

Church Membership

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as Paul mentioned earlier, we're privileged this morning as a church to welcome some new members, which we're going to do a little bit later, members who have been through our membership class and have been part of us for quite a while.

But before we do that, a bit later, I thought it would be good to stop and consider from the Bible just what it means to be a member of a church. We don't often talk about that.

People often just become members and they consider themselves as church members without really stopping and saying, what does that really mean? And it's important for us to do because there's a lot of misconceptions floating around, both inside and outside the church, as to what it means to be a church member.

And that's why this sermon is going to be devoted to looking at that, opening the Bible and asking God, well, what does it mean to be part of a church? I wonder what your view on church membership is this morning.

Some, for example, see church membership as kind of just the necessary paperwork you've got to do sometime in your life as a Christian, kind of like applying for a passport in home affairs, but without the long queues, of course.

[1 : 1 2] And people think being a church member is some kind of passport to heaven, which, of course, if you know the gospel, you know it's not. You're not saved by being a member of a church.

Now, I've got to say that right off the bat. It's important, even though I'm going to make a point about church membership, and I encourage everyone to be a member of a church. If you're a Christian, you're not saved by being a member of a church.

It's important for me to say that. Some people think that is what church membership is about. They think if they become a church member, they're safe. They've ticked the box. That's not the case. So why then? Why do people become church members?

If it's not to be saved, because that's what Jesus does for us, what's the point of church membership? Well, a much more common view, I think, amongst Christians, whether they admit it or not, a common view of church membership is kind of like it's a gym membership.

We treat it kind of like a gym membership, where the church is the place you come to do your spiritual workout once a week. Maybe you go for a class during the week to get a little bit of extra oomph.

[2 : 1 7] But as long as you've paid your membership fees, you're entitled to use the facilities for your own personal development. That is often how people consider church membership. And like a gym, there are even groups that you can go to and classes you can join if you want to meet like-minded people pursuing the same goals.

So is that what membership in a church is all about? Is it kind of like a spiritual gym? Is that what these members are going to be signing up for today? Because that is a very common view of church.

And yet that's not how the Bible encourages us to think about being a member of a church. Even though, whether consciously or subconsciously, we often treat church in that way.

See, rather than a gym, the pictures that the Bible uses to describe church are pictures like a family. A body, a bride, and an army.

That's not how we typically go about thinking about our church, is it? It's very different. And those pictures that the Bible gives us when describing what it means to be part of a church is very different to how most people consider church, if we're honest.

[3 : 2 8] And so this morning I want us to see, according to these images in the Bible, we're going to hop around Scripture a bit. So get your fingers ready for some page turning. I will have the

pertinent references on the screen behind me.

But I want us to see what being a member of a church really means, according to these images that the Bible gives us. And there are three main ideas that these images bring out for us that I want to go over.

So the first is that being a member of a church means, according to the Bible, that you don't belong to yourself anymore. You don't belong to yourself anymore.

Okay, well, you never did belong to yourself, newsflash, you belong to the God who made you, obviously. But I've got to say that, because we need a reminder of it. I do woodwork at home, in my garage, when I have some time.

And I recently, some of you know, built a cajon. Anybody know what a cajon is? Okay, good. A cajon is a drum. It's a type of drum that you sit on and you play. I've actually played it here a few times.

[4 : 28] I don't know if you noticed. Anyway. And that cajon belongs to me. Purely by merit of the fact that I manufactured it. I made it. So it automatically is mine.

It belongs to me. And in the same way, if you were created by a creator, if you were manufactured, right, so to speak, which, by the way, Genesis chapter 1 and common sense tells us that we were, we were created, we were made, we didn't just pop into existence randomly.

If you were created, you belong, body and soul, to your creator. You are his property. He owns you. Because, purely by the fact that he made you.

Alright? Now, that seems obvious, doesn't it? I shouldn't have to tell you that. And yet, most people don't realize that. Most people don't realize that they belong to God.

We are steeped in a culture which tells us that no one owns us. That we belong to no one but ourselves. The moral decline in our world that we see all around us.

