

Meaningful Membership – Romans 15:1-7

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1 Pet 5:1-3. We looked at this passage a few weeks ago regarding Biblical Leadership, but it also speaks to Meaningful Membership. The *last* of our bedrock series. From Bold Preaching and Passionate Worship to Biblical Leadership and Faithful Tithing, Meaningful Membership is also foundational to a solid church.

Especially in this day and age. When the prevailing worldview in our culture rejects it; rejects church membership. “What’s the big deal? If I’m here, I’m here. Why do I have to sign something?”

Others object because the word isn’t *found* in the Bible. “It’s not biblical,” they say. But they ignore the *principles* of membership in the Bible. And the metaphors. It’s like denying that birds who quack, waddle, swim, and fly are *ducks* because they’re not labeled.

And then there are those who *recognize* the principles of membership, but don’t want to make a commitment. Don’t want to be tied down. Or held accountable.

But most, I think, are just complacent. They haven’t gotten around to it. Church membership isn’t that important to them.

If that’s you, in any of those camps, I hope this sermon changes you. Because meaningful membership is not only bedrock for a solid *church*, but a solid life.

Four reasons. The first is that . . .

1. It’s one of the best ways to identify the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Membership is meaningful, and makes for a solid church, because it’s one of the best ways to *identify* the church. One of the best ways to identify the sheep. The sheep that comprise the flock. The fellowship of the redeemed.

Look at 1 Peter 5. Having just told us to do good even in the midst of suffering, Peter 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: [2] shepherd the flock of God that is among you [as in watch over it; care for it, teach it, love it], 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* he says; the flock of *God*, v2. Exercise oversight over *those in your charge*, v3. And, be *examples to the flock*.

Referring to who? Believers. Those who confess and follow the Chief Shepherd, in a local church. A *local* church. Because v2 says – *shepherd the flock of God that is among you*. Around you. Beside you. Not *every* believer in a city or region, just those in your church. Not *every* person who darkens the door, but believers. The sheep.

Which means, we need a way to *identify* them. A way to differentiate between those who pay *lip* service to Jesus, and those who truly *follow* him. Those just going through the motions and those who are *serious*. Those saved and those not.

If elders are responsible to shepherd the flock, they need a way to identify the flock.

Baptism of course, is the primary way; the *main* way of identifying the saints. But for those who aren’t baptized *here*, how do we know?

Church membership. Where prospective members share their testimony in writing, bear witness to their baptism, and express their desire to be shepherded. And sit down with a pastor or elder to verbalize it.

The bottom line is this: If elders are going to *shepherd* the flock, if they’re going to fulfill their *ministry* to the flock, they have to know who *comprises* the flock. They have to *identify* the flock. And church membership is one of the best ways to do so. And the first reason it’s meaningful.

The second reason membership is bedrock for a solid church and solid life, is that . . .

2. It’s an outward demonstration of a spiritual reality (1 Cor 12:27; Gal 6:10)

A visible expression of invisible truths. Four of them. Membership demonstrates and displays four different realities about our spiritual existence. Using several different metaphors.

The first, is . . .

• That we are members of the same body

Membership is an outward demonstration of the spiritual reality that we are members of the same body. Connected, and together, as one.

Like Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12:27**, speaking to the local church in Corinth. *You are the body of Christ [he said] and individually members of it*. Members of the same body. And Romans 12:5 says – *We, though many, are one body in Christ*.

Paul uses the metaphor of our body to show that while we are unique and different, we’re also connected. Just like the unique parts of our *physical* body are connected. It’s a spiritual reality. A spiritual truth.

And membership is a tangible demonstration of it. When you become a member of our church, *this* body, you’re confirming and displaying your connection to *Christ’s* body.

Second, membership demonstrates . . .

• That we are part of the same household

And not just any household, but the household of faith. Another spiritual reality. Like Paul says of the church in **Galatians 6:10**. *Let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Or as **1 Peter 2:5** says – *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house*. House and household. Two *more* metaphors that describe our collective existence.

And membership reveals it; demonstrates it. That we comprise a *visible* house, a local church, just like we comprise a spiritual house; the household of faith.

Third, membership demonstrates the spiritual reality . . .

• That we belong to the same family

We're not just servants with similar roles, but sons with the same inheritance. Daughters of the same king. Brothers and sisters in the same Christ. We don't just coexist, we're connected and belong.

Like it says in John 1:12. Those who believe in Jesus are given the right to become *children of God*. Children of the same Father. Children in the same family. With an *abundance* of brothers and sisters, Mark 10:29.

All of which is demonstrated and portrayed by church membership. Belonging together in *this* family. With an abundance of brothers and sisters right here.

And last, church membership demonstrates . . .

- **To be citizens of the same kingdom**

Having been delivered *from the domain of darkness and transferred* to the kingdom of light, we're in this together. (Col 1:13) We've entered *the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*; 2 Peter 1 (11). No longer strangers and aliens, but *fellow citizens with the saints*; Ephesians 2 (19). We're citizens of the same kingdom; the Kingdom of God.

And membership demonstrates it. Declaring outwardly, that we're in. Citizens and saints of the same rule and reign; God's rule and reign. Partnering together to *advance* the Kingdom, right here.

4 spiritual realities that are outwardly demonstrated by church membership. A demonstration that makes for a solid church.

Third, the third reason membership foundational, is that . . .

