

Lesson 5 – Membership

Introduction

If one is to be a member of Bible Way Baptist Church, he must fully understand the baptist distinctive "saved, water-immersed membership." Among other things, therefore, one must understand the word "saved," and the word "church," and the word "immersion."

I. Understanding Salvation

Salvation is by grace through faith and precedes church membership.

- **Saved from What?**
 - From sin and God's wrath ([Romans 5:9](#); [6:7](#), [18](#), [22](#)).
- **Perfect Redemption Required**
 - God's standard demands an infinite, eternal, and perfect payment ([Romans 3:23](#); [Psalm 102:25-27](#); [John 1:1-3](#); [Genesis 1:1](#); [Isaiah 45:12](#); [Psalm 90:2](#)).
- **Who Can Meet the Standard?**
 - Only Jesus—Creator, Judge, and Justifier ([Romans 3:24-28](#)).
- **Substitution Illustrated**
 - Jesus took Barabbas' place ([Mark 15:15](#); [Matthew 27:16-26](#)) as a picture of our substitution.
- **Salvation is Received, Not Earned**
 - It is a gift of grace received not by works ([Romans 4:4-5](#); [Galatians 1:9](#); [Romans 10:9-17](#); [Genesis 4:26](#); [Job 33:23-30](#)).
- **Regeneration: New Birth & Union with God**
 - Believers are indwelt by the Spirit and united with God ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#); [John 3:6-8](#)).
- **Spiritual Growth Process**
 - **Spirituality** is instant and Spirit-led ([Romans 8:1](#), [6](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14-16](#); [Galatians 5:16](#)).
 - **Sanctification** is measurable growth in Christlikeness ([2 Peter 3:18](#); [Colossians 2:6](#); [Philippians 1:20](#); [2 Corinthians 4:10](#)).
 - **Maturity** develops over time ([1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#); [Ephesians 4:12-15](#); [Romans 12:1-3](#)).

II. Understanding Membership

A. Biblical Definition of the Church

1. Church/Assembly

The New Testament word most often translated as "church" is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), simply meaning “assembly” or “congregation.” Unless used in an eschatological or prophetic context ([Hebrews 12:22-23](#); [Ephesians 5:27](#)), it reflects a **defined**, **local**, and **visible** gathering—much like the Greco-Roman citizen assemblies—and is never used to describe an amorphous, invisible, universal entity. A non-local assembly is a contradiction in terms. Similarly, συναγωγή

(*synagogue*) (*lit.* "a bringing together") emphasizes an intentional gathering, rooted in shared teaching and practice. These two terms point to a local, identifiable body of believers with recognized leadership and membership.

Any faithful understanding of "church" must start here. A New Testament church is a local assembly of baptized believers, covenanted together under Christ's headship, practicing the ordinances, observing Christ's commands, and governed by biblically qualified leaders. Applying the term "church" to non-gathered or non-ordered entities is a category error that undermines biblical clarity.

2. Family of God

The family of God refers to all believers ([John 1:12-13](#); [Galatians 3:26](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#)). Every believer is a child of God through faith, but not every believer is a church member. Church membership requires baptism (*believers' immersion*) as the public act identifying a believer with a local body ([Acts 2:41](#)).

3. Body of Christ

Local churches are Christ's body ([Romans 12:4-5](#); [1 Corinthians 12:27](#); [Ephesians 4:12](#)). While all believers are spiritually united in Christ, they function as His body only in a gathered, organized, visible context. The "body" image emphasizes function, connection, and order—not abstraction.

4. Bride of Christ

The bride is presented as a single, glorious assembly at Christ's return ([Revelation 19:7-8](#); cf. [Ephesians 5:27](#)). Scripture never refers to an existing, universal bride on earth. Local churches, as functioning bodies of Christ, prepare believers for participation in that final assembly. Saying "we are the bride" is premature; we are individual members being prepared to be part of it.

B. Pattern of Immersion

The New Testament assumes that baptism takes place immediately after receiving Christ as Savior. Mainly due to misconceptions and twisted understandings of church, Bible Way Baptist, like most churches, requires a training period to make sure those coming for baptism and membership understand the responsibilities, promises, and benefits of their actions before taking them. Some degree of "counting the cost" is appropriate for such major decisions ([Luke 14:28](#)).

