

We are again talking about **Church Membership** this morning.

Last week we talked about why it is necessary in our environment. We talked about the church being “a key-carrying body established by Jesus for the sake of everyone he has purchased with his blood.”

*Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 69.*

We have covered some of **what the church is** and **what it is for**. We have laid out what God says about church. We have seen its importance. We have seen that it is something that is **built in** to the Christian life. If we think to go through life without a commitment to a local church, we are not living out biblical Christianity. We are making it up as we go.

We have laid the groundwork that tells us what God wants the church **to be** and **do**. Now we need to learn more of **HOW we carry out** our Christian lives in the middle of this church.

Now, like we have said before, the church is not an easy topic to study, because we will not be able to go to one passage and get the whole picture. It would be like me laying out a **timeline** of my life. You could not go to one year to learn **what Carla is like**, even though she would be in every year since 1980. No, you would have to look at what I say **each year** to gather what she is like. You would get bits and pieces here and there. But there is no way you could look at the **whole timeline** and miss her significance to my life.

That is what studying the church is like. The epistles were written to **churches** to people **in churches** telling them how to, (among other things), live life in the environment of church. The church, from the beginning to end of the new testament, is **an assumption**.

Another complication is that the church is compared to a whole lot of things.

**A body, a flock of sheep, branches of a vine, a bride, a temple, God’s building, a people, exiles, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, salt of the earth, the Israel of God, the elect lady, and on and on.**

*Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 68.*

Wow. Each metaphor needs studied in its context to understand the various qualities of the church he was talking about. The church is the place that all of these things reside. It is the framework in which all this happens in.

Another insight from Mr. Leeman.

**Each metaphor for church has a job to do for describing something about our union in a church. Each metaphor teaches us something different about what a church and its members are like. To describe the church as a family is to speak about its relational intimacy and shared identity. To**

call it a body is to say that its members are mutually dependent but have different roles. To refer to it as the temple of the Spirit is to say that God specially identifies himself and dwells with these people. The language of vine and branch communicates the church's dependence on Jesus and his Word for its life. Do you see?

Think about it in terms of union. The union of a married couple serves a different purpose than the union of two bricks in a building because they are different kinds of unions. But what's our union within our churches supposed to be like. Like a marital union? A union of bricks? What? Well, we need to borrow words and ideas from all these different images to be able to characterize relationships within a local church. Isn't that amazing?

So when people ask me, "Is church membership even in the Bible?" I'm half tempted to reply, "No, it's not in the Bible, at least not in the way that you mean." The Bible has a much richer and more complex vision of how Christians should live out their unity in local churches. It's as though we've been looking for apples when really we should be looking for whole bowls of fruit.

**There's nothing on earth like the local church.**

*Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 70–71.*

Now when we look at all these metaphors, while they may be true of the universal church, where do they get practiced? How do we live them out? How do they show themselves? In the local church. For instance every local church has **the body parts it needs**. It is not one big arm of the universal church formed only to serve a function for the universal church. No.

**Individual body parts** are at **each location**. Corinth had its body parts for the church at Corinth. That is the context they are used in. 1 Cor 12:22 says The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. He is talking about the local church. The names and faces that these people know and live with.

OK, so this local church is an amazing thing that God has made. It is an outpost of the kingdom of heaven in our local community. And believers are to be woven into this local outpost.

OK then, who gets in? Who is qualified to be a member? What characteristics are needed to be a member? I have often said that it is the

elder's job to never knowingly **include** someone that Christ would **exclude** or **exclude** someone that Christ would **include**. But what does that look like? Well first we need to realize that it is the church that Christ gave the keys to the kingdom. So it is actually **the church** that should decide upon this. We have never formally done it this way. We have relied more on the elders to make this decision. But we are figuring out how to have **the congregation** make the say going forward.

So who should **be included**? Well, the person must be a true Christian, as far as we can tell. They should be able to explain **how it is** that **they are saved** and headed for an eternity with Christ. Some will be better than others at **explaining** that. But that is a qualification. They must make a profession that points completely to the grace of God and the work of Christ.

**To be a member, a person must believe they are a Christian and be able to explain how they know it.** Really, how can you **believe you are a Christian** and not know **HOW** you became one?

Along with this, **a person must sincerely and heartily agree with the core doctrines of the Christian life**, about what makes a Christian a Christian.

This list of doctrines should not contain any of the disputable issues where two parties have two sets of views that are based upon an understanding of the texts clearly stated in scriptures. Examples of these would be things like, should you keep Saturday as a Sabbath, Sunday as a Sabbath, or is every day a Sabbath in Christ? We may differ on whether a Christian is allowed to drink alcohol. We may differ on the idea of soul sleep or the soul going directly to be with Christ. We may differ on a lot of things. But we cannot differ on the core doctrines. Jesus was God and man. He was born of a virgin, conceived by God. Christ died to take upon Himself the wrath of God so that we can be saved. Christ rose from the dead. Salvation is by Grace alone by faith alone. Works play no part in getting us saved. Things like that.

