



Articles of Faith

Membership

The bible does not recognise individual denominational churches. Therefore, it is impossible in a biblical sense to become a member of “the Ledbury Baptist” church. The New Testament makes only one distinction and that is that churches are named in their Geographical locations. e.g. the church at Corinth, Galatia etc. this is because churches should be working together as one in their own communities to outreach the gospel. By definition, there will be a cohesive social, economic profile in a given geographical area that will allow churches to work together on projects that are able to cohesively meet the needs of their community.

Many of Paul’s letters were often addressed to the “churches in Galatia but never to “denominations” within geographical areas. However the bible does recognise that the church for reasons that are essentially practical (as Moses found out when he tried to lead a church of hundreds in the desert Exodus 18) needs to be pastorally divided up so that relational needs and pastoral oversight can be effectively administered. Hence Paul writes to the whole church on Corinth but also gives special greetings to various groups that meet in houses throughout the town. (1 Cor 16) As has been said the church is... “geographically united, pastorally divided”. It is interesting to note that Paul’s letter would be read corporately to the whole church as one and they obviously shared times when despite their pastoral divisions they came together as one church in a given locality.

If this is the case then people join the “church of Ledbury” the day they move house into the area. That is the day they become a member of the Church of Ledbury. Many of them then go on to look for a place where they feel pastorally at home. This may of course be in any one of the denominations within the town or its environs.

From this standpoint we must be clear what membership means to those we are asking to join. In one sense they have joined the only church God recognises by being saved and living on a locality.

However, it may be that they wish to make a public commitment to the group of people they have covenanted themselves to. In many ways there is a direct correlation with the marriage service because whilst recognising that it is in the physical union that two become one, people feel a need to announce their commitment to each other publicly before they do so. This meets one of man’s most deep felt needs, that is to have a “sense of belonging” and although we are not here to meet social and emotional needs there is a real benefit I believe in going through the process of committing yourself to a given part of God’s church.

Therefore, the emphasis in membership should be seen not on welcoming people into God’s church but acknowledging their covenant commitment to a part of God’s church in a given locality. The emphasis is upon welcoming them into the family and acknowledging their commitment to the fellowship rather than discerning whether they are saved or not. The church cannot therefore “vote” the person into membership because they are not choosing to “join the church” (they did this when

they were saved) the church has a more passive role in accepting their desire to serve the fellowship.

Having said that there may be times when the eldership wish to suggest to a prospective member that it would be inappropriate for them to become members. This will be for two main reasons. Firstly, the leadership discern that individual is not born again and their preclusion from membership should serve to bring them to salvation (Rom 3:20). Secondly where a prospective member comes with "spiritual baggage" and the eldership feel their unresolved issues that would make membership non-beneficial. This may be where a former member has left the fellowship acrimoniously and has yet to seek restitution with those who are aggrieved, or where they have left another church under troubled circumstances. In both cases the eldership might exercise an element of church discipline to "insist" that the candidate make restitution before being accepted into a new spiritual family.