



CHURCH MEMBERSHIP – WHY IT MATTERS

All are welcome to worship with us at Watermark, and believers in Jesus Christ are free to worship at a church of their choosing. We do, however, believe participatory membership in a local church body to be a normal act of obedience for all true believers in Jesus Christ in light of the following passages:

OBEDIENCE TO LEADERSHIP

Hebrews 13:17 states that Christians are to “*obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*” If there is no membership, which leaders should a Christian submit to? Do Christians have to submit to anyone with the title “elder” from any church? We believe that membership provides the direction for which leaders the members should submit to, and why.

LEADERSHIP OVERSIGHT

Acts 20:28 says to church elders, “*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*” If there is no membership, for whom will the elders give an account? Will elders of Watermark be held accountable for all Christians in Dallas, or for the members of churches that Watermark has theological differences with? We believe that membership defines the scope of authority and accountability for local church leaders.

OUTSIDE/INSIDE THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 states that Christians are not to judge the morality of those outside the church, but rather are to judge those inside the church, and remove unrepentant immoral members from fellowship if needed. How is being outside or inside the church definable if there is no such thing as membership? How can you remove someone if they aren’t “in” to begin with? We believe that membership provides a proper context for making moral assessments and decisions about members’ conduct and character.

CARE AND CORRECTION

Matthew 18:15-17 states that when a brother sins against you and does not listen or respond even after multiple witnesses address his fault, you are to involve the church. Without membership, who constitutes “the church,” and who decides when someone is to be treated as an outsider (“*a Gentile and a tax collector,*” v. 17) and lovingly called back to repentance? We believe that membership provides a clear process and path for care, correction, and restoration when a member is caught in sin.

Discuss the following questions as a group:

1. For non-members: Have you considered local church membership? What are you currently processing as you decide whether or not to commit to becoming a member at Watermark?
2. For members: Do you have any hesitations about being in community with someone who has not committed to membership at Watermark? If so, what are they?
3. For everyone: Are there any questions you need to ask to follow up on what was shared by anyone? Do you have any fears, hesitations, frustrations, or concerns?
4. What are the best next steps for the group in response to this conversation?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE STUDY: *Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-12, Hebrews 13:17, Acts 20:28-30, 1 Peter 5:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Acts 2:37-41, Acts 6:1-7, 1 Timothy 5:3-17.*