When we are asking for conformity to scriptural salvation, our goal is to look for a person who shows the **proper understanding**. This person will be broken. They will not be **arrogant** about their salvation. They will know that they brought nothing to the picnic except their sin. There is nothing to be proud about.

Do you deserve hell because of your sin? Yes. Certainly

Why do you think he will not do punish you with hell? Because of Christ.

How much is that worth to you? Everything

That is the attitude we are looking for.

## Baptism

In Acts 2:38 the crowds asked Peter what they had to do to be saved. Peter told them, **Repent and be Baptized**. Paul assumed everyone at the Romans church had already been Baptized. **Romans 6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

This is also the first thing Jesus commands followers of Him to do.

**[Mat 28:19 ESV] 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**

A person who refuses to get Baptized is a person who refuses to submit to the Lordship of Christ. When we are testing a person to make sure they are a believer, one of the first signs we look for is obedience to the Lord's clear commands. Baptism is a very easy command to understand and submit to. After we interview a member candidate, those doing the interview should be able to say

“Based on all I know so far, I am very confident that this person is a Baptized follower of Jesus Christ.” That is ultimately all that is required to join a church.

Now, should we only allow for the best representatives of Christ? Should we only allow the non controversial ones, the easy to live with ones, the ones who are not struggling to beat bad habits? Well, if we made the list long enough, we would all be left out. No. We are only trying to determine if the light is on or off. We are not trying to sort it out based on **how bright** their dimmer switch is turned up. It is truly wonderful. We can be brought into the church just like the song says, “just as I am”, so long as we are not committed to staying “just as we were”.

Now once we have taken the step to assemble with and identify with a kingdom outpost, then what?

We recently studied the book of Philippians. We learned a lot there about how church people were to live together.

The church in Philippi was told how to live.

Philippians 1:27–28 (ESV)

**27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are**

**standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.**

Look at this. Paul is dealing with this group, not so much as a bunch of individual Christians but as a common force. They, together, are to be living a **manner** of life, a **way** of life, that represents the gospel of Christ in way that is actually **worthy** of the gospel of Christ. How they **live** expresses accurately the **value of that which they have received**. Their life is **congruent** with the gospel they have received.

And how is that to look?

One in spirit. One in mind. Striving side by side.

You don't really get a picture of rugged individualism here, do you?

**Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJV)**

**1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Have you ever considered that **an individual Christian cannot obey this**, and most of the things Paul and Peter wrote in their letters. An individual freelance "**Jesus and Me**" believer cannot do a large part of what the churches were called to do.

Look again at the words Paul uses.

Like minded

Same love

One accord

One mind

Esteeming others better than ourselves

Look out for other's interests

That is the mindset of the church. That is God's will for the church. It cannot happen **separate** from the church. It cannot happen in a **universal church**.

It is to be worked out with **names** and **faces** who are submitted to Christ, to His word, to the leaders, and to each other. That is the model.

So how do we submit to the local church?

First publicly. Baptism and the Lord's supper are both done in a corporate model. We come together for these things. And in them we are identified publicly with that church. There is no such thing as a private membership where the member is not present for these things. There is no idea in scripture of being on a **membership role** at a church where we rarely attend. No. Membership is visible. It is public. This may not mean that the unbelieving world must see it. Persecuted churches may need to keep their gatherings hidden from the world. But those in the church know who is in and who is out.

Second- which is similar to the first- a member attends physically and geographically.

### **Hebrews 10:24–25 (NKJV)**

**24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

Meeting physically together is important. Sure, there are circumstances like Jack and Karen face where meeting is life threatening. There may be reasons that meeting is impossible. But when at all possible, we should meet face to face so we can do all the face to face ministry scripture urges us to do.

If we are to take scripture very seriously, even where **we live** should take into account our ability to **minister to others**. The jobs that we take should keep that in mind. The church should be a consideration in all of our thinking.

There are valid reasons to leave a church and join another. There are valid reasons to move geographically, especially for jobs and marriage. But whatever church we are a part of, the gathering together and the ministry to brothers and sisters should always be a high consideration, a high priority. The closer we are geographically, the more likely it is that we will be readily involved in each other's lives.

### **Third- Socially**

We can see these all tie together.

I like brother Leeman's quote on this.

