



HOW DO I BECOME A  
MEMBER OF SPEP?

by Dr. Glenn Parkinson

## WHAT IT IS

Jesus determined to build a church (literally, an “assembly”) to support, organize and help give expression to the faith of those who believe in Him. Faith in Christ is intensely personal, but it is never only private. Confessing Christ is something the Bible envisions happening in the context of the organized church. Together in the church, Christians worship, grow in their faith and make the gospel known to the world at large.

The apostles established elders in each church to define and recognize biblical faith, and to provide spiritual service to the believers that Christ entrusts to them. This is why we have a recognized “membership” in churches.

Becoming a church member implies 1) that the elders of a church affirm a person’s understanding of the essential biblical gospel, 2) that a person has committed him/herself to follow Christ and support His church, and 3) that the church recognizes that a person has all the rights and privileges of membership .

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

All our relationships help to define who we are. Church membership helps to define Christians in relation to God, one another and our surrounding culture. When you select a church home, you identify yourself in a specific way with Jesus Christ. Membership in one church does not cut you off from other believers at large, but it does connect you meaningfully with other believers who are likely to become part of your life. It brings a sense of ownership and mutual accountability which helps make faith concrete.

Members have voting privileges to elect their elders and other officers. Members are part of the corporation which owns all church property. Members vote to decide on matters regarding large capital improvements, and their advice is often sought by the elders before decisions are made in other crucial areas. Members have special access to the church ministry staff and the church officers when in need of spiritual support. Only members may be eligible for leadership and teaching positions.

Members are committed to worship with the church and support it with contributions of service and finances. Christ wants church members to forge relationships with each other for mutual encouragement and care. Members are expected to treat each other with respect and love, and work together for Christ’s sake, handling differences in a godly manner and respecting the church government Christ has established.

## HOW IT IS ACCOMPLISHED

Churches of various denominations are different. There are even differences between congregations in the same denomination. In order to carry out its responsibilities well, and help newcomers fit seamlessly into SPEP, the Session (the elders and pastors) have established a process for joining SPEP which we hope everyone will appreciate.

If you wish to join SPEP, you need to become familiar with what we believe. Please understand that you need only embrace the basic gospel message in order to join SPEP. That is to say, members are not required to adopt all of our doctrine. However, our doctrinal standards for teaching and leadership are higher than for membership, and you owe it to yourself to understand what you and your children will be taught here before you place yourself under our teaching. That is why we conduct a *Foundations Class* every quarter during the 9:30 education hour on Sunday morning. This three month class provides a very brief overview of major biblical themes. Unless you are a previous member of SPEP transferring back here, we ask everyone to participate in this overview before you join with us. The class goes through a book, and uses a convenient workbook format for each lesson, so that you can complete the work at home even if you miss some of the classes, or for some reason are unable to attend the class. Books and workbooks can be obtained before or after the class on Sunday mornings (or through the church office), and work done at home can be submitted before or after class to the instructors.

Pastor Parkinson also conducts a two hour Saturday morning Membership Seminar once a quarter, where you can ask any question and receive a number of introductory materials. Since he is able to fill in more of our church's and denomination's history and perspective, we urge you to take advantage of a seminar as soon as you think you may be interested in membership.

People who have completed the Foundations material and who have attended a seminar may request an interview with SPEP's elders. While folks often do not know what to expect in such a setting, they find it to be quite a pleasant experience as the elders are delighted to hear each person's unique story of their own spiritual journey. They will also ask you to respond to a document entitled *The Faith We Confess* (included at the end of this booklet) which summarizes what we mean by each membership affirmation.

If we are in agreement concerning the basic gospel faith, you will be joyfully welcomed as a member into our fellowship, pending baptism if you have never received Christian baptism. SPEP will have changed, because it will now be

enriched with all that God has invested in your life. And hopefully your life will also be changed, as you are enriched with all the God has invested in SPEP.

## WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

The Presbyterian Church in America recognizes two modes, or levels, of membership.

We encourage every parent to baptize every dependent child (regardless of age) in the Christian faith. Since different denominations understand baptism in different ways, we encourage you to speak to a pastor about our understanding of biblical teaching in this regard. In brief, we do not believe that baptism confers either faith or salvation upon a child. Neither do we understand baptism to be a sign of an individual's faith. Rather, we understand baptism to be a sign of the gospel that disciples (spiritual apprentices) are dedicated to learn. Adults who come to faith may "apprentice" themselves to study Christ, but parents determine their children's training. We consider such baptized children to be "non-communicant" members. That is, since the Lord's Supper is only open to confessing believers, our children should not partake of Communion until such time as they express their own faith. Non-communicant members are recognized as part of the church family – hence members – though we do not yet recognize their personal faith.