- 3. It's a **public expression of a personal commitment (Romans 15:1-7)**

A public expression of something personally decided. A *formal* way to convey something deeply felt. Which is important because personal commitments made *public* tend to stick. At least for those who take them seriously.

And it starts with love. Church membership is a public expression of a personal commitment . . .

- **To love one another**

1 Jn 3:11 says – *We should love one another*. Any questions? We should put the interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ ahead of our own. Love. We should show brotherly affection to one another. We should bless each other. It's a personal commitment made public in membership.

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

- **To bear with one another**

And God knows we need that. To be *patient* with each other. Longsuffering.

Romans 15:1-7. [1] *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves*. Meaning we have an obligation to be *patient* with each other. Bear *with* one another. Stay the course when people fail us; or disappoint us; or offend us. And a personal commitment to that end, a commitment made public, goes a long way toward keeping it.

Third, it's a commitment . . .

- **To build one another up**

V2-3 – *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 [or accusations] of those who reproached you fell on me."* Quoting Psalm 69:9 as if Jesus is speaking it.

Jesus not only took our *sins* on himself, but the *accusations* of our sin. Reproaches from the evil one to tear us down. And he did so for 2 reasons: to build us up, and serve as our example; to do the same with others. Just like it says in v2. *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up*.

And of all the people who qualify as your *neighbor*, shouldn't your brothers and sisters in Christ be near the *top* of the list? And wouldn't *publicly* expressing your commitment to them help move you from good intentions to actually bearing fruit? It would. And does.

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

- **To live in harmony**

After just quoting the Old Testament in v3, Paul tells us why in v4 – *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*.

As we saw last week, it's a key verse in the Bible. Telling us that the Old Testament is still useful. Still applies. From the *examples* of those who've gone before us, to the principles found in the Law. Encouraging us to keep on, and live right, full of hope.

Then he says – [5] *May the God of endurance and encouragement [the one who wrote the Scriptures] 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 and unity you *desire* in your church. Give them the harmony they need, to give you the glory you deserve." Something no doubt God will do if we *yield* ourselves to him, and commit to it. Commit to *live* in harmony.

5th, membership is a public expression of a personal commitment . . .

- **To welcome one another**

Which speaks to those who are *already* members, and to those who are *becoming* members. Both-and. V7 – *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God*.

Welcome, as in receive one another; into your lives and into our church. Accept one other. Have fellowship with one another. It's a command. And membership is a public expression of your obedience; your commitment.

And 6th, membership is a public expression of a personal commitment . . .

- **To serve one another**

Like it says in 1 Pet 4:10 – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another*. Assist one another. Minister to each other. Don't just use your gifts for yourself, but for others. Especially in church.

And the best way to do so is to make a commitment and go public. Public in membership and public in serving. Which you can do today. At least the second part.

You can start the process of serving before you leave. Just stop by the table in the lobby and make yourself known. Find out what's needed and sign up.

6 commitments that make membership meaningful and churches solid.

And last, the 4th reason membership is foundational for a solid church, is that . . .

4. It's a valuable means of sanctifying our lives (Hebrews 13:7,17)

A valuable means of conforming us to Christ. A valuable means of keeping us spiritually healthy and full of life.

- **Because it encourages us to imitate our leaders**

Imitate and follow those whom God has put in place to shepherd the church. Guide and direct the church. Love and teach the church.

Hebrews 13:7 – *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 your leaders, and imitate them; follow them.

Whose leaders? *Your* leaders. The leaders of the church where you're a member. The leaders of the church to which you belong. Indicating that membership and followership go hand-in-hand.

Which makes membership a valuable means of sanctification. Because it not only encourages us to *remember* our leaders, and pray for them, but follow their way of life *and imitate their faith*.

Second, membership is a valuable means of sanctifying our life . . .

- **Because it measures our willingness to submit**

Our willingness to follow. Our inclination to joyfully yield to the discretion and direction of another. In this case, the men God has chosen to *lead* our church.

Hebrews 13:17 says – *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account* [an account to God]. *Let them do this with joy* [lead and shepherd you with joy] *and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Because who wants to follow Mr. Grouchy-pants? Mr. Moan and Groan.

Membership is a valuable means of sanctifying our lives because it establishes leaders to whom we're to submit, and measures our *willingness* to submit. Our willingness to formally place ourselves under the loving guidance, and loving care, and loving instruction of those who lead.

It's sanctifying. And which one of us doesn't need more of that?

And last, membership is a valuable means of sanctifying our lives . . .

- **Because it holds us accountable**

Not that church leaders are the morality police, going around *looking* for things that are

wrong, but that membership is an open invitation to be encouraged by your leaders. An open invitation to be challenged. And if necessary, exhorted. All to live a life *worthy* of your calling.

Or to say it another way, membership is a constant call for help. "Help me grow, help me learn, help me avoid temptation, and help me glorify God." All of which makes it a valuable means of being held accountable, to sanctify our lives more and more.

Summary

4 reasons that membership is meaningful. Because more than just attending, or adding your name to a list, or joining a club; membership is belonging together in mutual partnership, working together for mutual goals, and sticking together in mutual love. Bedrock for a church, and bedrock for life.

Prayer – Lord, build your church. Build *our* church. Add to our number those who are being saved and those who are being sanctified; especially in membership. Break through fear and break down walls. Increase our love and service. Multiply our joy and unity. For your glory.

You Are Loved