

Life in the Church

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We are concluding today a series of messages on the biblical doctrine of the church and we undertook this for a couple of reasons, one to refresh for all of us that have been with us for a number of years, to refresh what it is that we do and why the church exists, and also for those of you that are newer to our congregation, we wanted to give you a sense of what we believe and what the purpose of the church is so that you can, you know, you can decide for yourself whether this would be the church that you would want to commit to down the road and to give your involvement to, and so we just feel like it was just the right time to be able to review these things.

One of the things that we said a few weeks ago that is just so preeminently and surpassingly important, is to remember that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. He bought it with his own precious blood, and so by right of ownership, by right of purchase, the church that is to say believers in Jesus Christ, belong to him. They are his. They are his unique possession, and so that has immediate long and far-reaching ramifications. The church doesn't belong to the pastor, it doesn't belong to the elders, it doesn't belong to a select few families in the church who may have influence or may not, and so the church just uniquely belongs to Christ. We are all under his love, care and authority when we come together in life in the church.

It also has another ramification, one that I'm never quite sure just how to say but experience has taught me that it needs to be said and said plainly, it also means that the church is about more than any individual, which is to say and I say it lovingly and gently, the church is about more than you. There are transcendent purposes that transcend what any one person wants or gets out of the church, we come together collectively to serve Christ and we realize that preeminently our focus and our aim and our desire to exalt is about him, and sure, of course, I'm going to talk later here this morning about the fact that we minister to one another, we care for one another, we love one another, we understand that, we want that and we embrace it and it's a blessed privilege to do that, there is just a centrality of focus that needs to be understood in the life of a true local church, is that preeminently the church is about Christ and we fall wherever our priorities fall, they fall in line under him so that it is not preeminently about me, preeminently about what I want. You know, when people, you know, leave and they say, "This church isn't giving me what I want," I just think, "Man, somehow I've failed you if you think that that's what the church is about. Somehow I've failed in my instruction that that would be so lodged in

your mind that you think it's all about you that way." We need to have these things clear in our minds, that's why we're doing this.

So the church belongs to Christ and what we said last Sunday, I believe it was, time kind of has a way of getting away from me in my mind, there is this environment of love that permeates everything about the church. Christ gave his life as we will remember at Communion in just a few moments, Christ gave his life, shed his blood for the church because he loved the church, because he loves, present tense, the church and gave himself up for it. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We could not deliver ourselves from our bondage to Satan, our bondage to sin. We could not pay the price necessary to satisfy the wrath of God against our many sins against him. We couldn't do any of that. We were hopelessly hopelessly lost and Christ in his love saw us in that miserable predicament, took upon himself human flesh to go to the cross and offer his perfect righteous life as a sacrifice to God, acceptable to God by which our sins might be paid for, our sins might be atoned, our sins might be washed away, and that we might be reconciled to a holy God even though we're not worthy of that. So we contemplate those things and we see that Christ loved us and loved the church and gave himself up for it, as it says in Ephesians 5.

Well, following along the lines of that, what follows from that is that when we come into a local body, when there is a local church, then one of our preeminent concerns and considerations is that we come into a local church in order to give ourselves to the people of that body, to give ourselves to that body in love because that is a reflection of what Christ did beforehand. We love each other in response to that prior vertical love that Christ placed upon us and, again, that kind of love and that sense of giving of ourselves, drives out or it certainly marginalizes the selfishness and self-focus that otherwise has such a divisive corrosive impact on a local church. We realize that we come into a body in order to give of ourselves to it rather than demanding that certain things that we want be met or we're going to take our business down the street. That's just a really bad way to think about life in the church in light of what Christ has done for us. So we understand this love is a giving of self that Christ first did for us, and when we come together in a body, we come in order to give ourselves and we'll see what that looks like more particularly and practically in just a moment.

Then last Tuesday, this past Tuesday, I know many of you aren't always able to be with us on Tuesday, we talked about the purpose of the church, the purpose of the church to exalt God, to edify the saints and to evangelize the lost. Exaltation vertically, edification horizontally, beyond the walls, evangelism, and we talked about that. I encourage you to listen to all of those messages if you haven't heard them. They are the philosophy of ministry that undergirds everything that we do at Truth Community Church and we try to be forthright and forthcoming about what we do and why we do it, all grounded in Scripture.

