

Church Membership:

Today we talk about the importance of church membership. To be a *believer in Jesus* means so much *more than just believing*, it also *means belonging*. Remember the definition of the word church; called out ones. We are called out of the world to be part of the family of God. God's word teaches us that it is our responsibility to join with and actively participate in a local body of believers known as the church. It is within that context that believers join in corporate worship, study the scriptures, live out the biblical instructions regarding ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of other believers, and where they submit themselves to one another and hold each other accountable in their walk of faith. The local church is a group of people; not a building, denomination, or activity. All through the NT the apostle Paul directed most of his letters to specific local churches in specific cities or regions.

At this point it may be important for us to understand what I mean by "member"? A member is somebody who, by signature or a word of commitment or promise, says, "I'm committed to a people, a people who hear the word of God preached, a people who perform the ordinances that Jesus gave to His church (baptism and the Lord's Supper), and a people who commit to the 'one anothering' commandments (love each other, exhort each other, admonish each other, hold each other accountable)." Those commitments are what membership is all about.

You see the difference between being an attender and a member is the difference between living together and being married. A lot of people want to date the church, but they don't want the responsibilities of commitment. That is spiritual adultery. In membership just as in marriage we are saying even if we are having difficulties today you can be assured of my love and I WILL be here tomorrow to work through this together. You can count on me in good times and bad. It's within the church that we grow spiritually. We are committed together for the long haul just as in marriage.

Membership is an act of commitment, not conformity. It's about belonging to God's family and being a contributor and not just a consumer. My heart as we move forward is to raise our expectations to the level where the cultural norm in our church is one that believers would pursue membership and the responsibilities that come with it.

Heb 13:17; Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow.

NLT

When I read this I must ask myself two questions: first, if there is no biblical requirement to belong to a local church, then which leaders should an individual Christian obey and

submit to? Second, and more personally, who will I as a pastor give an account for? It seems obvious to me that we must be part of a church.

It's very hard to do what the Bible calls a church to do unless it knows who its members are and who they aren't. If there is no understanding of local church membership, then who are we to submit to and obey?

Heb 10:24-25; Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

NLT

Right here we see the evidence for change in the church. Think of new ways to motivate one another. The same things that motivated me yesterday don't motivate me today. The same God, same Holy Spirit, same scriptures but they are ever changing as we grow in our knowledge and understanding of them.

When Hebrews was written the Holy Spirit was dealing with believers who neglected their responsibilities to support and join with the local church.

Let me share with you a quote from Charles Spurgeon:

"I know there are some who say, 'Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.' Now, why not; 'Because I can be a Christian without it.'"

Are you quite sure about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in a house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do."

In the body of Christ we are to be accountable to one another. Without membership that is not possible. Paul wrote the letter of 1Cor. to the local church in Corinth to deal with many issues;

*1 Cor 5; I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in **your church** is living in sin (having sex) with his stepmother. 2 You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship. 3 Even though I am not with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit. And as though I were there, I have already passed judgment on this man 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus. You must call a meeting of **the church**. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus. 5 Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan*

*so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns. 6 Your boasting about this is terrible. Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you. (obvious sin cannot be allowed to continue in the body) Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. 8 So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth. 9 When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. 10 But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. 11 I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people. 12 It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but **it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning.** 13 God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."*

NLT

There is no one scripture that says we must be a member of a local church, yet when the NT is taken as a whole it is obvious that it is talking about a local body of believers. If membership is not biblical why would the Lord Jesus command us to put an unrepentant sinner out of the church? Matt.18:15-17

What We Believe:

We Believe the Bible to be the only inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. We Believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three Persons; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

We Believe in the deity of Jesus Christ: in His virgin birth; in His sinless life; in His miracles; in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood; in His bodily resurrection; and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father; and in His personal return in power and glory.

We Believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential, and that repentance from sin and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the only way to come into a relationship with God.

We Believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life. We further believe His power and gifts are available to believers today.

We Believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost: they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

We Believe it is important to uphold the scriptural practices of the early church.

Therefore we hold to the practice of water baptism and the regular taking of communion.

We do not believe that either of these practices is essential for salvation, but that they serve as a demonstration of our living faith in Christ.

We Believe in the spiritual unity of believers in Christ, and the evidence of the unity being shown by how we love one another.

We Believe in the sanctity of marriage as defined by God in His Holy Word as the covenant union between one man and one woman for life.

Our Purpose:

To be a group of people committed to relationships, with God, one another, and the world. Sharing the gospel of grace given by Jesus at every opportunity whether through word or deed letting our actions speak louder than our words.

To sum it all up, we are an upward, outward focused church; with Jesus as our head trusting Him to build His church His way allowing us to participate along the way. We must bare in mind the words of Jesus in Matt. 16:18; *“Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means rock) and upon this rock (Jesus) **I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it”**”*.

What are the requirements of membership at IFFC?

1. A confession of faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; knowing that it is by grace that you have been saved, not of yourself but it is a gift from God.
2. To embrace and support the Mission of IFFC to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as commissioned in Matt. 28:18-20 and according to Isaiah 61:1-4
3. To attend services regularly according to the scriptures instruction in Heb. 10:25 we read that we should not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together”. That means we should make every effort to attend regular weekly Sunday meetings.
4. To use the gifting God has given you to help equip, encourage, edify, build up, and admonish one another according to 1 Cor. 12:1-11, Romans 15:14, Col. 3:16, and 1Thessalonians 5:14
5. To embrace and support the mission of IFFC through your faithful giving as an expression of your worship and obedience. Scripture is full of instructions about giving; Proverbs 3:9 to honor God with our wealth, Malachi 3:10 tells us to test God and try to outgive Him, Luke 6:38 according to Jesus how we give determines how God gives to us, 1Cor. 16:1-2 Paul encourages us to set aside weekly that we will be ready to give and 2Cor. 9:7 tells us to decide in our hearts what we can afford to give and do so cheerfully that God may be pleased.
6. To pursue “unity of the brethren” as spoken of in Psalm 133

It’s important that we do not merely attend a church but that we join a church; standing with other Christians. Joining a local church is an outward reflection of an inward love, for Christ and for His people. As we often see in life, the greatest love is rarely merely spontaneous; it is more often planned, premeditated, and characterized by commitment.

We read in Ephesians 5:25 that, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Acts 20:28 reminds us that He “bought His church with His own blood.” If we are Christ’s followers, we too will love the church that He gave Himself for.