[5 : 37] The pro-abortion lobbies. Killing babies. The rise in promiscuity. And the so-called sexual revolution. All of that is based on the single argument, my body belongs to no one but me.

And I can do what I want with it. But it doesn't. It belongs to God. It belongs to your creator. Your body. Your time. Your life. Your resources.

Your skills. Everything you own does not belong to you. It belongs to God. And yet, sin has blinded us to believe this idea that we belong to ourselves. We don't.

We belong to God. But that's not all, you see. If you're a Christian, you'll know what God did to save you from the penalty of that sin and rebellion.

Which we're going to remember later as we share communion together. He sent Jesus, his son, to take that penalty for you. To bring you back into a relationship with him. To wipe the slate clean.

[6 : 34] So you can enjoy a relationship with your creator. Back in the relationship you were designed for. For eternity. That's what he did for you, even though you didn't deserve it. That's the gospel that we preach at this church.

But in doing so, the implication of that gospel is, as 1 Corinthians 6.20 says, that God has bought you. That's what the gospel is.

God is paying a price to purchase you. If you're saved, God has bought you. That's what the Bible says. And so, what does that mean?

Not only does he own you based on the fact that he made you, but also, if you're a Christian, based on the fact that after he made you and you were lost in sin, he bought you back. So it's kind of like if, let's say my cajon that I built was stolen.

And then, a few days later, I was trawling gum tree and I found my cajon there. Beautiful photograph. Being sold for 1,500 rand, which is far less than it is actually worth.

[7 : 39] Now imagine, imagine I phoned up that guy and instead of reporting him to the police or anything, I went and I bought it back. And I paid the full price to get that back.

Now that is mine, not only because I made it in the first place, but I bought it back again. That's what God has done with you and me, if you're a Christian, if you're a believer in Christ.

He has bought you back from sin. Even though he made you, and even though by nature you turn your back on him, coming to Christ, putting your faith in him, is God buying you back.

He gave his son to purchase you at an immeasurable price. And so if you're a Christian, you're not just owned by God once, which should be enough, you're twice owned by God.

Now how does that change the way you live, if you think about your day like that? There's no escaping the fact that you belong totally to God.

[8 : 40] But you know what? That's not all. Look again at this reading that Eliel read for us earlier, Romans chapter 12. It's a vital passage when it comes to understanding what church membership is about.

This is a passage that actually talks about being a member of the church. And it says this, verse 4. Of Romans 12. For just as each one of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body.

Just pause there. So those God has bought, those in Christ, actually enter into his body on earth. That's what the Bible teaches. The church, this, and the church around the world, of which this is a reflection, this local church, is the body of Christ on earth.

This is essentially his physical body still on earth. But the implication for you and me is in what comes next. Verse 5. So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Let that sink in just for a second. Each member of Christ's body, the church on earth, belongs to who? All the others. Now, of course, we belong to God by default, but now as a believer, you also belong to the body of believers.

[10 : 07] Each member belongs to the others. You belong to me. I own you. But you know what? I belong to you. You own me. That's what the Bible's saying here. It's quite a shocking statement, isn't it?

We belong to one another. God, essentially, has given us to each other as gifts. Ephesians chapter 4.

You can read it later. But it talks about Christ giving gifts to his church. That's what the beginning of Ephesians chapter 4 is about. But these gifts are actually, it turns as you read on, these gifts are people.

The gifts that the Bible says Christ has given the church aren't the buildings or cars or tables or speakers. The gifts, the real gifts are the people.

That's the gifts that Christ has given to the church in the form of those gifted to minister. But then you read on, and it goes on to say that all Christians are gifted to minister. All Christians are called to serve and minister to others.

[11 : 07] And so all Christians are the gifts that God has given to his church. And so being a church member means that you acknowledge that you not only belong to God, but that you belong to his church, and that you are one of God's gifts to his church.

That's what being a church member means. You are one of God's gifts to his church. Now, do you come to church with that attitude?

That you are a gift to the others? Do you get out of bed and decide to go to church on a Sunday morning only when you think it'll benefit you, like a gym? Or do you go to church because you realize that you and your time and your skills belong to God, and he's given you as a gift to his church?