Well, today we come to a section of the doctrine of the church that I've titled "Life in the Church." Life in the church, and to just kind of tie together, you know, the concept of membership and involvement in all of that, church membership is for Christians only and

church membership is for Christians who want to obey Christ in light of the purposes and the attitudes that he has laid out for his people, and our commitment to the church, when I say our commitment, yours and mine, you know, the way that we live together, life in the body, our life in the church and our commitment to the church reflects our prior commitment to Christ. You see, Christ didn't die simply to save you individually, beloved, Christ saved you to make you a part of his body, and as we saw last week or whenever it was, we looked through 21 different "one anothers" in the New Testament all indicating the relational nature that takes place between Christians and the body of Christ. And I just want to say this gently and also by way of encouragement but also as something that needs to be said, the Christian life is meant to be lived relationally within the context of a local body. That is what God intended. That's what Christ intended, the Spirit of God baptized us into the body of Christ and that means that we are not meant to live individually as Christians as though it was a private personal thing and we have no accountability, no responsibility, no purpose with others, it's all about me and Jesus. That's not Christianity, beloved, and there comes a point where when people are involved in the local church that there comes a point where it's time to make a commitment, it's time to identify with a church.

I recently had a conversation with a like-minded fellow pastor whom I love deeply, I know a lot of pastors and so it won't do you any good to try to guess who it was, that you would know him. He actually initiated a conversation with me not long ago, not knowing that I was teaching on church membership, and he initiated the conversation with me and we talked for a little while and it was interesting to hear him talk, he's a far better pastor than I will ever be, but the conversation turned at his initiative to people who have attended his church for a long time but for whatever reason have never pursued church ownership. A long time. We're not talking about people that have just been there for a few weeks and are still learning, he's talking about guys that have been there for years. He said this. It was brilliant. He's one of those guys that, you know, whenever his mouth flaps, he's speaking things that are brilliant and godly. He said to me, this is a private conversation, he said, "I accept the fact that some people won't join the church for doctrinal reasons. That has integrity. But I have a problem with people who come and are just too lazy or too indifferent to join." I appreciated the providential timing of his thoughts and I understand his pastoral concerns. What do you do, how are we to think in light of the purpose of Christ in giving himself for the church, Christ gave all of himself for the people that he loved and to know that that's the spirit of Christianity, well, what do you do then with people who consistently attend a church but will not publicly identify with it, who don't want to commit, who don't want to serve? I don't know. I didn't have a really good answer for him. I'm like, "Dude, you're the really good pastor here, you tell me. You give me the answer to that because I haven't figured it out." You know, what do you do with people who want to eat dinner but don't want to help set the table? How does that work in the mindset?

Well, we today will try to kind of lay out some of that for you. What is it that we do, what is our mindset as members of Truth Community Church, what specifically do we do and why do we do it? Okay, I'm going to give you three things this morning. 1. We do this, number 1, we meet together. We meet together. We gather together like we're doing here

on Sunday. No one needs to be convicted in the room by this point because you're all here, right, so this is great. We meet together. Church members – mark this because this is important – church members make regular attendance at church meetings a life priority. It's where we worship God and we serve each other. In Hebrews 10 it says this, I alluded to this last week, I believe, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some," you see, the writer of Hebrews was dealing with the same issue, wasn't he? "Not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." You see, beloved, and I want to tell you and encourage you with what I'm about to say, is that your mere presence, simply being faithful in participation in the public meetings of a local church, has an impact. It is important. It is an encouragement. It speaks volumes to those that a part of the body with when they see you they say, "They're still with us. They're still loving Christ. They're still committed here. They're still committed to us." And it's like the oil in an engine that keeps it running smoothly, it has that kind of effect. And I'm speaking as elders, I can tell you it is a great encouragement. Those of you that make being with us a priority in your life, it's a tremendous encouragement and when people start to drift away, when people start to flake out if I can put it that way and just kind of be casual and yet direct with you, you know, it worries us. What's going on there? Is something wrong? They haven't said anything. You reach out, maybe they will talk to you, maybe they won't, but all of a sudden there is this element that something is amiss here and all of that, maybe not all of it but so much of that is alleviated when people just make the effort to be with the church that they became a member of when the church gathers. Church membership is saying this to the body, church membership is saying, "I'm going to be there for you. I'm going to be there for you. I'm trusting you, the church that I'm becoming a member of, I'm trusting that you'll be here for me but I'm telling you by my membership that I'm going to be here for you too, and we're in this together, and this whole thing of exalting God and edifying one another and loving each other and evangelizing the lost, I'm in it with you. I understand a little bit about what you believe. I agree with that. I share your doctrinal commitments. I want to help you. I want to serve you. I want to be a part of you and I want you to be a part of me." That's the idea of church membership, we meet together.

