

Church Membership – Various Scriptures

1 Pet 5:1-3; As part of our Built To Last theme for the year, we started a mini-series last week on the church

B/c just like God wants us to build our *lives* on the rock solid truths of his Word, he also wants us to build his *church* on the truths of his Word
And membership, encompasses a whole bunch of them

So I want to *focus* on that this weekend, and turn to several Scriptures to help you *see* those truths, and understand them, and embrace them for yourself
With the hope that if you're *not* a member, you will be; And if you are, you'll be encouraged and fired up all the more (**Intro**)

➤ 1 Pet 5 is the first passage then; Where he just got through saying that he wants us to do good, even in the midst of suffering; And then says in v1 . . .
So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed [IOW I have the credentials to say this]: [2] *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*
Shepherd *the flock*, and be examples to *the flock* he says

The question is, who's the *flock*? The church; Who is it? Who comprises it?
Who are the elders responsible to shepherd? As in lead, nurture, protect, and provide for

You can't say the people in attendance; B/c not everyone is a believer; And the church, the *flock* of the Great Shepherd, is only *comprised* of believers
Nor can you say all *professing* believers comprise the flock, b/c not all really are
They honor *me with their lips, but their heart is far from me* Jesus said (Mt 15:8)

Which means, we need a way of identifying the *true* flock; A way to determine who is and who isn't, part of the church; And that's where membership comes in

Membership is a necessary means of identifying the flock (1 Pet 5:1-3)

That's the first truth for a church built to last

Without a formal membership, and a formal membership process, it's often impossible to know who the flock is
Especially in a larger church; Where the elders don't know everyone; And can't

So membership becomes a necessity; Providing a means of identifying the true community of the redeemed, for whom the elders are responsible
And apart from which, they're left to guess; Inevitably missing some; Or focusing their efforts only on those they know, and leaving the rest out
Neither of which is good, and both beg for something better

➤ Enter membership; Where we ensure, to the best of our ability, that someone is a genuine believer; Relying heavily on their testimony of faith, and baptism
And their desire to live under the authority of God's Word
And willingness to make some *commitments* to our church
Like the ones you see on the back of a membership insert from time to time

Commitments like maintaining a consistent devotional life; Being in worship; Actively building our church up; Speaking well of one another; And tithing
In addition to their testimony and life, those things help us determine that they are indeed, part of the flock
And therefore, worthy to receive *the right hand of fellowship* as Paul says in Gal 2:9

Have you heard that phrase? Or better yet, seen it in Scripture?

It refers to the approval and affirmation of the elders, that a person is part of God's family, and welcome as a member
And as such, it's the closest reference to a formal membership that we *have* in the Bible
Used then it seems, just like now, to identify the flock
That's the first truth for a church built to last

2nd is that . . .

Membership is a tangible demonstration of a spiritual reality (1 Cor 12:27; Gal 6:10)

The spiritual reality first of all, that having embraced God's free gift of salvation, we are members of the body of Christ
Or as Paul says it in **1 Cor 12:27** – *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*
It's a metaphor Paul uses, to show that while we are unique and different, we're also connected; Just like the parts of a body; It's a spiritual reality

And membership in a local church, is a tangible demonstration of it; An outward means of reflecting an unseen truth
That while we are different, we *too* are connected; We too are members one of another
That's the first spiritual reality made visible by membership*****

➤ The 2nd, is that we are part of the household of faith
Or as Paul says it in **Gal 6:10** – *So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*
Yet another metaphor Paul uses to describe our inclusion in God's kingdom

And once again, membership is a tangible demonstration of it
Just like we're living stones being built into God's *spiritual* house, we're living people being built into his *visible* house; A local church

And just like we're a part of the household of faith *universally*, with *all* the believers . . .
We should be members of a household *locally*, with the believers right next to us
Tangibly demonstrating the spiritual reality; And serving as a witness to God's perfect design, of things unseen, but no less true; That's membership*****

3rd . . .

Membership is a public expression of a personal commitment (Rom 15:1-6)

A personal commitment to each other; Right here; B/c the letters of the New Testament were *written* to local churches; Groups of believers just like ours
Urging us first of all . . .

1. To love one another

1 Jn 3:11 says it explicitly – *we should love one another* (see also v23)
Not *in word or talk, but in deed and truth* (18)

Meaning, among other things, that we should put the interests of our church, our brothers and sisters in Christ, ahead of our own
And give up our thing, for their thing; Our good, for the church's good

Or, to put it another way, membership means always doing what's best for the *church*
Even if it's detrimental to *you*; Even if you break fellowship and *leave* the church
A love for Jesus, means a love for his bride; And doing everything you can to *honor* her, and preserve her, and protect her
It's part of a commitment to love one another

Second, membership is a public expression of a personal commitment . . .

2. To belong together

Like the early church in Acts 2:42; Who *devoted* themselves it says, or committed themselves, to *fellowship* – belonging together in mutual partnership
It's a commitment that guards our hearts against a lone ranger mentality, and spares us from the aches of loneliness
A commitment that spurs us on to do all we can to *connect* ourselves, and pool our resources, and stand *together* – in order to do more than we *ever* could alone

Third, is a commitment . . .

