

More than a Building, Membership, Ephesians 4:11-16, 8/31/25

We are in series exploring the purpose of the church and our role in it called More than a Building. The church is far more than the bricks and mortar...it's a people gathered in a location who have been saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ! In our church we are an eclectic, diverse group of people from all different spiritual backgrounds. God graciously saved some of us through Sunday school growing up with flannel graphs, or veggie tales. Others of us God graciously saved out of the chains of addiction, or self-destruction or despair. Some through reasoning through the compelling arguments for Christianity you became convinced, while others through a miracle of God you couldn't explain. Irrespective of how you got here, we are part of the church.

Which means there is a role that each of us have in the building up of the church in maturity and its mission. If you have signed up to serve: follow up! If you haven't but you want to, fill out a serve card. Last week in Ephesians 4 we saw the goal of the church- for all of us together to become more like Jesus. And Paul did this using the body metaphor which we will be talking about again today. This morning anchored in Ephesians 4, we are talking about membership in the church.

Now I get it, that doesn't inspire many of us with enthusiasm for this subject today. The same way as if I said today we are going to talk about taxes... A few of you would get excited, and maybe the same people who are excited about membership. But don't check out, I promise not to bore you today...or at least not try to bore you and show you why this matters. By the way, teens you can't check out either, because you can become junior members.

Now for those that aren't members here- I'm not going to guilt you, I want to reason with you, and encourage you to consider becoming a member. Now it's possible to be an unofficial member here, as many of you are- you attend regularly, you are involved, you are bought into the mission, maybe you even give financially to the church... and that's awesome. But you for one reason or another have stopped short of becoming official members. For a handful of you I've talked to you have an issue around baptism, but for most of us, maybe you just haven't gotten around to attending the class, it's not that important to you, or you are commitment-phobic...some of us have trouble committing to a favorite color let alone a church, or you were burned by a church in the past...hopefully today helps you overcome your barriers.

And if you are a member, don't tune out because we are going to be challenged and inspired to make our membership more meaningful in the body of Christ.

We live in a world of memberships. Some of us are proud card-carrying members of Costco—because let's be honest, the free samples alone are worth the annual fee. Others have a gym membership... which mostly means some of us pay \$40 a month for the privilege of feeling guilty when you drive past the building. Some of you are platinum rewards members at Starbucks—because after 300 lattes, you've finally earned a free tall black coffee.

Then there are the more unusual memberships out there. The Flat Earthers Society...The Lawn Mower Racing Club, The Cloud Appreciation Society- which our own Kristi Pullig is actually a member of. I am a member of the Philadelphia Mycology Club...mushroom foraging. Yes, your pastor forages for mushrooms with his dog Cosmo.

The point is: we all know what it means to belong to something for what we can get out of it. Most of the things we are members of do not require much from us, possibly a fee but that's about it. They are built mostly for our own convenience and interests. But membership at the Y, or Costco or a Mushroom Club is very different from membership in the church. It's not about perks, points, or punch cards—it's about vitally belonging to a spiritual body where our leader is Jesus himself. And if that is true as the Bible says, the vigor, and intentionally, and seriousness in which we pursue meaningful membership should be a bit higher than our commitment to the Y next door, Agreed? OK, the closest thing to guilt today. Before we get too ahead of ourselves, What is membership anyway?

MEMBERSHIP- An official recognition by the church of your COMMITMENT to the mission, ministry, and leadership of the church. So today we want to address two questions **1- Is Membership even Biblical? 2- Is Membership Important?**

1- Is Membership even Biblical? Maybe you say, there is no command, "Thou shalt become a voting member of a local church in accordance with thine By-laws." That may be true, but the term comes right out of the Bible in the context of the church- **1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."**

But let me show you in our passage we've been studying, Ephesians 4:11-16 that membership is vital as a pre-condition for how the church works. **16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,**

grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Even though this was written 2000 years ago Paul understood basic anatomy- the body is joined and held together by supporting ligaments. Ligaments, connective tissue connects bones to bones, holding the skeletal system together so we don't just collapse like the scarecrow in Wizard of Oz. This is why when we are watching football and we see our QB get hit in the knee we all go- oh no, not a torn ACL! That's one of the major ligaments that hold the knee together, pretty important. Church Membership is a spiritual ACL, it formally connects believers to one another and to the local church—so we aren't just "floating parts," but joined together in a covenant relationship. Without those connections, the body is fragile and unstable.