So you see, beloved, I think this is last time I'm going to say something like this and I'll pivot and move on, but I hope that what I'm about to say will linger like an echo in a mountain valley, "Hello [hello, hello]," and it echoes long after I said it. You see, being a Christian in the context of a local church is not primarily about what we get here, and if we're not getting what we want we check out or we don't come until we are going to get what we want. That's just so messed up. That's so messed up! Involvement in a local church is about what you give here, and some don't have much to give and some all they can give is their presence, but that's okay. Your presence is so much more than what you might think.

You see, it's a common mistake and people, I'm not saying that people think exactly like this consciously but their lives show it, you see, people will commit to church as long as

nothing else conflicts with it. "You know, as long as I don't have anything else to do, I'll be there for you." Well, that's kind of backwards. And they live that way for years and then they wonder why God seems far away when a crisis hits their lives, you know, and all of a sudden they're falling apart at a bad medical report or something else goes wrong and they wonder, "Where's God in the midst of my trials? You know, I've been here for Him." Well, look, we've just got to be real and we've got to be candid here. I'm not doing you any good by hiding things from you. The truth is they were never that near to begin with. I'm not thinking of anyone in particular when I say this, I'm just speaking in principles. They were never that near to begin with and their approach to church life was a symptom of where their heart was really at. It wasn't a priority, it was a convenience as long as it was giving them something that they wanted, as long as their itch was being scratched. Well, Christianity was never meant to be that way and when life crises come, we get exposed for good or for bad.

Now we meet together. Let me add one aspect to that and I'm very delighted that you're all here to hear me say this and I've said this in the past from the pulpit of Truth Community: church life also includes consistent participation in the ordinances of the church. Look at 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 11, beginning in verse 23. We'll look at it again when we partake of the elements together. 1 Corinthians 11:23, he says, "I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Well, beloved, I don't want you to miss a really important imperative that's easy to miss here. Verse 24, "do this," Christ says, "do this in remembrance of Me." Verse 25, "do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me," where Christ commands his people to share in the ordinances together and as a church regularly shares in the ordinance, one of the things that church members do is they make it a priority to be there when the ordinances are celebrated, and we do this not because there is some kind of external rule imposed by, you know, by the human leadership in the church, that's not what we're talking about at all. I don't even care about that compared to what the actual point is. This is what Christ who is the Lord of the church, who owns the church, who saved you, my Christian brother and sister, Christ says, "do this." This is a matter of responding to Christ and being faithful in these ordinances, the other ordinance being baptism, gathering together is a particular priority when the ordinances are being celebrated because this is what Christ has appointed for his people to do. And I want to tell you that in a believing heart there may be a sense of conviction if you failed on this, I get that, let that conviction spur you to change, but to the believing heart there should be no resistance to this. The believing heart that loves Christ, who understands that, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments," the believing heart says, "Lord, then what do You command? Oh, Communion, your ordinances are a part of that? Yes, Lord, what a delight to be able to share in a remembrance of that which You did for me."

So we should honor the command of the Lord of the church. We should meet together generally, we should meet together specifically when his ordinances are observed. That's why we do this, it's because it's what the Lord has commanded us to do. So we meet together. Secondly, what do we do when we gather together? What is the purpose? What is life in the church? Well, secondly, we'll state it like this: we uphold biblical doctrine. We uphold biblical doctrine. Christ calls the church to uphold and transmit the truth.

Look at 1 Timothy 3 with me, if you would. 1 Timothy 3. Paul has written to his younger disciple, Timothy. He's talked about the order of the church in terms of prayer, the conduct of women, the qualifications of elders and deacons, and he said all of these things and then in verse 14 he makes this powerful statement about why he is saying all of these things. He says in verse 14, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that," here's my purpose in writing to you, Timothy, "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." He says, "Timothy, I'm writing all of these things to you so that you'll know what the church should do and what the church should be like." And in saying that, he gives incidentally, as it were, a clear statement about the purpose of the church, the church exists to be the pillar and support of the truth, that which upholds the truth, that which proclaims the truth to God's people and to a lost world. The church is uniquely assigned with the purpose, the priority, and the responsibility by its Lord to declare truth so that people understand it, so that God is honored, so that sinners are brought to faith in Christ, and that God's people are built up. That is the central purpose of the church's existence is to be the pillar of the truth, the pillar of what the Bible teaches.

