

Membership

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[0 : 01] Good morning. Can you hear me? That's great. Good morning. My name's Chris. I'm a teaching pastor here at Watermark, and I echo Leo's sentiments about the weather.

In fact, I'm from the UK, so in the UK, it's like 24 degrees is like tropical weather. And yet here, I'm getting cold at 24 degrees, so I'm feeling a real wimp.

And one of the things that I've been just thinking about and reading recently, I've been reading 1 Corinthians. And in 1 Corinthians, I just had this very simple thought struck me.

Jesus loves his church. Did you get that? It's not rocket science. It's not kind of mind-blowing, except you see when you read through Scripture, Jesus calls his church, his building, his temple, his bride, his body, his flock, his saints, his disciples, his servants, his family, his people.

Jesus loves his church. And just kind of look around you for a second. Okay, it's audience participation.

[1 : 22] Okay, look around you. The church is not a building. The church is not a place. The church is primarily a people.

You and me, we are the church. Which means you and I are the church that Jesus loves. You and I are the church that is so costly that Jesus died, paid the ultimate price that you might come to be part of his church.

That's how much he wants you to be part of his body. He paid with his entire life. It is grace, pure grace, that you are part of his church.

And if you think about it, it truly is grace, because if you actually get to know each other, then you are really amazed that it's grace, because some of you have just incredibly weird tastes in TV shows.

Some of you have strange personalities. Some of us have habits, which normally we would never hang around with people who had those kind of habits, right?

[2 : 34] They're not the kind of people you'd always choose to hang out on a Friday night with. But Jesus died that you and I might be part of his body. He says he loves his church.

Some people say, I love Jesus, but I don't like the church. That's a bit like saying, I like you, but your body is really ugly. You know, that's not nice, right?

That's not the way you love the church. And yet Jesus says the church is his plan A. You know, in the Bible, he doesn't have a plan B, right?

The church is his plan A. And all through the New Testament, 90 times out of 114 times, whenever the word church is mentioned, it's all about the local church.

All about the local church. So the question that kind of kept coming back to me was, if Jesus loves his church that much, how much do I love his church?

[3 : 32] How much do I love this church that he's brought me into? And today we're kind of talking about membership. And if this is your first time and you're a visitor here, you're just really welcome.

You kind of listen in to the conversation that we want to be having. And really, I just, I mentioned last week, but I'm just so aware that membership is something we as a church have not really talked about well.

We haven't done well at all, I think. We've done it since, we've done it since right at the beginning. And yet, I think some of you, I mean, I know that we haven't done it well because some of you are like saying, I'm not sure whether I am a signed member of the church or not.

Let me just check. Did I sign that thing? Okay, I've been talking to some of you, so I know that this is the case, which shows that actually we want to make what it means to be a member more meaningful in the church.

And so that's what we want to kind of be talking about today, looking at the Bible. We're going to be having some membership classes coming up, and we just really want everyone to be engaged with this.

[4 : 35] Many churches practice membership, and it's kind of becomes this like exclusive little holy club for really holy people. I don't know if you've been in those kind of churches. You know, I've also seen other churches where they do kind of membership, and it's like they lower the bar so low to be a member that kind of anyone can just kind of walk in, and suddenly they're kind of the member of the church.

And yet, when you look at Scripture, Jesus never lowers the bar for what it means to be a disciple of his. In fact, Jesus lost followers because he wouldn't lower the bar.

And the church actually grew because he wouldn't lower the bar. And he didn't say, okay, you've got to kind of meet up to this standard to be a member of the church.

He said, no, I have met the standard. Now I want you to follow me and walk with me in your brokenness, in your sinfulness, and realize that I am going to lead you to walk as I call you to be as part of my people.

So here's why I think we just need to be talking about membership. Because as a church, I think just even what Jeremy was sharing, one of the most amazing things I see is we're really a community who serves together, who really tries to value each other, engage in each other's lives, and it's just amazing to see.

[5 : 55] I could tell you many stories of what I'm seeing. But I also noticed some other things. I noticed that sometimes when difficulty or struggles come, when it comes to just kind of moving away, sometimes people just slip out of the back door.