1. Spirit Immersion

- Jesus is the agent of spiritual immersion ([Matthew 3:11](#); [John 1:33](#)).
- The Holy Spirit is the medium or sphere into which baptism by Christ takes place (cf. [Mark 1:8](#); [Acts 1:5](#)).
 - [1 Corinthians 12:13 \(NET\)](#)
¹³For **in one Spirit** we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.
- Spirit immersion takes place concurrently with salvation as part of regeneration ([Romans 8:9](#)).
- Spirit immersion makes daily spiritual life in our mortal bodies possible ([Romans 8:10-11](#)).
- Spirit immersion is the proof of the final resurrection ([Romans 8:23](#)).
- Spirit immersion allows a functional union with God and other believers in the assembly ([1 Corinthians 12:7-25](#); [John 14:6-23](#)).
- Spirit immersion provides a membership in the future, yet to be assembled, assembly in heaven ([Hebrews 12:22-23](#)).

- Spirit immersion sets us apart as a temple of God (2 Corinthians 5:1ff.).
-

Spirit immersion vs. spirit filling:

Spirit Immersion (often referred to as being "baptized in the Spirit") speaks of a *once-for-all* event where the believer is united with Christ, enabling all of the above. This is *positional* and *relational*. It happens at conversion and it establishes our new environment: we are "in the Spirit" and no longer "in the flesh" (Romans 8:9). It's a permanent placement—by Christ into the Spirit.

Spirit Filling, on the other hand, is *repeated* and *empowering*. It refers to the ongoing experience of the Spirit's influence and control in a believer's daily life. While immersion is about *union*, filling is about *communion*. Being filled with the Spirit enables believers to live holy lives, bear spiritual fruit, and serve others in love and power. It's not automatic; it involves yielding, trusting, and walking in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

2. Water Immersion

Water immersion is not necessary for salvation from the penalty of sin.

- Thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)
- Works of righteousness cannot save (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6; Matthew 3:13-15).
- Unbelief is the final determining factor in condemnation (John 3:18; Mark 16:16).

Jesus commanded baptism as part of disciple-making.

- Matthew 28:19-20 (NET)

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Believers were baptized immediately after conversion as a public profession of faith and entrance into the visible local assembly.

- Acts 2:41 (KJV)

⁴¹Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Baptism is a public identification with other local believers of every background to express the spiritual unity that is found in Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NET)

¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

C. Benefits of Membership

- Creates a functional body for support (Romans 12:4-18; 1 Peter 4:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:24-25)
- Creates a functional body for service

- **1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (NET)**

²⁷Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it. ²⁸And God has placed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all perform miracles, do they? ³⁰Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they? ³¹But you should be eager for the greater gifts. And now I will show you a way that is beyond comparison.

- Creates a functional governing body and leadership

- **Acts 6:2-6 (NET)**

²So the twelve called **the whole group of the disciples** together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. ³But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵The proposal **pleased the entire group, so they chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch. ⁶They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them.

- **Acts 15:22 (NET)**

²²Then **the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided** to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

- **2 Corinthians 8:19 (NET)**

¹⁹In addition, this brother has also been **chosen by the churches** as our traveling companion as we administer this generous gift to the glory of the Lord himself and to show our readiness to help.

- **Galatians 1:8-9 (NET)**

⁸But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! ⁹As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!

- **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NET)**

¹²Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

- **Mark 10:42-44 (NET)**

⁴²Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. ⁴³But it is not this way among you. Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all.

- **Hebrews 13:7 (NET)**

⁷Remember your leaders, who spoke God's message to you; reflect on the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith.

- **Hebrews 13:17 (NET)**

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work. Let them do this with joy and not with complaints, for this would be no advantage for you.

- **1 Peter 5:1-3 (NET)**

¹So as your fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings and as one who shares in the glory that will be revealed, I urge the elders among you: ²Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God's direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly. ³And do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock.

- Creates a functional prayer bond ([Acts 12:5](#); [James 5:16](#))
- Creates functional worship ([Hebrews 10:25](#); [1 Corinthians 14:26](#))
- Creates functional instruction ([2 Timothy 3:14](#); [4:1-5](#); [Colossians 3:16](#))
- Creates functional discipline ([Matthew 18:15-17](#); [1 Corinthians 5:11-13](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:14-15](#))
- Creates belonging ([Ephesians 2:19](#); [1 Corinthians 12:18-27](#); [Romans 12:4-5](#))

D. Mechanics of Membership

Ultimately, there are only three prerequisites for membership (see the constitution for more details):

1. Giving testimony before the membership of one's salvation and then being immersed in obedience to publicly confess faith in Christ

–OR–

Giving testimony before the membership of one's salvation and of believer's immersion at a previous time

2. A vote of acceptance by the assembly
3. A teachable spirit