Look over at 2 Peter 3 with me. I'll say these things and then draw a couple of applications from it. 2 Peter 3, beginning in verse 1, "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles." Peter says, "You have been given this body of apostolic truth. It is your responsibility to remember it, to know it, to rehearse it before one another, to be stirred up mentally and in your mind by it that you would continue in your commitment to the truth until the Lord comes." He goes on and speaks about the return of the Lord later there in chapter 3.

Then in the book of Jude just beyond the epistles of John as you continue turning right in your Bible toward the end of it, Jude verse 3, there's a lot in this single verse. It's encouraging to me that even a biblical writer went on a tangent from what he intended to do. Jude 3, he says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." He said, "I'm appealing to you. There is this body of truth that has been given to the church and I am writing to you, instructing you, appealing to you, giving you guidance on how to go about contending for this body of truth that has been given to us. The faith, the truth of Jesus Christ as it is contained in His revelation in the Scriptures." He says, "this is why I am writing. This is your responsibility. You are to contend for the truth." You see how that

parallels the idea from Paul in 1 Timothy 3, the church is the pillar and the support of the truth? You know, look, the reality of it is that broadly speaking across the world, churches throughout the world, if somehow the churches fell silent in proclaiming the word of God, the light would go out, humanly speaking, because it is the church that is to proclaim the truth.

So the purpose of the church given by Christ is uniquely, we are uniquely responsible to proclaim truth, to teach it, to defend it. One of the qualifications of elders is that they could teach sound doctrine and be able to refute those who contradict. This is central to the leadership, the life and the purpose of the church. And a writer from the last century named R. B. Kuiper, I've quoted him a few times recently, he said this and I quote, "The truth of God must be proclaimed to all men, to those who are near and to those who are far away, to rulers and subjects, to rich and poor, to adults and children, to the learned and the ignorant, to the cultured and the uncultured, to the converted and the unconverted, to men of every race, nation and language. That stupendous task, the exalted Christ has committed to His church." He goes on to say, "In this world which under the spell of the liar from the beginning has become a dark den of falsehood and deception, there is one institution whose sole concern is to hold high the torch of God's special revelation. That distinction belongs to the Christian church." So the purpose of the church is to uphold the truth.

Now in light of the unique focus, the special focus that we're putting on, you know, understanding church membership, I ask this question in light of those Scriptures, in light of that quote from a past professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary. What does that have to do, this upholding biblical doctrine, what does that have to do with church membership? Well, Charles Spurgeon somewhat answers that question in this way. But before I get that quote, let me just say this, that prospective members of a church, I think this is true broadly, it's certainly not limited to Truth Community Church here, prospective members should basically have some kind of basic understanding of the direction of the teaching of their church. They should understand what a church stands for. Is a church Calvinistic in its orientation or is it Arminian? Does a church have a high view of the word of God and uphold it as the inerrant word of God in all that it teaches, or does it fudge on things and make room for errors and things like that? You need to know those kinds of things. Prospective members should basically understand what a church teaches and this, and they should have the commitment going in that they'll support the church's teaching, the church's doctrine without creating division over things that they might have other opinions about. You know, it's not that everybody has to believe exactly the same thing or to understand the fullness of the 1689 Confession which we use here at Truth Community Church as our confession of faith, it's not that you have to understand it all before you can become a member, it's not even that you have to agree with it all before you become a member, but there should be as you enter into membership, there should be a commitment that says, "I understand. It has been disclosed to me what this church teaches and my intention and my promise to you is that I am not going to create doctrinal controversy by contradicting that which you've told me you believe in advance." Okay? That's part of the way that we uphold biblical instruction.