Communicant members are people who have completed the process outlined earlier. The elders recognize their faith, they are welcomed to the Lord's Table and receive the right to take part in church government.

Please address any questions concerning membership to any church elder, or to Pastor Parkinson either at the church office or via email: [gparkinson@spepchurch.org](mailto:gparkinson@spepchurch.org).

## THE FAITH WE CONFESS

**Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**

*God*

1. There is one infinite and personal God who created and sustains all things.

*sinners ... justly deserving His displeasure*

2. Humanity was created in God's image; He has engraved upon our conscience the knowledge of His existence and our responsibility to center our lives around His purposes and plans.
3. The human race as a whole has rejected and damaged the conscience God gave us, substituting our will for His, thus earning God's just condemnation.

*without hope*

4. Because we are spiritually damaged, we have no way to truly make up for our failures.

*save in His sovereign mercy*

5. Our only hope lies in God's mercy to act on our behalf.

**Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**

6. God exists eternally as one Being yet as three united but distinct Persons, revealed to our understanding as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
7. God the Father decreed that human sinners be saved, and formed a plan to reconcile His just displeasure with His desire to bless.

*the Lord Jesus Christ ... Son of God and Savior of sinners*

8. Jesus Christ was (and is) God the Son, eternally divine yet also fully human through His virgin birth.
9. The God/Man Jesus Christ came to reconcile mankind with God.

*as He is offered in the Gospel*

10. The Bible faithfully records God's plan to save sinners, described and pictured in the Old Testament and fully accomplished in Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.
11. The Bible records that Jesus lived a perfect life on our behalf, voluntarily died on the cross as a substitute for us in order to bear our punishment, rose from the dead to begin a new humanity, ascended into heaven to rule His church while it expands to every nation, and shall return when the church's expansion is complete to judge unsaved sinners and renew all things.

*receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation*

12. We are reconciled to God by trusting in the gracious work of Christ on our behalf. We cannot and need not add anything to it. Salvation is a gift to be received by faith, not a reward to be earned, since Christ has earned it for us already.

**Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**

*in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit*

13. God the Holy Spirit begins to dwell in the body and soul of every believer from the moment of personal faith, creating an unbreakable and eternal bond with God and with every other believer.
14. His purpose is to reproduce the perfect human character of Christ in us.
15. We need, and have, the help of God the Holy Spirit to transform our inner motives, and therefore our outward behavior.

*resolve and promise ... that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ*

16. Salvation is not only deliverance from the punishment of sin, but also from the power of sin to warp our thinking and enslave our lifestyle.
17. Members of Christ's Church are committed to the transformation of their character into a replica of Jesus' character.

**Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?**

*the Church*

18. In this context, “the Church” refers to the outward organization God established to preserve and transmit the gospel through the ages to all nations.
19. Those who are publicly consecrated to learn and live the gospel (either personally, or by their parents) are admitted into the Church by water baptism – a sacrament picturing the work of Christ.

*worship*

20. God’s calls His Church to assemble weekly for worship. We need it and He deserves it.
21. Those whom the Church recognizes as having personal faith in Christ are admitted to the Lord’s Supper – another sacrament that portrays the work of Christ and nourishes our faith.

*work*

22. God calls His Church to nurture the faith of its members and communicate the gospel so that others may come to faith.

*promise to support ... to the best of your ability*

23. Members of Christ’s Church are committed to regularly attend worship, being especially careful to prepare for and participate in the Lord’s Supper.
24. Members of Christ’s Church are committed to contribute the resources – time, personal talents and money – that enable the Church to pursue its calling.

**Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?**

*the government ... of the Church*

25. Just as God has established the authority of the family and the authority of the State, God has also established a government within His Church, with responsibility to explain the Bible and spiritually enforce its authority among Church members.

*the discipline of the Church*

26. The government of the Church is responsible to provide opportunities for spiritual growth, lovingly pursue Church members who fall into corrupt teachings or lifestyles, and remove from membership anyone whose profession of faith is no longer credible.

*submit*

27. Members of Christ's Church are committed to obey Church government unless they believe it is not applying the Bible properly. In that case, they must use every means to rectify the impasse within Church courts before leaving the fellowship.

*promise to study its purity and peace*

28. Members of Christ's Church are committed to care about the quality of the Church's doctrine and moral reputation.

29. Members of Christ's Church are committed to pursue unity within the Church, and to resolve all conflicts in a spirit of mutual love and respect.



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