**Churches should be more than social clubs, but they shouldn't be less. Our friends are the ones we imitate and follow. We spend money where they spend money. We raise our children like they raise their children. We pray like they pray. Our friends form who we become as we imitate one another (see James 4:4; also 1 Cor. 15:33)**

*Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 97–98.*

Another element of submitting to each other socially is that we learn to love those who are **different** than us. The church in the US has made a huge mistake by lumping together all people of a **similar age** and having them spend most of their time in that environment. Young people need to meet the needs of old people. Old people need to meet the needs of young people. Older women need to teach young mothers how to do their jobs. Old men need to teach young men how to be men. Young people need to sit and hear the stories of the old. They will learn much if they will just listen and ask questions.

When you and I sit down on Sunday morning, we sit in our normal seats in an orderly fashion. But when we relate, it looks more like a web of relationships interweaving among our body. There should be a strand **to** each of us **from** each other. Some of those strands may be thicker. But they should exist. And everyone should initiate those contacts. That is not the leader's job. That is **everyone's** job. Leaders can **teach** body-ness and we can be **an example** of body-ness. But we cannot **create** it. That initiative must come from every member.

And sometimes, the more uncomfortable that connection is, the more valuable it is. And often the more productive it is. Do you feel left out and distant from the church? What have you done about it? When is the last time you invited someone over? When is the last time you made an effort to visit someone? This stuff isn't someone else's job. It is all of our jobs.

**Fourth- We should also submit affectionately**

**1 Corinthians 12:25–26 (NKJV)**

**25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

We know that not everyone is going to share **everything** with **everyone**. Nor should they. But the church should have meaningful relationships where burdens can be shared. I think of when **Jarrod and Suzannah** were going through their trial with Fiona. The body **knew** and the body **suffered** along with Jarrod and Suz. Some were able and willing to be more involved than others, but I think it is safe to say that the Sisler family knew their church family cared. The Sisler family was not the only ones crying and they were not the only ones rejoicing when the **good news** came out.

That is how church should be.

There are times we have failed miserably in this. There are times we have done well. There is one good thing though. If we are alive, we have time to improve.

**Fifth- We should submit financially.**

Scripture tells us in several places that we should look out for those in need.

Romans 12:13 (NKJV)

**13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**

Galatians 2:10 (NKJV)

**10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.**

These are just a few verses. So we should look for needs and meet them.

Paul also says that finances should be used for those who preach.

1 Corinthians 9:14 (NKJV)

**14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.**

I am the highest paid person at our church. The elders have assigned to pay me \$900 per month. That is the amount I have been paid since I started preaching 11 years ago I think. So it easy to see, no one is getting rich at our church on your hard work.

We have been able to build this building by your contributions. We have not been in rough financial shape for a long long time. Many pastors complain about people not giving. I just smile. This church has been a very giving church.

Our membership document requires a tithe of one's income unless one has a scriptural concern about doing so. Then they are to approach the elders. We do this because it is a scriptural principle in the Old Testament that the tithe will take care of making sure that the ministry of the priesthood could be paid for. There are always expenses involved in a ministry that need met. And we should all play our part. It is a mutual commitment for the good of the Body. I have also seen that the Lord normally blesses us as we give. There is no formula that you can hold God to in order to get richer. But when we show that being obedient to God is more important to us than money, he often blesses us with more money.

**Sixth we should submit vocationally**

This is not an absolute. It is clearly God's will sometimes for someone to take a job elsewhere for reasons other than just an increase in money. But in



general, if the church means to us what it is supposed to mean, we should be as committed to it as the Lord allows.

Carla and I have remained in Oakland primarily because of this church. The only time I seriously considered moving was for an opportunity at Christian Aid that didn't pan out. I thought that job would have been an opportunity for greater ministry. The Lord evidently thought that the ministry here was more important. I could have gone various places for more money over the years, we could have moved to be closer to biological family, but as long as the Lord would **provide** for our family **here**, I was committed to staying. And the Lord **has** supplied for us time after time. I was always amazed at the opportunities God provided in the Oakland area even though I am not highly skilled in any particular skill.

If we see church the way the NT presents church, it should normally be a higher priority than any ladder we can climb, any promotion we can obtain, any status we can gain. There are exceptions. But the church should always be a major consideration.

Seventh, we should submit to the church on obedience matters.

**Galatians 6:1 (NKJV)**

**1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**

**Jude 23 (NKJV)**

**23 but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.**

Sometimes we may fall into a sin. It is easy to think that it is nobody's business. And if you have no church membership, you may be able to **live** in that sin without **any** intervention by **believers**. But in the church you cannot **do so** if your sin is at all **visible**. Others in the church will interfere. They will step in and begin asking hard questions. In the church, you are called to **submit** to their loving intrusion. It may be hard to be told **you must win** where you have **always lost** in the past. It may cause you to fear or to freak out. But you are required to submit to **God's words** at the hands of **God's messengers**. That is just one way you submit to the church.

Lastly, we should submit to the church regarding spiritual practice.