Look, you know, my sense is we have some newer believers in our congregation, we are very very grateful for that, I don't expect a newer believer to understand all of the 30-some sections of the 1689 Confession. What I do expect is for somebody to say, "I realize that you hold this and I'm not going to come in and create division." We do not accept, we do not accept people who have an agenda coming in wanting to change our doctrine. Our doctrine is established. If someone doesn't like our doctrine, no problem, we're not going to fight with them over that, we're not going to argue with them over that, they just need to find someplace else to go to worship where the church does agree with them. But don't come in and cause problems and try to stir people and draw people away from the doctrine of the church. I'm not aware of any anything like that happening in the moment in which I speak this, and so I'm just being ahead of the curve here. That's not acceptable. The one who comes says, "I want to support what this church teaches. The teaching that I hear resonates with me. I share these convictions. I want to grow in them myself. I want to help this church spread that teaching with whatever participation and help I can lend to it. I want to support like that."

Now for Charles Spurgeon, what he said about things on this point. Charles Spurgeon said this and I quote, he says, "I have no right to be a member of a church whose doctrines I do not accept. Indeed I ought not to regard it as a possibility that I could join to profess what I do not agree with. If I am protesting in my heart and yet in my proper person continue part and parcel of that church, I am not acting truthfully to God." You see, in the closing aspect of what Spurgeon said there is just so really helpful, is that we recognize that, you know, we're living all these things out in the presence of the God who sees and knows our heart, and that, you know, there should be a transparency and a sincerity of heart that as people come into the church sincerely, truthfully, without hidden agendas saying, "I want to be a part of this church. I want to support this church. I'm going to be there for you and I hope and trust that you'll be there for me." That's the spirit of church membership and a church that gathers together people like that as I, you know, look, I'm proud and biased as the pastor of Truth Community Church of the membership that we have here, but you know, I believe with all of my heart that we have members just like what I'm describing here in this message, you know, then that becomes a very sweet place to be. This becomes a haven in the midst of the storms of doctrinal controversies that happen in the broader Christian church, the storms of life, the storms of doctrine in the broader church. Here's a place where we can gather together, we can gather in trusting one another and say, "I know that you're with me. We're on the same team. We're on the same side. And what a blessing it is that even if my whole family stands against me, what a blessing it is to come here to be with this group of people and know that I'm with people of like precious faith that love me, that love Christ, and that I love in return as well." That's the spirit of church membership, beloved, it's very special. It's a lofty thing and it's one of the reasons among many why we at Truth Community Church protect it and guard it, and yet welcome all with open arms who are truly converted to Christ and want to share in what we are doing.

Finally, what do we do? We said we meet together, we uphold biblical doctrine together, thirdly, finally for this morning and kind of coming back full circle to what we said last Sunday, do you know what we do? We love one another. We love one another. Christ

gave himself for love of the church. We give ourselves to the body in a spirit of love. Let me take you through some passages in the book of Romans to wrap up this aspect of our service together and then we'll move into Communion.

Turn to Romans 12 with me. Romans 12. After the Apostle Paul had set forth the doctrine of salvation in chapters 1 through 8 and its meaning for the nation of Israel in chapters 9 through 11, he now explains how believers are to live out that proof that he has just written about. The prior 11 chapters undergird what is said here in verse 12 and he says in verse 12, he says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God," Romans 12:1, "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." He says, "In light of everything that I've said, here's now what you do in response to that truth." Verse 2, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." And then he goes and he gives this extended discussion of what obedience in the realm of the Christian life looks like and what obedience, how it finds its expression in the church body. Romans 12:4, he says, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Do you see it, beloved? Do you see how he brings this focus immediately after all of these great doctrines that he's set forth in the first 11 chapters, he brings it to the relational dimension of the body of Christ and living together with other Christians in love.

So we see that – oh, beloved, one day I'll go into this in greater detail, Lord willing, for now I'll just say this – people love the book of Romans, people devoted to the doctrines of grace love the book of Romans and rightly so, but what I want you to see is that Romans doesn't stop after Romans 8:39 or it doesn't stop after Romans 11:36, it's all one unit of instruction. We're meant to follow it all the way through so that we should never divorce our understanding of doctrine from the way that it works itself out in our lives and in the context of the local church. Same thing in the book of Ephesians, broadly speaking, oversimplifying, first three chapters of doctrine, Calvinistic doctrine, God chose us before the foundation of the world, he writes those three chapters and then chapter 4, verses 1 through 3, he talks about unity and love within the body of Christ. You see, the doctrine is meant to flow into and inform and produce this life of love within the body of Christ, not simply me by myself off sucking my pacifier of my preferred teaching of God's word, having nothing to do with the people of God. That is not biblical Christianity. I don't know how many times more I'm going to keep saying that. We love one another. The Spirit baptized us into a body and this is to find expression in the church body. Paul said there in verse 5, we're members of one another.

