

# Recommended Reading: Church Membership

## by Jonathan Leeman

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by Ben Purves

The 9Marks book *Church Membership* by Jonathan Leeman does an excellent job laying out the biblical vision for church membership, and the implications of that membership. As we continue in our sermon series [Life Together](#) and consider the Biblical commands for 'One Anothering,' let me encourage you to grab a discounted copy at our OBC Bookstore.

The books we have placed on our bookshelves have been selected because they are edifying and valuable in the life of the church. They are discounted with the aim of getting them in the hands of readers. Note: I referenced Leeman's book in a [blog post](#) on membership last year. This short volume has become my go-to-resource on this topic because it is concise, clear, practical, and accessible.

### Church Membership: Why?

How important is church membership? Is it optional, or is it necessary? Leeman guides the reader away from the club mentality that so often misconstrues local church membership. The local church is not a voluntary association, club, civic organization, or optional religious gathering. Instead, it is a family and a royal family at that.

Leeman argues that membership is how the world knows who represents Jesus. The local church is a heavenly embassy which affirms the heavenly citizenship of believers. Membership in the local church practically marks our identity in the kingdom of God.

He then takes the reader through a tour of the New Testament, stopping to look at examples of church membership (Acts 1:15, 2:41, Heb 13:17, etc). He discusses the distinction between being part of the universal church and a local church, defining the local church as *"a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances"* (pp. 62-63).

Leeman then defines church membership as *"a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living his or her discipleship in the care of the church"* (p. 64).

I appreciated Leeman's list of reasons why membership matters, which he also explains in detail (pp. 79-81):

1. It's biblical.
2. The church is its members.

3. It's a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper.
4. It's how you officially represent Jesus.
5. It's how you declare your highest allegiance.
6. It's how you embody and experience biblical images.
7. It's how you serve other Christians.
8. It's how you follow Christian leaders.
9. It helps Christian leaders lead.
10. It enables church discipline.
11. It gives structure to your Christian life.
12. It builds a witness and invites the nations.

## Church Membership: What?

What is required for membership? A clear profession of faith in Jesus Christ coupled with repentance from former patterns of sin, demonstrated by water baptism. At Occoquan Bible Church, we agree with holding these as prerequisites to membership. One must have a sincere profession of faith, which has then been publicly expressed through believer's baptism—i.e., immersion that comes after one has been born again.

If you have trusted in Christ alone for your salvation, and you have been baptized by immersion, let me encourage and invite you to take the next steps toward church membership. In our church that looks like signing up for a new members class.

Toward the end of his book, Leeman walks through another helpful list, "Eight Ways to Submit to a Local Church." In this list he describes how church membership is lived out within the local church. These eight points mirror the One Anothers we are considering in our current sermon series. Which is another reason I'd encourage you to get a copy: *Church Membership* complements what we are learning together as a church.

## Church Membership: Who?

If you are a church member, a regular attendee, or someone who is looking for a new church home, this book will serve you well. It will help give you a biblical understanding of the local church, the significance of church membership, and what belonging to a local church should look like.

Let me encourage you to pick up a copy and read it. And if this book should provoke questions, or you want to know more about membership at Occoquan Bible, let me encourage you to come speak with one of our pastors.

Last with this emphasis on church membership, let me extend a special invitation to all members and those who are considering membership to join us for a special church service on Sunday evening, November 15th, from 6:00–7:00pm. We will have a night of family worship, with a discussion of what it means to be in covenant membership together with one another. May we live out the reality of the Gospel in our wonderful union with Christ and each other!

Pastor Ben