

Biblical Community: Belonging to Christ Together

At Shawnee Bible Church, we value the local church as a biblical community. In current American religious life, choosing a church can be treated more like a consumer-driven decision based on benefit rather than joining a community where members belong to something or someone grander than themselves.

A biblical theology of what it means to “belong” to a local church starts with what Jesus said it means to belong to him: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:34, NASB). We believe the Christian life is not a retail decision but a loving abandonment to follow our Lord and Savior in response to his great love and sacrifice for us (Ephesians 5:1–2). Fundamentally, this includes involvement in a local church—a “flock” that is the physical expression of “the church of God which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, NASB).

We recognize that all true Christians are “members” of the universal church, which Paul calls The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)—that innumerable assembly of all believers in Jesus. However, we also believe that such a “membership” is expressed tangibly in the local church community, which is the “local, living, and loving collection of people committed to Christ, to regularly assemble and have his Word preached and obeyed, including Christ’s commands to baptize and celebrate the Lord’s Supper.”¹ Thus, we see the local church as more than a preaching point or a classroom. It is a community of regenerate believers in Jesus Christ who are joined together in fellowship by tangibly belonging to Christ under biblically qualified leadership (Acts 20:28–32; 1 Peter 5:1–4).

We see Shawnee Bible Church as such a community of the members of Christ’s body. In order to foster this mutual belonging, after profession of faith, we ask individuals to join our church by completing a membership class where our statement of faith and mission and values are clearly communicated and where basic elements of biblical membership are taught. By belonging to Shawnee Bible Church, believers indicate their commitment to cooperate with beliefs and practices, regularly attend gatherings, prayerfully and financially support the ministry, and faithfully strive to fulfill the biblical “one another” responsibilities of love and accountability. This formal membership is required for individuals to serve in various ministries or on our leadership teams.

¹ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 157.