

‘The Meaning of Membership’ (Part one)

For the next two weeks our church will be engaging in an important teaching series called, ‘The Meaning of Membership’. The dictionary defines a *member* as a person who belongs to a particular group or community. Therefore, ‘*Membership*’ refers to member-status that is recognised or granted by a particular group or community. On a practical level what is most important about membership is that the members of a given community share a common understanding that they belong to one another and therefore share certain rights and responsibilities. No group or community can function in a healthy way without this mutual understanding.

As we (at SBC) begin to discuss the meaning of membership it’s important to discern that we can do so in two distinctly different ways:

1. **The meaning of membership in Christ’s Universal Church:** Our church Constitution affirms the Biblical teaching that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour are members of Christ’s universal Church family:

- *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...”* (Ephesians 2:13, 19)
- *The Church is the body of people whom God has separated from the world through faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. All regenerate persons are members of the universal Church of God which takes local form wherever groups of believers unite for worship, fellowship and service in accordance with scriptural principles...”* (Page 3, point 8 under ‘Basis’ in SBC’s Constitution)

2. **The meaning of formal local church membership at SBC:** This type of membership specifically relates to our own form of congregational government in which formal members must meet our constitution’s requirements and be recognised by our church before gaining the right to vote in church meetings or becoming eligible to hold certain leadership positions (e.g. elder or deacon).

Our church leadership has recently issued a call to prayer and church-wide discussion in regard to our need to re-examine SBC’s constitutional requirements for our local formal church membership. However, the aim of this first Bible study is to focus on the broader and more fundamental topic of membership in Christ’s Universal Church. Next week we will focus more specifically on the meaning of membership in our local church at SBC.

Read Ephesians 2:11 – 22

1. Why were Gentiles (non-Jews) once automatically considered to be outside of God’s family? (Ephesians 2:11 – 12)
2. Explain how the blood of Jesus Christ has brought all believers near to God? (Ephesians 2:13 - 18)
3. Name some of the benefits of Christ’s death to his Universal Church? How have you personally benefited from Christ’s death? (Ephesians 2:19 – 22).
4. What are the bare minimum requirements for membership in Christ’s body?
5. Is membership in Christ’s body more an inclusive or exclusive thing? Explain.