenant..a two way street...where you need the church and the church needs you?

Are you committed to “one another...one another” here in this group called CBIBC?

We need you to do that.  
And we need to do that for you.