Is that the reason you get out of bed on a Sunday morning and go to church? Because that's what the Bible says should be the reason you gather together with the body.

Because you're the gift of the body. You belong to the other members of this church. And so are you practically coming to church with that attitude? And are you looking for opportunities to serve as a member that's been given to the body?

[12 : 20] I mean, the Bible describes us as body parts, members of the body. Now imagine your tongue all of a sudden one day just decided to not contribute to the rest of your body.

Or your lungs decided they're going to take a day off. I mean, that wouldn't work, would it? Every part of the body needs to function for the other parts to work. That's how a church works. That's how the Bible describes a church.

Every member needs to play their part, needs to see that they are vital in the functioning of the church, not just to come and consume. And there are many opportunities to serve a church.

Paul mentioned one earlier. The technical training day we've got next Saturday is one of the ways, if you're technically minded, that you can use your skills to serve fellow believers. And there are many others.

You should have received, did you receive a guide to serving on your way in? Yes, you did, in your notices. And that's not random. You got that for a reason. And the reason is to show you all the different opportunities and ways that you can serve this church as a member of the body.

[13:31] Because being part of a church means realizing that you don't belong to yourself. You belong to God, and he's given you as a gift. To his church. That's the first thing.

Second, though, which is related to the first, being a member of the church means realizing that you can't do what you want. Now, this is obviously a very unpopular idea.

Who are you, Mr. Preacher, to tell me what I can and cannot do? Well, all I say to that is don't shoot the messenger. Because you're right.

I don't have any right to tell you what you can or cannot do. But God does. And my job is to tell you what God says. And God has every right to tell you what you can and cannot do.

Because he made you. And he made you to live a certain way. He didn't make you just to live however you want. Think again about that cajon that I made and bought back from Gumtree, right?

[14:36] Now, it's sitting in my lounge again. Now, like everything that is designed, I made that cajon for a particular purpose. I didn't just make it and then afterwards, after I made it, looked at it and worked out what it's going to be used for, decided then how to use it.

I made it right from the start with a plan for how it is to be used. There's a right and a wrong way to use it. Anything and everything that is made, that is designed, has a right and a wrong way to use.

And when God designed you and me, when he made us, it was the same. He didn't just make us and then put us on the earth and say, now I wonder what they're going to do.

I wonder what they're going to get up to. No, he made us for a purpose. Before we were made, before we were created, there was a purpose behind our creation. And that purpose, if you read Genesis and onwards, that purpose is to rule the world under God and to love him and to love our neighbor.

That essentially, if you boil it down, is the purpose for which he made people. To rule the world under him and to love him and to love our neighbor.

[15:46] So how's that going? Not very well. Okay, the world's in a mess. We put ourselves before others and we forget God and break his laws on a daily basis.

We are not living according to the purpose, according to the design. But thankfully, the Bible goes on to reveal that God didn't leave it that way. He sent his son to buy us back and the reason that he bought us back wasn't so we could now carry on living the way we want, but the reason he bought us back with the blood of his son was to restore us to the purpose for which he made us.

So while we're not saved by living a certain way, we're not saved by works, we're not saved by being a member of a church, we're not saved by a particular pattern of life, we are, however, saved for a particular pattern of life.

We are saved for living a certain way. And Ephesians 2 tells us this. It says this, For it is by grace you have been saved.

By grace, free gift, through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For, this is important, verse 10, Why have we been saved?

[17:06] For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. You see, he saved us to do something.

He saved us to do good works, to fulfill our original created purpose. Not to live how we want, but to live how he wants. That is why he saved you, if you are a Christian, if you're a believer today, if you're going to participate in Holy Communion, and believe what it represents.

If that's you, God has saved you for a purpose, to live a certain way. And by becoming a member of a church, a local church like this, you are recognizing that.

You are recognizing that God saved you for a purpose. To become a member of a church is saying, I now want to live how God wants me to live, not how I want to live by default, but how God wants me to live.

Becoming a member of a church, part of it is a commitment to pursue holiness in your life. As Hebrews says, it's a commitment to throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us.