And you're like, oh, where was that person? And they're like, oh, they left like two months ago. And you're like, but as a family, we want to be able to walk with you in that. We want to be able to send you. That's a great time for us to pray for you together.

And if we don't see that that's part of being a family, you know, we've missed something of what it means to be church. You know, some of us don't know exactly what we believe and why we believe.

I don't know if you, I did an iTunes update this last week. Do you know when you get the iTunes update and they give you all the new terms and conditions, how many of you actually ever read them?

Or do you just click agree? Like, I have never read a single one of those iTunes. Now, Alfie told me, like, I have no idea what I'm signing up to. No idea. Alfie actually told me that apparently you're not supposed to make nuclear weapons with your iPad.

[7 : 10] So that's one of the agreements, which I didn't know. But it's a good thing I'm keeping that one. But the thing is, nothing terrible has happened to me so far. So I think it's cool, right?

I think it's fine. And you know, the thing is, I can treat church in the same way. It's like, I know the deal. I just click agree by coming to church on a Sunday. But in fact, do I understand what I'm really signing up for when I say I'm a Christian and I belong to the church?

Do I know what it is? You know, I have, I've had people come to me and say, hey, I need you to sign this form to say that I'm a member of Watermark for the school that my child is trying to get in. And I haven't seen them for weeks or months. And I've heard they go into about three different churches. And I'm like, maybe we need to think about what it actually means to be a member of a church.

Because the Bible has some very significant things to say about it. And so I want us just to talk about a few different things. Membership is about commitment.

[8 : 16] Membership is about belonging. Membership is about accountability. And membership is about submission. Okay? So that's just kind of where we're going to go. We're going to start with membership is about commitment.

And if you have your Bible or your bulletin with you, we're just going to kind of go through a few of these different passages together. So we're going to start looking in Acts 2.

Acts 2, it's the birth of the church. Remember, Jesus says to Peter, I'm going to build my church through you, Peter. I'm going to build it. It's my church. And then Pentecost happens.

The Spirit comes down. 3,000 people get saved. And do you know what it says? It says they got baptized and they get added to the church. And then verse 42 says, they devoted themselves to the

apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

They devoted themselves. Do you know what that word devoted means? It actually means to cling on to, to hold fast to with perseverance and persistence.

[9 : 23] That's what it means. You know, when you have a teenager who is devoted to playing Assassin's Creed on their Xbox One, what does it look like?

Right? You know, they will, even though they could be eating or sleeping, they're willing to hold fast to that game console just because there's something about it that's important for them.

Nothing's moving them from that. There's a commitment. When the passage says they devoted themselves, they committed themselves to the apostles' teaching.

They were so desperate for God's word that they were going to just cling to it. They were committed to one another. So it says they had all things in common. They sold their possessions. They gave money to those who are in need.

I mean, just think how committed you've got to be to give away your stuff. I mean, that's pretty committed. And then, they were meeting daily in the temple. You know, they were kind of, so the temple's like Sunday sermon, kind of, it's big group gathering.

[10 : 27] A lot of people can fit there. Then they met in each other's homes, small groups, like our CGs. They're loving each other. And they're doing all of this and it doesn't seem like, oh no, I've got to do this.

It's actually, Jesus has captured them in such a way that their commitment to Jesus is always lived out through the commitment to the people that he provides around them in his church.

So here's the progression of faith. You hear and believe the gospel. You get baptized. You get added to a local church and then you devote yourselves there to the people, to God's word, to prayer, to really following Christ in that community.

That's the biblical pattern. So if you're thinking about it, in the first century in Jerusalem, how many churches were there? One.

Good answer, Graham. Yes. There was one church. So when you got baptized, which church you got committed to was the church in Jerusalem because there was only one.

[11 : 35] There was no other choices. And baptism was a huge sign of commitment because in a pagan culture, you know, being a Christian wasn't cool. But now the issue for us in our society is in Hong Kong, you know, there's like over 1,500 churches.