As so joining as a member is indeed Biblical. It is not some made-up business idea to track metrics. Or for us to compare how many members we have to the next church, or a way to be exclusive or gain control of people. It's a deeply biblical, relational, and practical reality of how the church accomplishes its goal. And that leads us to our second question.

2- Is Membership Important?

The answer is yes. Obviously, or I wouldn't be preaching this message. But let me tell you three reasons why. One Structural, One Relational, and One Missional.

Structural: Membership is the Structure for Care and Accountability

As we follow the birth and early stages of the church in the NT, we see the apostles and leaders, under the direction the Holy Spirit, set up important order and structure- Acts 6- the creation of deacons, 1&2 Timothy and Titus, Paul talks about how the church conducts itself when it gathers, and what to look for in choosing people to serve in the offices of Elder and Deacon- which we will be talking about next week. One of the things we see is Christ designed his church with a structured, reciprocal relationship between the church members and its leaders. This relationship is summed up well in *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 leader's responsibility is to exercise oversight and are accountable for the congregation. And the congregation's responsibility is to follow and honor the leadership God has put in place. As a pastor, two questions leap off the page for me: Which leaders should an individual Christian obey and submit to? The leadership at Aldersgate or Faith Presbyterian? A preacher on YouTube? All? None?

Second, and more personally for me, who will I as a pastor give an account for? 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? Whether they have made a commitment to the church and our leadership or not? It would seem to me that this would be impossible apart from an intentional structure of membership. 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.

Relational: Membership is how we practice the "One Another" Commands

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,

grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. How specifically does the church grow and build itself up? Primarily through the 59 One Another commands in the New Testament for the church. I'm actually going to read them all to you to get the full scope of how big of a deal this is.

1. Be at peace with one another — Mark 9:50
2. Be devoted to one another — Romans 12:10
3. Honor one another above yourselves — Romans 12:10
4. Live in harmony with one another — Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8
5. Accept one another — Romans 15:7

6. Agree with one another — 1 Corinthians 1:10
7. Serve one another in love — Galatians 5:13
8. Bear with one another in love — Ephesians 4:2
9. Be kind and compassionate to one another — Ephesians 4:32
10. Forgive one another — Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
11. Teach and admonish one another — Colossians 3:16
12. Encourage one another — 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; Hebrews 10:25
13. Build up one another — Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11
15. Wash one another's feet — John 13:14
16. Submit to one another — Ephesians 5:21
17. Consider others better than yourselves — Philippians 2:3
18. Look to the interests of one another — Philippians 2:4
19. Carry one another's burdens — Galatians 6:2
20. Offer hospitality to one another — 1 Peter 4:9
21. Use gifts to serve one another — 1 Peter 4:10
22. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another — 1 Peter 5:5
23. Do not pass judgment on one another — Romans 14:13
24. Stop biting, devouring, and consuming one another — Galatians 5:15
25. Do not provoke or envy one another — Galatians 5:26
26. Speak truthfully to one another — Ephesians 4:25
27. Do not lie to one another — Colossians 3:9
28. Admonish one another — Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16
29. Spur one another toward love and good deeds — Hebrews 10:24
30. Do not slander one another — James 4:11
31. Do not grumble against one another — James 5:9
32. Confess your sins to one another — James 5:16
33. Pray for one another — James 5:16
34. Greet one another with a holy kiss — Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14
35. Have equal concern for one another — 1 Corinthians 12:25
36. Comfort one another — 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:18
37. Wait for one another (Lord's Supper) — 1 Corinthians 11:33
38. Members of one another — Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25
39. Do not be conceited, provoking, or envying one another — Galatians 5:26
40. [And number 40 through 59] Love one another — John 13:34; John 13:35; John 15:12; John 15:17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 4:11; 1 John 4:12; 2 John 5

Now let me ask you a question. How well do you think you are going to be able to live out these one another commands and receive them in the local church outside of the commitment to one another and this church in membership? Not nearly as well. Christianity is a team sport, not a solo sport.

