

Brandywine Together Part 3: A Case for Church Membership 9/23/18

Recap: The Church is God's Plan A to reach the world with the saving message of Jesus.

What is the Church? The Church is a group of followers of Jesus in a location who commit together to: 1) Regularly meet together for worship 2) Help each other grow in faith and love 3) Prayerfully partner together to advance the gospel. This is why Todd encouraged you last week to get connected in Biblical Community. **Week 3- A Case for Church Membership**

Have you ever been halfway through a conversation just to realize someone had a hidden agenda? Acquaintance on Facebook from high school I haven't talked to in at least 10 years, messages me- "Hey Nate, it looks like you are doing great and got your life together, I'd love to talk to you sometime. Give me a call." So I call, and he's just making small talk...and I'm starting to wonder, OK what is this all about? Eventually gets around to tell me about this great online business that is making him money...OHHHH- NOW I know. I hurried off the phone. Annoyed thinking, I would have preferred if he just messaged me and said- Do you want to waste your time being part of my online pyramid scheme? I like it when people shoot straight.

My goal today if you are a Christian and you consider this your church home- Is to persuade you to become a member, is that straight enough for you? Now, if you are already a member- awesome, I want to give you a stronger biblical foundation for meaningful membership. If you aren't a Christian, or maybe you are just visiting- Some of this may seem foreign to you, I hope you will stay engaged in this message because I think you will learn more about what this church thing is all about, maybe it will raise more questions and I would love to meet with you for a cup of coffee anytime, anywhere on me...take me up on that. But many of you attend and this is home for you. Maybe you go to a small group or classes, you have your kids in programs, maybe you serve and even give financially here. But you have stopped short of official membership.

If you're like most people, the word "membership" doesn't cause you to well up with any deep spiritual emotion. For some of us, membership is something most associated with junk mail from credit card companies or a high-pressure sales pitch at a gym. When it comes to the church, perhaps membership is viewed as a bureaucratic tool for keeping track of people or a cold, impersonal metric. Some consider it Western—an imperialist concept that really ought to be abandoned. What I want to do is provide answers for some of the questions and objections to membership I have heard most often.

Is membership in the Bible? Full disclosure NO...let's close in prayer.

Why do we practice it if it's not in the Bible?

There is no command, "Thou shalt become a voting member in accordance with thine By-laws." But the Word Trinity is not in the Bible either. It may not be there explicitly, but I believe the concept of membership is implicit.

Now it's important to understand what we mean when we say membership. Official recognition by a church that an individual is committing themselves to the church to fulfill God's purposes and commands. "Official" may take many different forms based on the church- Baptism, a vote, signing something, a handshake, laying on of hands...

Let's look at a few Key Passages of why we believe this kind of membership is important. The reason we even use this word MEMBER is because we see it in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul addresses a particular local church in the city of Corinth, explaining to them that instead of being divided and jealous of each other, they should be united together as one. Why? In the course of that argument he says in 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Here in the analogy we see membership as not some theoretical concept but rather something local, something practical and concrete. Each member plays a part in the local church- Eyes and ears, fingers and feet, inner parts and outer parts that are in this thing together- one hurts we all do, one rejoices we all do. See membership is not some cold, beauracratc, accounting term. It captures vividly the flesh and blood ideals of church membership. Oneness, Mutual responsibility, Commitment, Interdependence. Membership at BVBC is an official recognition of this spiritual reality in the local church.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

The writer of Hebrews is writing to the local church, the same church that he said, don't neglect meeting together. As a pastor, two questions leap off the page for me: First, if there is no recognized membership in the local church, then what holds this relationship between pastors and congregation together? Which leaders should an individual Christian obey and submit to? The leadership at Aldersgate or Faith Presbyterian? All? None?

Second, and more personally, who will I as a pastor give an account for?

The Scriptures clearly command a shepherding body to care for specific people. 1 Peter 5:2 *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.* Must we give an account for the soul of every individual who walks through these doors? Whether they come occasionally or weekly, whether they attend a few different churches, whether they have been here once, or 30 times or 30 years? It would seem to me that this would be impossible apart from individuals in the congregation coming forward to say, "Yes, I am counted among your number of whom you, leaders, are responsible, and I am agreeing to place myself under your leadership." We live that out through the mechanism of membership so that it's clear. Now this might not seem like a big deal to some, but it is a serious issue for us pastors and leaders who see this as our responsibility before almighty God.

Acts 6:1-6

Did you know that the first church in the New Testament was a Megachurch? After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, Acts 2, people responded to the gospel were baptized and Dr. Luke

records that they add 3000 to their roles that day. Skip forward a few months in the life of this young, growing church.

Acts 6:1-6

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

*2 So the Twelve gathered **all the disciples** together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.*

3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Notice, we see the whole church in Jerusalem gathered together for the first members meeting where they voted on 7 people to be designated as "Deacons" that is, servants for these widows. The implication is two-fold- 1) They knew who the disciples were (who were among them), who were choosing and who were being chosen. If Jim Bob just happened to walk in that day thinking he was at the YMCA, and decided that he wanted to participate, did his vote count? 2) They had some democratic mechanism to determine who was being elected. Ballots, "I's", "Hand Raising". So there was some structure here to make sure there was a level of accountability and order.

So we can surmise from just these few passages that while the mechanism of membership is not explicit, we do **see the vision of local church membership** as unity, commitment, responsibility and interdependence in the analogy of the body. We do see an implied need for some form of recognized membership in the electing of leaders, relationship between pastors and congregation, accountability.

Why do we require Baptism for Membership?