And when you get baptized, you get brought into God's universal church and you're a believer but you need to learn where do I express that, my identity in Christ in a local church body?

Where do I do that? And hopefully what you do is you get baptized and if you're not, if you're Christian and you're not baptized, we want to encourage you to get baptized. So you get baptized and then you, hopefully you stay in your local church.

But the thing is, in our society, things move. People move. Things change. And so then when you move on, how are you going to express your commitment to your new church?

How do the elders know that you're committed there? How do you understand what the church really believes more than you just kind of like the music and you like the atmosphere? The way that we do that is through membership process.

[12 : 45] That's why we do it. One of the things I've noticed, you know, in Hong Kong, I don't think it's only Hong Kong, I think it's a lot of places, but we can sometimes treat Christianity and church kind of like a buffet.

You know, we do church kind of buffet style. You know, there's a bit of spiritual sashimi over here, a bit of teaching curry over there. You know, we pick and choose the little bits we like.

And so I hear this all the time. I hear, hey, I've started going to this new church and I just really love the sermons over there. They're so relevant. But the community is not great there. I love going to that church because they have great community over there.

So I want to get engaged in that community group there. And then sometimes my friends invite me to another church and I love the music there. Right? We're doing church spiritual buffet style. And the question is, where has God called you to love the church, not just to date the church?

Are you there to give or are you there to get? The call of membership is to stop dating the church and to settle down and marry her, if I can use that analogy.

[13 : 53] Right? Now, I'm not saying, you go to a church, you will find no church which is a perfect church which does everything. If you join it, anyway, even if it was a perfect church, it wouldn't be

perfect after you've joined.

But, what membership is saying, I'm going from being a fan of this church to being a family member. I'm going from saying, I like this, to saying, I'm committed. I'm going to devote myself here. That's what membership is about. And so, some of us really just don't understand in terms of, Hong Kong is very transient.

It's very transient. Some of us are only here for a short time. But God actually says, when you look and prayerfully look around different churches, you have to think, where am I going to get plugged in?

Even if it's just a short time, where is the church I'm going to devote myself to? And if it's this church, great. If it's another church, great. But God calls you to devote yourself, no matter how long you're here, to a church.

[15:01] Membership is about commitment to Jesus first and then to the body that he loves. Okay, that's the first thing. Second thing, membership is about belonging.

Flick over to 1 Corinthians for me. I just want to spend a little bit of time here. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12, says this, Just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. Did you notice how many times he said all?

Did you get that? He said, All members, all baptized, all drink of one body. Yet we're one together, but all of us are important. In the church in Corinth, which is where Paul's talking, it's a local church, he's talking to people who are thinking things like that.

Well, if I'm not engaged, there's plenty of other people who can take my place. They're looking at everybody else around them and saying, well, I'm not as gifted as them. I'm not as good a communicator as them.

[16:21] I'm not as extroverted as them. I'm not quite as good. So I'm not going to be a mist if I don't engage in the body. And Paul is saying to them, guys, don't you understand who you are?

Don't you understand what Jesus has brought you in? You're a body. And he says, if the foot, verse 14, the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body.

He's saying, if you are a foot and you go AWOL, okay, you're saying, well, I'm only smelly and a little hairy. I don't get much pictures on Facebook.

So therefore, I'm not so important. He's saying, no, don't you realize, just as with the body, every part is valuable.

You have a unique contribution to make in the body where God has placed you. Did you get that? You, say, me, I, have a unique contribution to make to God's body that he has placed here.

[17:30] I think we can miss that sometimes. You know, I heard of one guy who left his church recently because the elders wouldn't let him charge his phone during the service.

Do you think he understood his role as a member of the body? I don't think so because what this is saying is there is something bigger than just you that God has brought you to be a part of and you have value in that.

The speaker, Charles Spurgeon, he said this to some people who say, hey, I can be a good Christian but I don't intend to give myself to a church. This is what he says. He says, think of a brick. Okay? What is the brick made for? It's made to build a house. It's no use for the brick to tell you that it's just as good a brick while it's kicking about on the ground by itself as it would be as part of a house.