[18:17] See, the Christian life here, and elsewhere in the Bible, is depicted as a marathon. Rowan, I can't not, she's not here, but Rowan, who you know, is this morning at a prize giving for running a crazy distance of 100, was it 100 kilometers?

100 kilometers, she won a 100 kilometer race. When was it? Yesterday. That's insane. I mean, imagine, that's how long? 10 hours, George? Just short of 10 hours, running, full out.

That's crazy. But you know what? The Bible describes the Christian life as a kind of 70, 80 year long marathon. It's quite intense.

And, 1 Corinthians 9 says this, Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Now, he's talking about the Christian life, and he says, run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games, goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown, that will not last, but we do it, to get a crown that will last forever.

[19:28] So, Paul's saying, you see, when you're a Christian, he's saying here, it's not over yet. Just because you've come to believe in Jesus, doesn't mean that you can now sit back and wait for heaven.

You've got to run. You've got to throw off everything that hinders, and run the race that God has given you to run. You've got to strive to live the new life that God has given you to live a holy life. And you've got to throw off those habits and passions that hold you back, and keep you bogged down, and keep you from living that holy life. That is what it means. To be a Christian.

But you know what? That's going to be almost impossible for you to do without help. Now, I, myself, am very proud to say that I've just got back into the habit of running on a regular basis.

My holiday did me well. I ran quite a lot on my holiday. And so, my running habit has lasted a whole two weeks now. And I hope it'll last longer. And I was actually, I was quite proud that I ran a total of 10 kilometers this week.

[20:31] And then I heard that Rowan ran 100 kilometers in a day. Yeah. So, yeah. Anyway, we all have different gifts and abilities. But, I don't know if you've ever tried to get into the habit of running, or any exercise, but you soon realize, that it's much easier to do if you run with other people.

You know what I mean? Because, when you run with other people, they hold you accountable.

When you run with other people, you have to get up in the morning to go for a run, because someone else is relying on you. Someone else is going to phone you up and hold you accountable, and call you lazy if you didn't do it.

And they, also, running with other people, pushes you to do better. Especially if you're running as a group. If you've ever run as a group before, it tends to be that the weaker runners, who would have just ambled along by themselves, now push themselves to keep up with the group.

So, it challenges them to push themselves more than they would have otherwise. And that, that is how the Bible describes we run the race of holiness together. As God's people, keeping each other accountable, and pushing each other to keep strengthening in holiness.

Becoming a member of a church, means joining that running group, essentially. Becoming a member of a church is saying, I want to be held accountable. I want to be pushed.

[21:54] I want to be helped to discipline myself in holiness, and I want to help others to do that as well. I want the church to spur me on, out of my comfort zone, and call me out when, when, when they see unrepentant sin in my life.

And so, no longer is your life and how you choose to live, none of your church's business. I've often heard that.

You know, church, people who come to church, and there's something that needs to be addressed in their life, and I, as a pastor, might call them out on it. And often I hear, well, that's none of your business.

Maybe not in those words, but in, in the attitude. It's none of your business. It's my life. It's my private life. You keep out of it. But you know what? If you're a member of this church, you've asked it to be our business.

Because being a member of a church is realizing that you can't just do what you want. It's an admission of that. And it's, it's a request to help, to live the life that God has called you to live.

[22:57] So that's the second thing. And then finally, this morning, I want us to see the third aspect of being a member of a church. What it means, is it means that you have a new mission in life.

If you're a member of a church, you have a new mission. Now, everybody's on a mission. You might not think you're on a mission, but you're on a mission for something in life.

Everybody's on a mission in life, whether it's to make enough money to buy your own house one day. That's a mission. It's an objective that you're working towards and you're focused on. Or whether it's, whether your mission is to travel to faraway places, to see the world.

I've got a friend, a Facebook friend, who every time he posts a news feed, he's in a different country. It's, it's ridiculous. But his mission, his overriding mission in life, is to travel to as many countries as he can, and see as many different cultures as he can before he dies. For other people, their overriding mission in life might be to find true love. That's all they think about. That's all they focus on. For others, it's to become successful in their field, their job, their occupation, or their sport.

