

Brian Chesemore
SESSION 3 | Membership

I. SOMETHING BIGGER THAN ME

A. The Story of Johnny Clem?¹

B. The Formation of the Church

- Acts 2.22-24, 32-33, 36-42
- Baptism is going public for the first time about what Christ has done.
- The Lord's Supper is going public in an ongoing way about what Christ has done.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper, *"have vertical and horizontal elements: they commit us to God and to one another...they knit the body together: baptism adds one to many, and the Lord's Supper makes many one. So we can say that both ordinances imply a covenant not just between an individual and God but also between an individual and the church."*²

II. MEMBERSHIP, LIKE THE SACRAMENTS, IS SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL

A. We preach the message that alone has the power to save.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, **for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Romans 1.16-17

B. We preach a message that separates.

"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. "(2 Cor. 2.15-16)

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/drummer-boys-played-important-roles-in-the-civil-war-and-some-became-soldiers/2012/01/31/gIQA3cKzRR_story.html

² Jamieson, Bobby. *Going Public*. Page 146. 9 Marks.

III. WHAT IS THE CHURCH THAT WE ARE SAVED INTO AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A. Following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the Risen Lord has given his Spirit to apply Christ's work and save a people to himself. The people of God exist as *the church*—joined to Christ by faith and indwelt by the Spirit.

1. The church exists as the people of God, belonging to him and representing him on the earth.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Pet 2:9-10)

2. The church is the unique dwelling place of God on earth.

"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" (2 Cor 6:16)

3. The church is the Body of Christ: deriving its life from him, vitally united to him, and finding its identity in him. As a result, members of Christ's body are intimately related to each other as well.

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Cor 12:27)

B. The exclusive role of the church. The church is God's chosen means for carrying out His purposes until He returns. He has ordained no other organization or structure for this purpose.

Matthew 16:18: ". . . I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

1 Timothy 3:15: ". . . if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (NIV)

IV. WHY SHOULD I *JOIN* A LOCAL CHURCH?

Why go to all this trouble to learn about this church? Does it really matter if I actually join a church?

- ❖ God's specific purposes for His people are accomplished as individuals join themselves to and participate in local churches. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this tangibly through membership in a specific local church.

A. Church membership is biblical.

1. Membership—the recognition of a clearly defined community of people—was the clear practice of the early church.

Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Converts were "added" to a specific group of fellow believers that was numerically defined).

Acts 5:13: "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." (Believers were a discernible group of people to which other believers "joined" themselves).

2. An identifiable membership is the necessary condition for pastoral care.

Acts 20:28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." (Pastors are responsible to care for an identifiable group of people, and they will give an account for those committed to their care)

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."

3. Committed members are the primary source for the regular funding of gospel ministry.

1 Cor 9:13-14: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

4. Membership is the necessary context for the sacraments.

- ❖ Rightly administering the sacraments requires an awareness of the spiritual condition of those who are participating. This requires identifiable, committed relationships between believers which is expressed through church membership.

“These outward signs mark out a visible fellowship; they structure Christ’s church as a community with membership. Baptism requires a decision about admission to the community. The Supper, a sign of continuing fellowship, implies the exclusion of those who have turned away from the Lord. . . . the sacraments testify that the church must have organized form as well as organic life.”

Edmund Clowney

5. Membership is the assumed context for church discipline.

Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5 both describe situations in which believers are to confront other believers who are persisting in a sinful way of life. This can only refer to a situation in which Christians are joined together in an identifiable membership that is committed to live a godly lifestyle distinct from the world. Moreover, the final stage of church discipline (“excommunication”) involves the removal of an unrepentant person from formal membership in a visible, organized group (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:2, 9-13; cf. 1 Tim 1:19-20; Titus 3:10-11).

6. The commitment represented by membership is the clear implication of Biblical metaphors describing the church.

The primary NT metaphors for the church—body (1 Cor. 12:27), temple (Eph. 2:21), household (1 Tim. 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28)—have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals *joined together* into a single, identifiable entity.

“God has given us four pictures of the church, not one. This is not just to emphasize and prove the point by repetition, but also to say four different things about what it means to be a member of a church. To be a stone in his temple means to belong to a worshipping community. To be a part of a body means to belong to a living, functioning, serving, witnessing community. To be a sheep in the flock means belonging to a community dependent on him for food, protection, and direction. To be a member of a family is to belong to a community bound by a common fatherhood. Put together you have the main functions of an individual Christian. Evidently we are meant to fulfill these not on our own but together in the church. Now can you see the answer to the question why you should join a church?” *Eric Lane*

B. Church membership identifies us with Christ and His people.

1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

C. Church membership is vital to our spiritual health and growth.

Ephesians 4:15-16: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Heb 3:12-13: "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 is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (We need other believers to help us in our fight with sin)

Heb 10:24-25: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (We each have a role to play in encouraging other believers)

D. Church membership enables us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of others.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit has given every Christian spiritual gifts that are to be used in service of the church and its mission. The ordering of believers within the church to deploy their diversity of gifts for the good of the body is by divine design.

1 Cor 12:4-7: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

1 Cor 12:18: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."

1 Peter 4:10-11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

E. Church membership enables us to be spiritually nourished through the preaching and teaching of God's word.

- ❖ God calls pastors to care for and equip his people, and the primary way they do this is through the teaching of God's word.

Eph 4:11-14: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed

to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

V. 10 PRINCIPLES ABOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. Church members are Baptized Christians
2. Church members must meet together regularly.
3. Church members help other church members persevere in faith.
4. Church members help each other be fruitful.
5. Church members obey and submit to their leaders.
6. Church leaders keep watch over church members.
7. Church members know each other.
8. Church members don't allow sin to consume each other.
9. Church members protect the purity of the church's witness.
10. Church membership gives us opportunities to be assured of our salvation.

VI. SEVEN WAYS YOU WILL BE REMINDED OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP ON A SUNDAY IN THE NEXT MONTH (OR SO...)

1. You will hear the preaching of the Gospel.
2. You will see SGCL practice the Sacraments:
3. You will see the gifts of the Spirit working all over the place in the lives of members.
4. You will see the members giving financially.
5. You will see us welcome another membership class.
6. You will hear us read the church covenant.
7. You will hear prayers for our members.

"Church membership is a gift of grace...more than most of us realize, it has its life-sustaining, faith-strengthening, joy-preserving effect according to God's plan and mercy. The Christ-displaying, corporate ministry of the Word of God comes to us in church membership in ways that we cannot predict. I urge you not to cut yourself off from this blessing by staying on the edges of Christ's church."³

"Church membership is a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant whose effective signs are baptism and the Lord's Supper."⁴

³ Piper, John. *When I Don't Desire God*, 131-132. Crossway.

⁴ Jamieson, Bobby. *Going Public*. 146. 9Marks.