-Important to remember. Baptism doesn't save us. We have an equation you have heard me share before. Salvation is faith in Jesus+Nothing.

But Baptism is an important public declaration of our faith, and it was from the beginning of the church. **Back to the Future**- Marty...Doc, Imagine I have the DeLorean, we go to Palestine 10 days after Jesus' ascension. Jews from all over the area are arriving in Jerusalem At Pentecost-one of the 3 important pilgrimages in the Jewish calendar. Acts 2, While the disciples are together in the upper room, Spirit comes upon them, empowers them as Jesus promised just a

week earlier in Acts 1:8. We hear Peter proclaim Jesus as the messiah, call them to repent and believe AND to publicly display their allegiance through baptism, Acts 2:38. Why? Jesus commanded this- Matthew 28:18-20. Acts 2:41- And those who believed were baptized. 3000 souls were added to the "CHURCH" in Jerusalem. They joined the church, but only after profession and baptism. This sets the pattern that unfolds through acts. Fast forward a few months, persecution breaks out in Jerusalem after Steven stoned- Philip preaches the gospel in Samaria, and in Acts 8:12 many believed and were baptized, he meets the Ethiopian eunuch- who believes, is baptized. We take the DeLorean to Damascus- we meet Saul who encounters the risen Christ, believes and then is baptized-Acts 9:18, few months forward in the DeLorean, Peter goes to Cornelius in Acts 10:47- Believes and is baptized. Set the time machine Two decades forward, Paul on 2nd missionary journey- in Philippi, Lydia, Believes and is baptized, Paul and Silas tossed in jail, earthquake, Jailer comes to faith, believes and baptized, he family comes to faith and is baptized. Paul then goes to Corinth- Preaches, people come to faith and are baptized.

This is the pattern. Believe, baptized, received into membership and disciplined. **According to Scripture, Baptism is the first step of following Christ!** All too often we think we have to wait until we reach some spiritual level of maturity. Nope! The NT makes no mention of an unbaptized Christ follower. Have you been baptized? **Come to my class after the service.**

Objection- Few if any people would be bold enough to say it, but you might think it- **I don't know if I want to officially associate with these people.** Do I belong here? I mean Baptists? "People might think of those Westboro Baptist nuts who picket military funerals. Or they think of me as a fundamental" Or all those conservatives who attend, or all those liberals who are a part of that church. Many are married and I'm single or divorced. I'm sort of a beginner Christian and these others seem like they are more seasoned. Many of us have a heavily Christian background and we grew up memorizing Awana verses and know all the Christianese. Then for some of us, that's not our story at all. Right? I mean, some of us came from non-religious homes...we had a 20 something year old girl who came to Christ at my former church who never knew that Christmas was associated with Jesus from the Bible. Some of us stayed on the straight and narrow and others that were rebels, addicted, busted up, spent time in Jail, adulterers, We were just a train wreck. But the Gospel calls us to set aside these labels, these differences and discomforts...The for the sake of unity in Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This was the only community on earth where the slave could who hold an office and be treated as an equal member. The Gospel creates this new people in a local context, empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by the Word of God, and held together by Christ, the cornerstone. **Nothing else is going to hold us together other than the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.** God takes the church kid and the non-church kid, republican and democrat, urban and suburban, married and single, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, black, white, Asian, Hispanic...

all of us and put us together in one local body. If you embrace the Gospel you embrace a new family. And when you don't see eye-to-eye on somethings you say...OK- I love you my gun-toting, tax-hating, gas-guzzling, republican brother or sister for whom Christ died. I love you too my green-conscious, bleeding heart, tax-loving democrat brother or sister for whom Christ died.

Objection- I don't want to join the church because the church may disappoint me, may not meet my needs, may let me down.

Yup. I don't object actually. That may happen. We aren't perfect, and if you are newer here and the church has never let you down in some way, just wait a little longer. We are going to mess up and not always get it right. **But the church does not operate like contractual obligation, it is more like a covenantal relationship.**

A contrast says, "You do these things for my benefit. And I will in turn do these things for your benefit. But if you don't, then I'm out." We enter contracts to limit our liability and guard ourselves from pain. But our most vital relationships can never survive contractual terms. They weren't meant to. Imagine you are at a wedding and the couple gets to the vows. And they say- I Mary, take you John to be my husband, As long as you mow the lawn on Saturdays each week and you clean the dishes after we have dinner." "Well I'll do the dishes if you agree that we make love 3x a week, and 5x on Birthday weeks!" We would all audibly gasp. In fact, if I heard contractual vows, I would go get my gift out of the gift pile and take it home. They're not giving that to some pawn shop eight months from now when they're divorced. No, the vows are for better or worse, richer for poor, good and bad. Why? Because you know that in marriage you are going to let each other down, not always live up to expectations, and hurt each other sometimes. Shannan and I get into a good fight over something every 8-10 weeks...and annoy each other about all kinds of things regularly. But we love each other, and we know we aren't going anywhere and we help each other heal and grow in profound ways.

God is in it with us not as a contract where we live up to his expectations all the time, but a covenant- for better or worse. And guess what, he designed his church to be a covenantal- the 59 one anothers, many of which Todd shared last week, are nothing if they aren't covenantal language.

Last Slide- If you're looking for the perfect church, if you are too afraid to jump in and commit you will spend the rest of your life dancing around every three to five years looking for what scratches your current itch and never participating meaningfully in what God has given you for your sanctification, for your maturation, and for your experience of who God is. And this, at the end of the day is why membership is ultimately for your own benefit and spiritual progress. Do you have questions? Let's talk. Let's do this together for the sake of the Gospel.