Missional: Membership Makes Jesus Visible in our Community.

In Matthew 16 Jesus said he would build his church and it would advance in the world as an unstoppable force offering the light of the gospel to all in darkness. Just before he went to the cross in the ultimate act that would accomplish our salvation, paying for our sins through his sacrifice, Jesus met in that upper room with his disciples, this final conversation was captured in John 13-17. In this conversation prepared his disciples and the church today with the secret of how the world would see Jesus even after he's no longer on earth. And he said- Your love and unity as the church would be the visible manifestation of Jesus to the world.

That's one of the critical reasons we live out these one anothers in commitment to one another, because the community around us begins to see this and it's compelling. When our members are in the hospital and they have all kinds of people from the church visiting them, calling, they are getting cards. The nurses and doctors and the family members go- wow this is all from your church? That's incredible, I want to be part of that. Right now there is a member of our church going through a really difficult season of anxiety and sleeplessness and the church has surrounded them and is praying for them every hour of the night, and God is working powerfully through that to bring healing. Do you know the impact that makes on coworkers and neighbors and friends who hear and see this? When people struggling with addiction gain freedom and put their lives back together through accountability with one another here- , or they go through reengage and have their marriage restored, it's a visible witness of Jesus.

Can you imagine if everyone in our community got involved in and joined a healthy church? Imagine what would happen to statistics on violence, poverty, addiction, fatherlessness, divorce... You know there is so much loneliness, isolation, and disconnection in our world. The former surgeon general said that loneliness is the greatest epidemic of our time. Chronic Loneliness and isolation increase the risk of early death by 50% —comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes per day or obesity. (*PLoS Medicine*, 2010, Holt-Lunstad) Loneliness has been linked all kinds of physical, mental and emotional unhealthiness- from blood pressure, to diabetes, to depression, to substance abuse. A *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* study found loneliness increased the risk of cognitive decline by up to 64%.

Imagine if these lonely and isolated people joined and were meaningfully engaged in a healthy church. Imagine the reversal of so many of these dysfunctions and issues. What Jesus has designed in the church, in its structure for care and accountability, in its one another love and support is an incredible gift. It's why I'm so passionate about leading a healthy, growing church and it's why I'm so passionate about membership.

Recap- **#1 STRUCTURING Care and Accountability, #2 Practicing the ONE ANOTHER Commands #3 Making Jesus Visible in our Community**

Now whether you are an official member or not yet, we want this for you. We don't exclude you from access to the places where care, and growth and one another happens. Let me share some environments where this happens here that you can plug into: Life Groups...we have a leadership training on 9/21, learn more about one. Support Groups- Griefshare, parents of children with special needs, widows, Broken Beginnings, Re|engage. Adult Ed classes. Fill out connection card.

Now, the church isn't perfect. We are made up of people...and so we aren't going to always get it right, people are going to fall through the cracks sometimes, and the church may disappoint you. And that might be one of your objections for joining. But when the commitment is there, just like in a healthy marriage, you are committed to each other and so when one messes up they are committed to making it right. And that's how the church should function.

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. Let's do this together for the sake of the Gospel.

Two Challenges:

#1 If you are a member- how are you living out the one anothers? Where do you need to lean into these?

#2 If you aren't a member- attend Explore Membership class 4 weeks in October at 11:30am. And if you are a teen, did you know you can be a junior member, you don't have to wait, come to our class.

After sermon

Next two weeks- Leadership in the church. And we are going to talk, from the Bible about how the leadership of the church is designed and some changes to our leadership that we are proposing to align more with the Bible's vision.