3. To bear with one another

And for this, I'd like for you to turn with me to Rom 15:1

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

You could easily write the word *persevere* next to that verse, and nail it

Meaning, that we have an obligation to persevere in church

To bear with people when they're difficult; To stay the course when they fail us; To hang in there when times are tough

To stick with it when you're disappointed; Even by your leaders; It's a commitment

Fourth, is a commitment . . .

4. To build one another up

Rom 15:2 – *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."*

Jesus, not only took our *sins* on himself, but the *accusations* of sin; Reproaches from the evil one to tear us *down*; And did so for 2 reasons – to build us up . . .

And serve as our example; That we would do the same; That we would build *others* up

And of all the people who would qualify as your *neighbor* – would not your brothers and sisters in Christ sitting next to you be near the top of the list?

People w/ whom you worship, and do ministry, and live life?

Totally; It's a commitment every single one of us should make

And publically expressing it, helps move us from good intentions to active engagement

Fifth, is a commitment . . .

5. To live in harmony

After saying that the Scriptures were written for our instruction, and endurance, and hope – Paul says in Rom 15:5-6 . . .

[5] May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus [in harmony with him], [6] that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a prayer of sorts, to say – “God, give them the peace/unity you *desire* in your church”
“Give them the harmony that's so *attractive* in your people”

Something God will no doubt do, if we *yield* ourselves to him, and commit to the same

Sixth, membership is a public expression of a personal commitment . . .

6. To serve one another

Like 1 Pet 4:10 says – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another*

Use it to be all in for the work of ministry; Use it to stay off the sidelines; Use it to bless those around you; It's a commitment

And publically expressing it, is a way of saying – not only *can* you count on me, but I *want* to be counted on

I want to be as involved in God's work here as I possibly can

I want to partner together for *more* of God's glory in our midst

Seventh, is a commitment . . .

7. To support one another

Or as Gal 6:2 says – *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

So fulfill his ethic, his way; His way of treating one another in the church

Weeping with those who weep, helping those in need, and supporting one another in the trials of life

It's a commitment; That along with the others, is conveyed and reinforced by a public expression of membership (**Summary**)

And then last, the 4th truth for a church that's built to last . . .

Membership is a valuable means of sanctifying our lives (Heb 13:7,17)

A valuable means of conforming us more and more into the image of Christ

And at the end of the day, is that not what it's all about? Is not church, and our membership in it, about exalting Jesus in our lives? Both individually and collectively

It is; And membership goes a long way toward helping with that; For 3 main reasons

1. It reinforces our need to recognize and imitate our leaders

Heb 13:7; The writer of Hebrews is starting to wind down here with some last minute reminders and instruction, and says in v7 . . .

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Remember them, as in recognize them in the first place, and keep them in mind

If you don't recognize that you *have* spiritual leaders, let alone that you *need* them – you'll never remember them, and you certainly won't imitate them

In which case your sanctification will be lacking

We *need* spiritual leaders in our lives; Every single one of us

We *need* people who are gifted and godly for the purpose of discipleship and guidance

That's how God designed the *church*, and that's how he made *us*; We *need* it

And one of the benefits of membership is that it *reinforces* that need, by calling attention to it, and giving us a formal means of expressing our *followership*

A formal means of expressing our *desire* to be led, and our *desire* to imitate our leaders, just as God says

2. It tests our willingness to submit

Heb 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. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Membership is big for *leaders* in the church, b/c it clarifies exactly who they're responsible for . . .

And it's big for the rest of us, b/c it tests our willingness to submit; Our willingness to obey

Which none of us come by naturally; None of us like to willingly and joyfully yield to the decisions and discretion of others; We just don't

And yet, every single one of us has to; Even the leaders; Including myself

It's incumbent upon me to submit myself to the *other* elders, just like it's incumbent upon them to do the same; It's a mutual thing; And a necessary thing; For all of us

B/c every single one of us has an authority issue; Every single one of us has difficulty submitting; Whether at home, at work, or here at church

And membership addresses that problem

First of all by exposing it, and then by encouraging us to *do* something about it

Like formally placing ourselves under the loving guidance, and care, and instruction of those who lead

Membership a valuable means of sanctifying our lives, b/c it tests our willingness to submit

3. It holds us accountable to biblical standards of behavior

Something that every single one of us needs – accountability

And membership provides it, b/c it's an open invitation that says, "Help me"

"Help me grow; Help me stay away from sin; Help me get out of sin; Help me know the joy of my salvation; And help me do whatever it takes to honor God in my life"

It's an open invitation to be held accountable to God's standard of living

Not that we're the morality police, going around *looking* for things that are wrong in each other's lives; But praying for and *pleading* with one another to live right

And encouraging one another, sometimes through tears, to live in a manner worthy of the gospel; Worthy of our calling; Worthy of the Lord Jesus

Membership is about *that* kind of accountability

And as such, it's a valuable means of sanctification in our lives (**Summary**)

➤ 4 principles, for a church that's built to last

And as I said from the top, if you're not a member, I hope you will be; I hope you'll add yourself as a living stone, to the household of faith, that God is building right here

And if you already have, if you're *already* a member, I hope you're encouraged by what you've heard; And spurred on to even *more* love and good works among us

Pray – Lord, thank you for the design of your church; Thank you for setting it up, and building it, and providing for it through things like membership; Help us as we live this out; And give us a passion to pass it on; For a church built to last

We give now, for that very reason