This is what I mean. First, this is where you exercise your spiritual gifts.

## **1 Corinthians 12:7–11 (NKJV)**

**7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:**

Everyone in the church is given **spiritual gifts** for **that** specific church. So that is where you exercise them. God has arranged it that way. The gift you have is not for you. It is for others. And you owe it to God to make use of that gift in your local body.

Second this is where you focus on building one another up in faith through God's word.

## **Jude 20–21 (NKJV)**

**20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.**

Do you want to be built up in the faith? Do you want to help **others** to be built up in the faith? Look **first** to your local church. God has planted people there for all of us to **build us up** and for us to help **build them up**. If you don't see it yet, just keep looking.

And lastly these are people we should pray for regularly. We are told over and over to pray for each other. And the each other is always the local church. We should pray for more than this, but not less.

So what we have said up to this point is that Church Membership is necessary in our world for the church to know **who is committed** to being a Biblical part of the church and **who the church can vouch** to the world that **“This person is one of us. This person is a follower of Jesus Christ.”**

Being recognized as a church member in our culture is similar to “being added to their number” in Acts. It is necessary and natural. There are no **autonomous lone ranger Christians** in the New Testament. Every Christian was **addressed** in the **context** of church.

The local church is an outpost of the kingdom of God. While it is true we are all part of the universal church, all of our responsibilities are carried out **to, through, or in the context of** the local church. The local church is where authority is carried out.

In an effort to affirm our mutual commitment to each other and to make sure we all understand what that commitment entails, we are going to have all of our members **re-sign**, and **new** members **sign**, a membership statement. But this time there will be two additional questions.

There will be a question about your understanding of what the gospel is. We would like you just to explain your understanding of how you were saved. And we would like you to list the circumstances and your understanding of Baptism.

The elders are still working out the details of the membership agreement. There will be some changes, but knowing you all, I doubt any of them will be at all controversial. The biggest change is that we have changed our stance on who is qualified to be a preacher. The preacher should meet the **qualifications** of an elder and **be** an elder. We believe that change most closely matches the Biblical model.

We will get the revised agreement to you soon so you can **reaffirm**, or for the **first time**, affirm, your membership to the body of Ferndale Church.

Now that you have heard the requirements and responsibilities of membership, if you would like to discuss any of the points, please get with one of the elders to discuss it. We really do welcome those conversations. It is important to us that we are all on the same page with membership, even though we may lovingly disagree on many secondary issues.

## Twelve Reasons Membership Matters

1. *It's biblical.* Jesus established the local church and all the apostles did their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Christians today should expect and desire the same.

2. *The church is its members.* To be a church in the New Testament is to be one of its members (read through Acts). And you want to be part of the church because that's who Jesus came to rescue and reconcile to himself.
3. *It's a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper.* The Lord's Supper is a meal for the gathered church, that is, for members (see 1 Cor. 11:20–33). And you want to take the Lord's Supper. It's the team flag that makes the church team visible to the nations.
4. *It's how you officially represent Jesus.* Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and therefore a passport-carrying Jesus representative before the nations. And you want your representation to be authorized. Closely related to this....
5. *It's how you declare your highest allegiance.* Your membership on the team, which becomes visible when you wave the flag of the Lord's Supper, is a public testimony that your highest allegiance belongs to Jesus. Trials and persecution may come, but your only words are, "I am a Christian."
6. *It's how you embody and experience biblical images.* It's within the accountability structures of the local church that Christians live and experience the interconnectivity of his body, the spiritual fullness of his temple, and the safety and intimacy and shared identity of his family.
7. *It's how you serve other Christians.* Membership helps you to know which Christians on planet Earth you are specifically responsible to love, serve, warn, and encourage. It enables you to fulfill your biblical responsibilities to Christ's body (for example, see Eph. 4:11–16, 25–32).
8. *It's how you follow Christian leaders.* Membership helps you to know which Christian leaders on planet Earth you are called to obey and follow. Again, it allows you to fulfill your biblical responsibility to them (see Heb. 13:7, 17).
9. *It helps Christian leaders lead.* Membership lets Christian leaders know which Christians on planet Earth they will "give an account" for (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).
10. *It enables church discipline.* It gives you the biblically prescribed place to participate in the work of church discipline responsibly, wisely, and lovingly (1 Cor. 5).
11. *It gives structure to your Christian life.* It places an individual Christian's claim to obey and follow Jesus into a real-life setting where authority is actually exercised over us (see John 14:15; 1 John 2:19; 4:20–21). *It's God's discipling program.*
12. *It builds a witness and invites the nations.* Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching universe (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34–35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:9–12). The very boundaries, which are drawn around the membership

of a church, yield a society of people that invites the nations to something better.  
*It's God's evangelism program.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Leeman, [\*Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus\*](#), 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 79–81.