

# We are Baptists

## Saved Church Membership

**Acts 2:47** *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

### Introduction

When I think of memberships, I think about being part of a community who hold to the same values and philosophies that I do. To be a member of any group is to form a commitment with that group that not only opens up certain privileges, but also protects the community from problems. Membership is generally open to anyone who wants to be a part of the group. Membership is not about keeping people out, but about revealing who is really committed.

Understanding that memberships are more about who is committed than who is left out, we can see the importance of being a member. For instance, we do not stop people from attending Central Baptist Church services. Anyone is welcome to attend our services without being a member. Once someone has been attending and we have 2-3 families interested, I usually hold a class called *Discovering Church Membership*. In this class, I explain what it means to be a member of Central Baptist Church. Our number one requirement for being a member is that they are saved. A person must possess a testimony of salvation before they will be accepted into the membership. Next, they must be baptized. Once these two requirements are met, a person presents themselves for membership, and the church votes to accept them. At that time, they understand what our doctrines, philosophy, and structure are all about and agree that they align with our beliefs. We do not force people to join our church; it is totally voluntary! The requirements to join are the same for everyone. We do not discriminate in any way. If you meet the requirements, then you are accepted. It is that simple.

Once they are a member, we allow them to participate in ways that non-members are not allowed. For instance, we allow them to teach our children. Why would anyone want a non-member who has no commitment to your church or doctrine to teach your children? It would be like me trying to work the cash register at Walmart without being an employee. My skills working at a cash register are irrelevant. The problem is that I am not a part of the employee team.

Members are able to vote or hold an office in the church. Again, why would you want or allow anyone to hold an important position if they were not committed to the organization? This would be foolishness. I would never allow a practicing

Muslim to teach my kids or be a deacon. So then, why would I allow anyone who is not a member to have a voice in our church or a position of leadership? Membership is important to show a person's commitment. There is no greater membership requirement than salvation. It is the foundation of the church, and every member must be saved to be a called a member.

Let's investigate this Baptist distinctive and see just how important it is!

## I. Only Believers are Members

- A. Saved Church Membership means only **saved** people should be a member of a local church.
- B. While many churches do not require a salvation testimony to be a member of the church, **Baptists** have always required it.
- C. Church membership includes several **requirements**.
  1. Salvation **testimony**
    - A clear understanding of what salvation is and a time when that person recalls putting their faith in Jesus Christ.
  2. **Baptism** after salvation
    - a. By immersion
    - b. In a Baptist church
    - c. Often a person is asked to be rebaptized if they are coming from a non-Baptist church (see notes on We are Baptist-Baptism)
  3. Church **vote**.
    - The church then accepts the candidate into the church by an open vote. This is not voting them to be saved. Voting means to accept them into membership because of their public testimony of salvation and baptism.
  4. Transfer of **letter**
    - Baptist churches will also accept members by a transfer of letter from another Baptist church that affirms that they were members in good standing.

## 5. **Statement** of faith

- On rare occasions where the church a person is transferring from has closed, the church will accept a statement of faith from that candidate. In other words the person will give a testimony of salvation and confirm that they were baptized in a Baptist church and then the church will accept them. Since people don't normally lie to get into church, we accept their word as a believer.

## II. **All Believers should be a Member**

- A. Not only do Baptists believe in a saved membership, but we also believe that membership is **important**.
- B. Why should you be a member of the church?

*Thus, Baptists believe that only saved persons should be members of a church. Baptists also believe that saved ought to be members of a church. While becoming a Christian is an individual response of faith, growing as a Christian is enhanced by fellowship with other Christians. The Christian life was designed not as a solo endeavor but as a fellowship experience, with a church being the primary fellowship. (baptistdistinctives.org)*

1. Christ died for the church. If it is important to Him, it should be important to us! (*Ephesians 5:25*)
2. We are stronger together! (*Ecc. 4:9-12, Ephesians 4:16*)
3. We have been gifted to edify the church.
  - Why would God give us spiritual gifts for the church if He did not want us to be a part of a local church? That would make no sense at all! (*1 Corinthians 12-14*)

### III. The Attack on Saved Church Membership

The ideal of a believers' church consistently appears in Baptist confessions of faith. Baptist theologians, pastors, and other leaders through the centuries have held up no other model than that of a born-again church fellowship. While that is the ideal, is this the reality?