Actually, by itself, it's a good for nothing brick. This is what Spurgeon says. He's saying, a detached Christian, like a detached foot, is not living according to the purpose that God has saved you for.

[18:48] You're living in disobedience and the house without you, the body without you, investing and contributing, will suffer just as you will spiritually if you're not engaged with a local church body.

Verse 18 says, God has arranged you here. You get that? God has arranged you here. What that means is you matter in the body.

Just say that. I matter. Just say that again. I matter. Yeah, you count in the body of Christ because he's building something and he's called you to be part of his body.

You know, we live in a society that values independence. You know, it says like, basically, my identity is built of juggling a whole load of different things in my life.

So, I'm a husband, I'm a father, I'm a brother, I'm a son, I'm an employee, I'm a church member. And so, we're kind of juggling all of these things in our lives. And you know, when life gets busy, you've got to drop one of the balls.

[19 : 58] And sometimes, what we do is we kind of, okay, the church one, we're just going to drop a little bit. But if you see that you belong as part of this, even if you can't make a meeting because things are crazy, you'll find other ways to think, how do I express being part of this local body?

Don't underplay God's design in having you here for however long he has placed you here. And if this is the church that you feel God has called you to be, then God says, I have placed you here not to be detached but to plug in.

You matter. What that also means is this. It's not just belonging here means you are valuable, but it also means that we have responsibility towards each other.

Do you know the Bible has over 50 one another's statements? Love one another, carry one another's burdens, forgive one another, a whole load of different things. And yet, those one another's are not just about kind of serving occasionally, although that's great.

In verse 25 in the passage, which I didn't read there, it says, you've got to care for one another as a family, as a body who's responsible for one another. You know, that's how we flourish together.

[21 : 28] Do you know the difference between being a babysitter or just leading in the kids ministry and being a parent? Okay? What's the difference? You know, I've done babysitting before.

I've done kids ministry before. You know, you do your task, you play with the kids, you do whatever, you teach them, and then, and you kind of hope they just don't kill each other or anything like that, and then at the end of the day, you just kind of hand them back, and then your job's done, and then you, and then usually what you do is you just complain about the parents of like, hey, shouldn't they have brought up their kids a bit better because it was such a nightmare for me doing that?

And that's how you do it. But if you're the parent, you have responsibility, and I've talked to many of you as new parents, there's this just incredible joy when you have a new child, but also a credible sense of, wow, I'm responsible for this.

And now that child, you view very differently than if I'm just the babysitter, right? They're your family. You have a responsibility. And so, in the same way Paul is talking about here, the way that we see each other, if you see yourself so interconnected, is we belong, and therefore we're responsible for each other, which means things like, if you lead a CG, I mean, just here's an example.

I don't know if you've ever led a Bible study in a CG, or if you've actually just turned up to your CG, your community group. The difference is often, the amount of prayer that you pray when you're actually leading the study compared to if you just turn up is quite considerable.

[23 : 18] You know, if you just turn up on a Sunday morning and it's just kind of, hey, whatever, and if you're preaching, the amount of prayer and the amount of thought that you're talking about it is different, right? If you see yourself as a member of the body with responsibility to each other, then when you come on a Sunday, how much are you praying for our time together?

Not just, oh, I hope I hear a good sermon. Or when you meet to the community group and are you praying that God would be there, present, because you see it's us together, it's not just one or two people who's doing everything and I'm just gonna turn up.

Do you see that? That's what members see. We belong, we're responsible, we all matter in this. If someone doesn't show up in your CG for five weeks or in the service, a fan will say, oh, it's a shame, haven't seen them for a while.

A family member will say, hey, let me give them a ring, let me see how they're doing. Do you see the difference? That's what membership is about. It's about commitment, it's about belonging, thirdly, it's about accountability.

There's another verse on your sheet, which we didn't read, but I'd like to just read it to you now. Hebrews 3, verse 12.

[24 : 42] Again, this is written to a local church. He says, take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day as long as it's called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Did you get that?