So what does that look like? Well, let me just give you five points here really quickly. First of all, we use our spiritual gifts in the body. God has gifted you with something. You have an ability, you have a talent, you have resources, you have time, you have a mix of those things in different proportions. God intends for you to somehow find use of that, to make use of that. It could be as simple as simply being, "I'll be a member in the church that is faithful to pray because I can't get out much." Or, "I'm a mom and I've got a

lot of little kids. I can't get out much. I can't always make it like I would like to, but do you know what? I'm gonna be a faithful mother in the context of my home and that will be my contribution to the life of the body of Christ. I will display by my actions what a Christian mother looks like, what a Christian mother does, and even though I'll be, it'll seem in a sense like I'm on the public margins of things, I'm doing my part by being faithful to my family, being faithful to my husband." You know there are a lot of different ways that this all plays out but we use our spiritual gifts in the body.

Look at verse 6. He's just been talking about the body. Verse 6, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Different strengths in individual members of the body, the individual contributes those strengths and makes strong where the body would otherwise be weak. This isn't complicated. It's part of giving yourself to the body of Christ in love. This is how we love one another.

Secondly, we share in each other's joys and sorrows. Look at verse 15, he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men." Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. This is life in the body.

Now beloved, and I'm not picking on anybody based on where you geographically sit here, but if you come in five minutes after the service ends and you sit in the back row and then you leave immediately and you talk to no one on your way out and that's the consistent pattern of your life, it's not just because you had something urgent that day, tell me how you're rejoicing with anybody who rejoices, or weeping with anybody who weeps when you just keep everybody at arm's length or more? How is that, how are you obeying Christ and his instruction from his word in the participation of body life that way? How is that possible that that's what you're doing? You see, we're to love one another, we're to share in each other's joys and sorrows.

And I suppose there's something else that I need to say here at this point as well, is that, you know, sometimes it means that you're gonna have to make the effort, it might mean that you have to make the effort to reach out yourself and not simply complain because nobody came up to you and talked. That doesn't work. You've got a mouth too, you know, and you can reach out also and you can speak up. I honestly believe that our church is exemplary in speaking to those of you that are members, I believe our church is exemplary in reaching out to new people, exemplary in caring for people who might be sitting alone and caring for them and trying to reach out for them, but it's inevitable that we're gonna miss some people, it's inevitable that someone may feel neglected. All I'm saying here is I want you to understand that there is an obligation on both sides. It doesn't do to simply say, "No one spoke to me and therefore I'm out of here." That doesn't work.

The one who's serious about biblical church life says, "Oh, I can reach out too. Oh, this is so uncomfortable. I am just like the pastor at Truth Community Church and social interaction is awkward and difficult for me. I'm just like the pastor there but I've got to try and I'm gonna try. Hi, my name is Tom. Who are you? Have you been here a long time? I'm kinda new here. This is hard for me." But you reach out and you look to cultivate that and you give it some time and you don't just blow everybody off just because it doesn't happen in the first two weeks for you. That's ridiculous. That's selfish for people to act that way, to leave over that. That's ridiculous. That's not acceptable because we are all under this admonition from Scripture to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. "My name's Tom. You know, I'm new here but, ah, you know, can I pray for you? How could I pray for you this week? I'm just finding my way around and this is really awkward for me but I want to try. I believe that the truth is here. I believe that love is here. I'd like to become a part of it and you're the closest one to me. Let's talk."

Thirdly, said that we love one another by using our spiritual gifts, secondly, we share in each other's joys and sorrows, thirdly, we share in the financial support of the body. Romans 15:27, Paul speaking about the churches at Macedonia and Achaia who contributed to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem and he said in verse 27, he said, "they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." Paul's saying that these saints in Macedonia and Achaia benefited from the teaching, the spiritual things that flowed out of the church at Jerusalem, they benefited from that spiritually therefore it's only right that they would return things materially to help the church in Jerusalem in their time of need, in their place of need. And that's the pattern, that's the way that it works in the body of Christ. We come in, we share in the benefit of spiritual ministry, share in teaching, we share in loving one another, we share in all of these things, well, then it's only right and proper then that according to our means we somehow contribute to the financial support of what makes that happen. You know, and you just see again how this drives out, love drives out the selfishness that just says, "Give me. Give me. Give me. And I'm gonna have my hand tight on my wallet as you do." We don't even ask for money here. We don't pass a plate here. The financial support of the church is never an issue unless it comes up in the regular teaching of Scripture. We never go out of our way to talk about it but Scripture here shows that life in the body means that somehow we're sharing in the financial support of the body according to our means. Some it may be very little, some they may be on the verge of bankruptcy and it can't be anything right now. That's okay. Over time those things even out.

