



Meaningful Membership

At Hespeler Baptist Church we believe membership in the local church is more than a mere formality or simply adding your name to a list, as our covenant and practice demonstrate.¹ Yet if membership is to be of any significance it ought to be meaningful. The following 4 commitments we make to our members and ask our members to make are a “fleshing-out” of our membership covenant. This is what it looks like when we live it out:

1) We will affirm you in the gospel:

As **elders** and a **congregation** we will commit to affirming you in the gospel by publicly identifying and covenanting with you as a baptized follower of Jesus Christ.²

In order for this to be meaningful we expect **you**, as a member of Hespeler Baptist Church, to make this local church your home and us your family by publicly identifying and covenanting with us as a baptized follower of Jesus Christ.³

2) We will oversee you in the gospel:

As **elders** we commit to overseeing you in the gospel, as those who will one day give an account to God (Hebrews 13:17). We will do this through: the preaching and teaching of God’s Word in weekly worship services, mid-week studies, Sunday school classes, appropriate small groups, discipleship, mentoring, counseling, and through holding you accountable to living a God-glorifying, cross-centered life.

As a **congregation** we commit to overseeing you in the gospel through transparent relationships, which cultivates an environment where accountability, speaking the truth in love, mutual encouragement, and bearing one another’s burdens can happen.⁴

In order for this to be meaningful, we expect **you**, as a member of Hespeler Baptist Church, to commit to:

- gathering for weekly worship services and prayer⁵ (we cannot *oversee* you if we never actually see you!). Where possible, we would encourage you to benefit from mid-week studies, prayer meetings, Sunday school classes, appropriate small groups etc.
- submitting to the spiritual authority of those in leadership⁶ (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5)
- submitting to those in the body out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21)
- being transparent with other church members in which you care for, encourage, rebuke, teach, and learn from each other (Ephesians 4:15-16).⁷

3) We will engage you in the work of the gospel:

As **elders** we commit to engaging you in the work of the gospel by providing opportunities for service in the kingdom work God has given us to do both locally and globally. We will discern with you the ways God has gifted you and how you should be using these gifts in the context of this local church to build the body of Christ and spread God's fame.

As a **congregation** we will engage *with* you in the work of the gospel. Although we are many members, we are one body and commit to working with you with the same mind, love, and purpose (Philippians 2:3) to proclaim to the world character and gospel of God through the ministry of Hespeler Baptist Church.

In order for membership to be meaningful, we expect you to be much more than a passive or casual observer of what happens in and through the local church, but instead be actively engaged in areas of service to promote the glory and gospel of God. We expect **you** to commit to:

- praying for the work and victory of the gospel
- giving of your time, money, and resources regularly, cheerfully, generously, and at times sacrificially to the work of the gospel⁸
- "using the spiritual gifts God has given you to build up the body however you can (1 Corinthians. 12:7)"⁹
- boldly and unashamedly visualizing and vocalizing the gospel with urgency in your spheres of influence¹⁰ (home, neighbourhood, community, school, workplace, etc.).

4) We will guard you and the gospel:

As **elders** we have a reputation to uphold. It's not ours. It's not yours. It's not the church's. It's Christ's. While we commit to constantly engage in formative discipline (teaching, preaching, counseling, encouraging, discipling, exhorting) we also commit to guarding you and the gospel through corrective discipline (removal of privileges, call to repentance, excommunication) where and when necessary. The purpose of this is *always* restorative (Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Should any member become entangled in persistent, unrepentant sin we will take appropriate steps to guard the testimony of Christ's church in the local community.

As **elders** we also commit to guarding you and the gospel by refuting false teaching and keeping a close watch for wolves in sheep's clothing who would seek to come in and destroy the flock of God (Acts 20:28-31, 2 Timothy 2:14).

As a member we expect **you** to:

- continually submit yourself to the spiritual leadership and authority of the local church¹¹
- (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:5)
- keep a close watch on your own life with respect to sinful patterns and behaviors, taking seriously the call to murder the flesh (Romans 8:14), resist the devil (Ephesians 6:10-20; James 4:7), and love not the world (1 John 2:15-17)¹²
- lovingly and gently confront another brother or sister who has offended you in aiming to promote and preserve unity (Matthew 18:15-17; John 17:20-21)
- continue in a lifestyle of faith and repentance, “behaving” the gospel as one who professes to believe the gospel.

Benefits of Meaningful Membership¹³:

If membership in the local church is truly meaningful, it is mutually beneficial:

For your **elders**: meaningful membership provides a clear picture of those we are to watch over as those who will give an account to God.

For the **congregation**: meaningful membership provides a clear, public picture of who is committed to the local church and who the local church is committed to.

For **you**: meaningful membership commits you, commits others to you, provides you with the spiritual protection of elders, and provides you with the comfort of knowing that a whole group of people would rather remove you from membership than tolerate unrepentant sin! Given the deceitfulness of sin, this is an encouraging reality!

For **the watching world**: “Meaningful membership is important because it is the only way for a church to corporately tell the truth about God and the gospel.”¹⁴ The only satisfying explanation for why we live this way and how we are *able* to live this way is that the transforming power of the gospel is *real*, that Jesus Christ did come to earth, die on a cross, save us from God’s wrath, rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and will one day return.

Endnotes

¹ From membership covenant: we recognize that the church of Jesus Christ is the highest institution under Heaven, and it is a solemn responsibility to belong to it.

² From membership covenant: As the elders of the body of Christ meeting at Hespeler, it is our solemn and joyful privilege to welcome you officially into church membership.

³ From membership covenant: that you will pray for and seek to help the whole family of God here at Hespeler.

⁴ From membership covenant: We are committed to be your friends and family, to encourage you and assist you in times of sickness and distress. We promise to pray for you, to love you and support you.

⁵ From membership covenant: that you will...assemble regularly with the church at worship and prayer.

⁶ From membership covenant: that you will respect and submit to the spiritual authorities of our church

⁷ 9Marks - "What is Meaningful Membership?", <http://www.9marks.org/answers/what-meaningful-membership>, last accessed March 26, 2012.

⁸ From membership covenant: that you will contribute cheerfully, generously, and regularly to support our ministries

⁹ 9Marks - "What is Meaningful Membership?", <http://www.9marks.org/answers/what-meaningful-membership>, last accessed March 26, 2012.

¹⁰ From membership covenant: that you will strive for the growth in obedience and holiness through personal evangelism, witness, and service

¹¹ From membership covenant: that you will respect and submit to the spiritual authorities of our church.

¹² From membership covenant: that you will keep yourself from all ungodliness

¹³ Some of this section has been summarized from a number of articles from www.9marks.org on church membership, last accessed March 26, 2012.

¹⁴ 9Marks - "Why is meaningful membership important for evangelism?", <http://www.9marks.org/answers/why-meaningful-membership-important-evangelism>, last accessed March 26, 2012.