Exhort one another every day as long as it's called today. You know, the context that this is written in is a local church where things have been tough around them and some of the Christians are looking around at the society and they're saying, maybe it would be easier for us if we kind of

became Jews rather than just stayed as Christians because Jews get an easier ride in society and there's this temptation for them to kind of go easy on the Jesus stuff and just fit in with the crowd. And the author of Hebrews is saying to them, guys, you need to help each other with this. Like, does anyone ever feel that pressure at work, the pressure and family to just dumb down your relationship with Jesus?

Anyone feel that? Because this passage says sin is deceitful. It can twist you. It creeps up on you like a persuasive salesman trying to sell you a handbag or a new drone and you can't afford it but before you know it, you've, you're taken.

[26 : 12] You're in. And the author of Hebrews says, listen, that responsibility for each other means you are going to exhort each other to come back to Jesus.

What that means is, exhort means urge, implore, encourage, say, hey, I'm with you, come on, let's run this race together. That's what it means.

In Watermark, our community groups are really where we want to encourage that to take place. Because I don't know about you, but I'm always tempted, you know, prone to wander, prone to wander.

Anyone else prone to wander? Graham is. Good, this one. All the rest of you, I need you to talk to me. But you see, that's, that's what we're like as a community.

Because, you know, the number one thing that turns non-Christians off Christians and off Christianity is actually Christians. You know?

[27 : 15] Christians who say, hey, I go to church, I do all these things, but then, actually, all through the week, they're living a life which has no bearing on how the gospel is changing them. And the thing that people keep telling me again and again, oh, Christians, you're just hypocrites.

And you know, yes, we are all here, everyone is a hypocrite, actually, but I don't want to be pursuing hypocrisy, I want you to help me to live faithfully. And so, your responsibility, my responsibility as a member, that's why we encourage you to get into community groups, is that you'll be helping each other, engage in each other's life, so that we are not hypocrites, but we are people who honor Jesus in the way that we live.

And when we mess up, we're just calling each other back to the grace and the mercy and the kindness of Jesus, and helping each other on that road. Are we up for that?

Are you up for that? That's what accountability means, but it means something also more than that. And here's the thing which is a little culturally, you know, we struggle with.

Throughout Scripture, it tells us that actually part of this process of discipleship is church discipline. Same word, disciple discipline. I don't like the word discipline because it reminds me of harsh punishment.

[28 : 44] It reminds me of when I was at school, we used to have corporal punishment, you know, where they hit you with a cane. I just avoided it and got my friend in trouble because I just got to stay in the corridor.

I was kicking a stone in the playground. And my friend, I heard him getting beaten, and I was just standing in the corridor. And that's my impression of what discipline is. It's the kind of punishment that I want to avoid.

And yet, that's not what the Bible calls discipline. This says, discipline is about discipleship. It's what Hebrews is talking about. And Jesus talks about it in the same way. He says, Matthew 18.

He says, when, if a brother sins against you, and go and tell him his fault, go and sort it out together. If there's issues of sin, don't just leave them, sort them out.

And he says, if he doesn't listen to you, take two or three others with you. And so it's not a kind of he said, she said kind of thing. No, like, do it as a community. And then, if they still won't listen to that, tell it to the church.

[29 : 47] And then if he still won't listen to the church, he says, treat them as a Gentile and a tax collector. This is hard, but this is Jesus talking. What he says is this.

Sin is serious, but discipline is not about punishment. Discipline is about bringing us back to Jesus. It's about helping us to win each other over so we're not going to be hypocrites in the world around us.

And he says, sin is deceitful, so therefore, as a church, we need to be praying for each other. We need to be calling those who we see going astray, calling them back. This is part of what it means to be a member.

At a previous church, there were a couple. They were living together. They were sleeping together. But they said, hey, we're Bible-believing Christians. We love Jesus. But they refused to get married because they just said, okay, marriage is just signing a piece of paper.

That's what they said. We love each other. That's all that's necessary. What do you do in that situation? If you're a member, if you're an elder, what do you do? You know, do you say, well, marriage is just a human institution.

[31 : 01] It doesn't really matter as long as they love each other.