#### A. Evidence of a **falling** away from this doctrine

- The distinguished Baptist historian William R. Estep stated, "Baptists in the United States are perilously close to losing their insistence upon a regenerate church membership."
  - Other observers of Baptist life agree with Estep and cite as evidence for this conclusion such factors as the huge number of non-resident Baptist church members and the characteristics of many resident members with their lack of involvement in church life, a low level of financial support, little commitment to evangelism, missions and ministry, and a life style obviously contrary to the teachings of Jesus.
  - *Of course, some of these factors may be the result of conditions other than an unregenerate condition, such as being "backslidden" or perhaps immature as a Christian (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Ephesians 4:11-16). And certainly, numerous church members are wonderfully dedicated followers of Christ. Yet it would seem that these factors would not exist in such abundance if members of churches were truly born again.*  
(baptistdistinctives.org)
1. The lack of commitment by many members of today's Baptist churches causes concern if those members are really believers.
  2. Rampant backsliding is causing a lack of commitment and Christian service.
  3. The lack of real commitment is having an impact on the church.

#### B. What are the factors contributing to the **decline** of this doctrine as a mandate for membership?

1. A growing **tolerance** for sin in our culture.

- We are told not to judge people and so the attitude among believers has shifted to a point that many don't think we have a right to question someone's salvation. Although judging can be a sin, we must also realize the necessity of requiring proof for one's statements. In other words, a person's actions must accompany their statement.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

- a. We have denied people membership over known open sin!
  - b. We are all sinners that is for sure. However, when someone claims to be a believer and yet has an obvious sin that is condemned in the Bible and is refusing to repent, then that person is denied membership.
  - c. We practice church discipline in order to keep a pure church as much as possible. You do not normally see this process as it rarely ends up in the last step of church removal.
2. Present day church **growth** books are de-emphasizing this doctrine.
    - a. In order to reach as many people as possible churches are more focused on numbers than true salvation.
    - b. Getting people in the church, rather than getting people saved has become the predominant philosophy.

#### **IV. Why Saved Church Membership matters**

- A. It keeps the church as **pure** as possible.
  1. Although everyone is welcome to attend, requiring church members to be saved helps keep the church as pure as possible. A believer will have a conscience and want to repent of sin. This attitude will keep the church holy and allow the Holy Spirit of God to use the church to make an impact on the lives of the lost.

2. When sin is predominant in a church then the light of that church becomes dim.
  3. Lost people naturally sin. If the church is full of unregenerate people, it will change into a worldly place of religion.
- B. It fosters a **fellowship** where real Christian growth is possible!
- C. It protects the church from **errors**.
1. Doctrinal errors. If a lost person is involved, then they will come from a humanistic point of view instead of a biblical worldview. This will distort true doctrine and cause many errors in the church.
  2. Decisional errors. A man not led by the Holy Spirit will not make spiritual decisions. They will make worldly decisions without the authority of the Word of God!
  3. An unsaved person will not fully understand the Scriptures and thus will not promote or live by the doctrines. 1 Cor. 2:14
- D. It protects the church from **division**.
1. Amos 3:3 is clear that unless people are on the same page, they will have division.
  2. If a person is not saved and grows into leadership, they can be used by Satan to destroy the church.

## V. **Conclusion**

- A. Baptists have long held that salvation is a pre-requisite for membership!
- B. All believers should be a member of a local church!
- C. This doctrine protects the church from being ruled by unbelievers or losing its effectiveness.