

Radiant Church, August 28, 2016  
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## Gospel Pictures #12 Church Membership is a Picture of the Gospel

Our Contemporary Western culture is drawn to personal choice and committed primarily to preserving the *freedom* to withdraw, move on, reconsider and renegotiate. As a people we are naturally fearful of obligation or permanence.

People in our culture are faithful to their spouses until fidelity is uncomfortable and inconvenient. We are loyal to our employers until we get a better offer.

As a culture we are committed to consumerism, and if Christians are not careful, our churches will be nothing and do nothing different than what the surrounding world is and does. We attend when we want, are accountable to the degree we want, submit to whom we want and only when we want and give only when it is convenient and doesn't involve risk or pain.

In response to the culture, the modern church has rules, some stated and others inferred:

1. the religious verbally punish others for not keeping the rules
2. the rebellious are quick to overlook personal failures by changing the rules

But all of us try to invent our religious measurements, and then try to live up to them. And we end up feeling like fake superhero's, or real failures.

When it comes to church we may be guilty of just going through the motions, hoping no one asks us to do anything, but is this really who the church was created to be?

**Ephesians 3:10** *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

The local church is not a place. The church is the glorious gathering of the redeemed, the sanctified flock of the great Shepherd; the united household of God; the beautiful body and bride of Christ. It manifests the "manifold wisdom of God" for the display of His glory. The Church and its members are pictures of the gospel.

Such an exalted picture of the church seems silly as long as we're content with superficial relationships and shallow obligations. It all seems impossible as long as we pursue entertainment and avoid commitment and obligation.

I want more than that. I want to be a part of something beyond myself.

I want to know that what I devote my life to is important and lasting.

And the reality is, I will only really obligate myself to what I think is important.

So why is being a member of a church, this church, important?

How is church membership a picture of the gospel?

**1 Corinthians 12:14-20** *For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

Aside from an analogy of the church, what do we get from this?

A church is made up of more than one person; lots of members.

A church needs its members. Every member is important.

A church's members need to function as important parts of the church

God is the One who chooses how each member is gifted to function in the church

Back in Ephesians 3:9 Paul tells his readers that the mystery of Christ, the thing that Jesus accomplished that is so unlikely, so counter-intuitive, is that the church is made up of many people, many different kinds of people who otherwise would not be willing nor able to be a part of the same body.

Church membership is 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 out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.

When we become members of this or any church, we are forming a covenant relationship, and covenant agreement, where both sides participate, even if only one party can insure that the covenant will be upheld.

### ***The elders covenant...***

To appoint elders and deacons (including any paid staff) according to the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

To prayerfully seek God's will for Radiant Church and steward her resources

to the best of our ability based on our study of the Scriptures and following of the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

To **care for the church** and seek her growth in grace, truth and love (Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:15-16 Colossians 1:28; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

To **provide teaching and counsel** from the whole Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:1).

To **equip the members of the church for the work of ministry** (Ephesians 4:11-16).

To **be on guard against false teachers and teachings** (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 1 John 4:1).

To **lovingly exercise discipline when necessary**, for the glory of God, the good of the one disciplined and the health of the church as a whole (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

To **set an example and join members in fulfilling the obligations of church membership** stated below (Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:3).

### ***The members covenant...***

#### **To follow Jesus**

By being baptized after conversion

By pursuing the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of spiritual disciplines (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 5:1-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)

To **regularly attend Sunday gatherings**. We gather on Sundays to learn how to worship in response to the gospel.

By regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through communion

By serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25; Titus 3:14).

By being a steward of the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances in a way that is sacrificial, cheerful and voluntary (Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

### To connect with a Gospel Community

We gather during the week in the primary organizing structure of Radiant Church - in Gospel Communities. In GC's we live together in everyday rhythms. We celebrate together. We bless each other. We eat together. We recreate together. We tangibly proclaim and display the gospel to Juneau together.

We become a part of a gospel community so we can learn how to live All of life for God's glory, Jesus' fame, and our joy.

**To submit to the elders and other appointed leaders** of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5).

### Conclusion

All people live out of their chosen identity. **Radiant Church Juneau is a family of servant missionaries learning to be and make disciples of Jesus.** Members of Radiant Church do and want to live out of these identities

Membership is not about privilege or prestige. It is not some elevated level of access with secret insider benefits. It is not a legal document or means of control.

Membership recognizes and responds to the call of discipleship in the context of gospel-centered community. It is an affirmation and agreement to contribute to the good of the body rather than consume from it.

It is a formalization of that which already implicitly exists. It is an obligation to sacrificially seek the good of others in the body of Christ by taking the general call toward service and incarnating it within a particular people.

God calls His people into covenant, not only to Himself but also to each other. He calls us to a life of sacrifice, generosity, service and radical commitment to the good of the body. And this happy obligation is most readily pursued within the context of a particular body—a local church.

Church, and committed church membership is where and how we live out the gospel together