[24 : 04] For some, who serve in politics, they've made it their life mission to improve their country. For others who serve in politics, their life mission is to improve their property. But whatever it is, everybody's working towards something.

Everybody's on a mission, you see? So what's your mission, I wonder? Ask yourself, what is your mission in life? What absorbs your thoughts? What gets you out of bed in the morning?

When Jesus came to earth, and called people out of the world back to the purpose for which God had made them, he also called them to be involved in a new mission. And this is beautifully depicted in the narrative of him calling the first disciples, which we read in Mark chapter 1.

I'll read it to you. It says, As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Come follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people. At once, they left their nets and followed him.

[25 : 13] Okay, so these disciples, they already had a mission. They were on a mission. Their mission was to catch fish. They were fishermen. They had a fishing fleet. That was what they were raised to do.

That was their job, to supply fish to their family, their town, and to sell their excess to make a profit and to grow their business. That was their mission, that absorbed their daily life. But then along comes Jesus, and he gives them a new mission, to fish for people, he says.

But notice what they had to do in order to take up that mission. Did you notice, right at the end of that passage, they had to drop their old mission. They had to drop their nets.

They had to stop fishing for fish in order to fish for people. They had to abandon their first mission in order to take up their new mission.

And that's what true discipleship calls for. To put aside worldly missions and to focus on the mission that Jesus has given us.

[26 : 16] You know, the disciples didn't say, sure, Jesus will follow you, but can we bring our nets with us? Can we catch fish on the way? No. They had to drop their nets. They had to focus fully on their new mission.

You can't fulfill a whole lot of different missions at the same time. We can't follow and chase after our worldly missions and the mission that God has given us at the same time.

And the mission that Jesus has given us is the same mission as he gave those first two disciples, which is to fish for people. To tell people out there who do not yet know what Jesus has done to open the way to eternal life in relationship with their creator.

to bring people to repentance of their sins and faith in Christ. That is the most important work you can ever be involved in on this planet, in this life.

There is nothing that comes near it in terms of importance. There is nothing more important that you can do in life than to fish for people. And yet are you, if you're a Christian, are you carrying out the mission that Jesus has given you, that he's given to all his disciples?

[27 : 27] What? You don't know how to be involved in that mission? Well, you see, that's what being part of a church is all about. Being a member of a church is saying, I want to be involved in the mission of the church.

I want to contribute my gifts and my resources to that mission. That's what becoming a member of a church is saying. And so have you done that? Maybe you've been coming to this church for a long time.

Maybe you're visiting from another church. Have you, no matter what church you're part of, no matter if you're an official member or not, just a regular attendee, have you stepped forward and thrown your lot into this mission?

It's the most important thing you can do with your short time on earth. Don't waste your time on earth. You'll regret it in eternity looking back if you waste this life chasing after earthly missions that mean nothing in the end.

And so are you seeking to be trained up to do the mission Jesus has given you? Are you giving money towards that mission? Are you willing to cancel appointments in lesser worldly missions to be involved in this greatest mission of all time?

[28 : 45] Well, I'm going to stop there because we're going to cover that more next week. Ross Anderson is coming to speak to us about getting involved in God's mission in fishing for people, so please do come back for that.

Father God, we thank you for these, our brothers and sisters, who are today making a formal commitment to give themselves to the mission of the church on earth.

We thank you for the gospel of salvation, for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life won by your son's death on the cross. We thank you for giving these men and women saving faith.

We pray that from this day forward you would equip them through the power of your Holy Spirit to live the lives you have called them to live as members of your body.

Grow their spiritual gifts. Guide them to use those gifts for the building up of the body. Give them opportunities in daily life to witness to the gospel in word and deed.

[29 : 45] Cause their conversations always to be seasoned with salt, distinctive, filled with grace and truth. Make these your soldiers shining lights in a dark world. Wherever they find themselves, help them to fight the good fight of faith and to throw off everything that hinders and to run with perseverance the race that you have marked out for them.

And help the rest of us as a church body to spur them on towards love and good deeds and help them to spur us on in return. Through these your people we ask, grow your kingdom and glorify your name.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. the fin Are you