Fourthly, we pray for one another. We pray for one another. Romans 15:30, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." Paul says, "I urge you, brethren. I need your help, brethren. I need you underneath me. I need you like holding up my arms here with your prayers. Strive before the throne of God with me as I pray for you, pray for me as well." We pray for one another. You see, we don't just walk out and forget about each other until we come back on Sunday.

Oh yeah, no, no, somehow the people in the church become a part of our intercession before God.

Finally, point 5, how do we love one another? That's the third major point. We've said the spiritual gifts, sharing in joys and sorrows, the financial support, the matter of prayer, and then fifthly, and this is a big one, we consciously preserve the unity of the body. We consciously preserve the unity of the body. Look at Romans 16:17, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them." We're not to entertain them. We're not to give them a platform for their divisive destructive words. We're to turn away from them. We're to say, "No, not here. I don't receive that. I don't take that. I'm not listening to you as you try to stir up trouble. You're gonna have to take that someplace else because it's not welcome here." Paul says verse 18, he describes those divisive people. He says, "For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." So we preserve the unity of the church.

Several years ago I did a message that if you haven't heard it, I encourage you to pick up, to follow up on that, "Putting the You in Church Unity." I encourage you to listen to that if that is unfamiliar to you.

So all of that said and all of it intended in a very positive, constructive, affirming spirit toward this congregation, but we have to say things positive and negative, we have to lay it all out in order to be faithful to the Scriptures which are our source of life, faithful to Christ who gave himself for us, we have to say these things that we've said here today. What I want to say as I close is this, is that life in the body, life in the church is natural for those who are in Christ, who are in the body of Christ. Scripture goes so far as to say, speaking to Christians, that you don't have any need for anyone to teach you how to love one another because you already know how to do it. It is a natural response of having the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, and all those other fruit found in Galatians 5:22 and 23. This comes naturally. The true Christian hears this and says, "You know, this is convicting. I fall short but I welcome this. This is where my heart is inclined to. This isn't abrasive to me. This is balm to know that I can be a part of the body of Christ that he loved and that he died for."

And at some point, beloved, it's in my notes and I need to say it, at some point life in the church becomes a priority around which you shape all of life, not vice versa. I'll leave it there, but I am so grateful to be surrounded at Truth Community Church by people who emulate this, which is to say I'm so grateful to be at Truth Community Church to be surrounded by people like you. What a blessing God has given to me and I trust that our desire going forward corporately is that we would all contribute to make this even more a slice of heaven on earth.

To those of you that are new, I just want you to know as you're contemplating, you know, whether this is the place for you or not, I just want you to know that our arms are open wide to like-minded believers who want to join us in the spirit of the things that we've

talked about here today. This is no exclusive club, it's the furthest thing from my mind. Our arms are open wide to people who share in our doctrinal commitments and want to be a part and a contributing part of a body like this.

So with gratitude toward God for you, I invite you to bow now in meditation with me as our men come to prepare to serve Communion and as our musicians also come.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, You are the Lord of the church and we gladly recognize Your role and Your position. We pray for those who perhaps have heard this and recognize that they're totally foreign, totally strangers to this kind of life of which we have spoken, this life in Christ You Yourself, and so, Lord, we ask You to have mercy on the unbelieving hearts, that You would open their eyes, that You would take away their heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh that they might willingly respond to You in repentance and faith and enter into Christ, and then following upon that, Father, entering into the life of Your church. Thank You for all of the wonderful people that have made Truth Community Church their home. I thank You for each one and I pray that Your Spirit would be swift to encourage and affirm those, Father, who are so faithful that they would not walk away with a false sense of guilt over the things that they've heard but, Father, that Your Spirit would assure them of Your care, Your love, that they are pleasing You in their lives. For those of us perhaps a bit convicted, Father, have mercy on us and show us the path forward. For others, Father, newer to our church, learning, figuring things out, sorting it out, be gracious to them and guide their footsteps to the place of blessing that You would have for them in their lives. And all of these things, Father, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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