

“Church Membership”, (1 Corinthians 12:12, NKJV)

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:12)

Whether or not churches should have a formal membership roll and/or a church covenant is a matter of liberty regarding organizational structure (1 Corinthians 14:40). If the church has sound doctrine, and requires formal membership, one should join the membership, and not make a big deal out of it. If not, one should not make a big deal out of it either. My personal opinion is that having an official church membership role at the local church is unnecessary. To those who argue that formal church membership and/or signing of church covenant is necessary, I submit the following responses.

1. There is no direct command to do this in the New Testament.
2. Believers are already part of the universal church, beginning the moment they accept Jesus Christ as Savior.
3. Membership rolls are made up of professing believers. One may be a church member but not a member of the Body of Christ. This may cause someone to be self-deceived regarding their salvation.
4. To use Hebrews 13:17 as a basis, and applying it to the Pastor and to whom he is accountable before God for, is ludicrous. The Pastor knows he is accountable before God to pray for everyone who comes into his sphere of influence.
5. Church discipline is still possible without formal membership. Matthew 18:15-17 does not require that the church have formal membership.
6. Church membership, when it is used as criteria for certain rights and privileges, or withholding them, can result in problems. Those who do not believe in formal membership as conscientious objectors will not join, and be disenfranchised to some extent.
7. Church membership requires that the church set artificial criteria (e.g. must be baptized, take classes, and be there a year, etc.). Some criteria may have no basis in Scripture.
8. Church covenants are only useful to the extent that they summarize biblical truth. If they function as a church Statement of Christian Faith, then call it that. It should not be necessary to sign any membership form or covenant. The word of the Christian is his or her signature (Matthew 5:37).
9. Accountability and commitment to the local church is not something one can just sign up for. These things are results of a commitment to the Word of God and one's own discipleship. If the doctrine of the church is sound, and people believe in the ministry of the local church, they will be willing to get involved. It is the responsibility of the leaders to instruct and exhort the congregation to

engage in Christian service (**Ephesians 4:12**). Congregants will either get busy for the Lord, or they will soon fall away.

Whether your church has formal membership or not, here are the questions that you need to ask yourself. Am I sure of my own salvation in Christ Jesus? Am I willing to share my hope in Christ? Am I busy for the Lord? Am I a regular participating congregant at my local Bible-believing church? Am I faithful and accountable to my local church? Do I pray for those in it who minister to me, who I minister to, and who minister alongside me?