

## What is a Church Member?

**Romans 15:1 ESV (Pg. 553)** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. **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.” **4** 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. **5** May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, **6** that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **7** Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

- I. Last week we asked the question, “What is a church?” In answering that question, we borrowed Jonathan Leeman’s definition that “A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.”<sup>1</sup>
  - A. You’ll notice this definition involves 5 parts<sup>2</sup> for us to clearly understand:
    1. A church is a group of **Christians**. This means people who have repented and believed the gospel<sup>3</sup>; not just any old group of religious people will do.
    2. Church involves regular gathering. We are commanded in Hebrews 10:23-25 not to neglect the habit of meeting together regularly, and more so as we see the day of the Lord approach.
    3. Church facilitates congregation-wide affirmation and oversight. The church enables each of us to affirm faithful belief, and to correct departures from it.
    4. We don’t gather to simply socialize, motivate, or to provide therapeutic relief for one another; but to represent Christ as we gather in His Name.
    5. All of these purposes are supported by Gospel preaching and the administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
  - B. When these things are happening, it transforms the group from a group of people with similar interests, into a church of disciples, representing Jesus.
  - C. A great analogy of the church is as an embassy of the Kingdom of God. “What is an embassy? It’s an institution that represents one nation inside another nation. It declares its home nation’s interests to the host nation.”<sup>4</sup>
    1. Unlike the way an American embassy represents American interests in Paris, Cairo or Hong Kong, however, the church represents a kingdom that is not in another part of the world, but rather one that is part of another world.
    2. More than that, we are representing a kingdom that won’t take full effect until sometime in the future. So under this analogy, a church represents an other-worldly, invisible, not-yet-fully-received future Kingdom.
      - a) The church’s presence in this world should serve as a constant reminder to the world of God’s interests: righteousness, justice and holiness.
      - b) Moreover, the world should see those interests demonstrated by the people claiming to be permanent citizens of that kingdom by their acceptance through the shed blood of Jesus.

3. To be a church member (or covenant partner) is to be an ambassadorial representative of the Kingdom of God through the agency of the church.
- D. Another function of an embassy is to affirm citizenship.
1. Suppose you were mountain climbing in Switzerland, and while doing so, your passport falls out of your coat pocket and goes tumbling into the abyss below. You'd be in big trouble! Unable to provide proof of your citizenship, you wouldn't be able to leave the country or establish yourself within it.
  2. Fortunately, there would be a solution available to you. You could go to the nearest US embassy where they could affirm your citizenship, issue you another passport, and send you on your merry way.
    - a) The embassy has no power whatsoever to **make** you a citizen. Your birth under the constitution and laws of the United States does that. The embassy can only affirm the validity of your citizenship.
    - b) Similarly, the church cannot make anyone a Christian, but throughout the New Testament, places like 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 give the church the authority to officially affirm membership in the Body.
  3. Consider the implication of Paul's instruction to Titus as it pertains to the church's responsibility. **Titus 3:10 ESV As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.** Paul is saying that person's actions prove the state of his soul, and the church is to affirm or deny that such a one is truly a part of the Body.
- E. Under the Old covenant, the nation of Israel were God's unique people. They were to represent him and reflect his holiness. They had a king, and a set of laws to help them accomplish this lofty goal. They were given a national festivals and the sign of circumcision in order to mark them as unique.
1. The problem was that even with all these benefits, they utterly failed to represent God or reflect his holiness. In fact, they turned to the worship of idols time and time again, abandoning their position as God's special, marked out people. So God fired them as his unique people.
  2. Because of Jesus' redemption, instead of one nation, God now calls people from every nation and tribe and invites them to be his special people.
    - a) Instead of giving them a king who was just as flawed as they were, God himself would be their King.
    - b) Instead of giving them a law that they would never keep, he gave them his own Spirit to live inside of them, inscribing God's law on their hearts, and actually enabling them to obey out of love, not fear.
    - c) Instead of festivals for remembrance, he gave them baptism and the Lord's Supper so that they could meditate on all his good gifts, and identify with Jesus' sufferings and resurrection together.
  3. And instead of being marked by the cutting of their individual bodies through circumcision, their individual bodies would be unified into his one body (the Church) as the sign of their membership connection to him.
    - a) Although there were times in their history when the Jews neglected the ordinance of circumcision, it was God's first order for them.

- b) Someone may have been born to Jewish parents and lived smack in the middle of Jerusalem, but without circumcision, there was no way to indicate your status as a true Jew.
    - c) True repentance for the Jews always meant a revival of circumcision.
  - 4. Many Christians are turned off by talk of joining the church. They say they love Jesus and do religious things, so why publicly associate with a local church through covenant partnership? Why not just be a free-lance Christian? Why not just be a free agent and keep your options open?
    - a) Just like circumcision for the Jews, how will your membership in Christ be affirmed if not by a local church? You may say, “I’ll know in my heart who I am!”
    - b) Perhaps, but I can point you to many groups who claim a connection to Jesus Christ who would be quickly disqualified if their profession were analyzed by scripture. And where can you point in the New Testament that supports such an isolated, independent of your salvation?
  - 5. On the contrary, association with Christ **always** infers association with his body. You can’t have Jesus without the church.
    - a) **Colossians 3:15 ESV** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, **to which indeed you were called in one body**. And be thankful.
    - b) **Romans 12:4 ESV** For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, **5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another.
    - c) **Ephesians 4:4 ESV** There is **one body** and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all**.
- II. So with all this in mind, let’s look at Jonathan Leeman’s definition for church membership: “Church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s discipleship and the Christian’s submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.”
  - A. We’ve talked a lot in the last few weeks (and even today) about the church’s affirmation and oversight, so let’s focus the remainder of our time today on “submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.” Let’s look at our text and see what Paul can tell us about caring for each other.
    - 1. It begins by saying **“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”**
      - a) This is a “two-sided coin”. It shows us that we have both an obligation to bear each other’s burdens, failings, faults and weaknesses. But it also shows us that we have a benefit of being borne up by others as well.
      - b) I have known many people who have always been there to receive from others in the church, but never ready to give. Conversely, I have known others who always thought they had something to give, but could not humble themselves to receive anything for the care of their own souls.

2. But covenant partnership is just that: partnership. When I need you you're there for me...when you need me, I'm there for you. No one can thrive in the church if their relationship with it is two one-sided. Ask yourself, am I a giver, a receiver, or can I point to instances where I have been both? If there is an imbalance on one side or the other, the Lord wants you to adjust.
  - B. The passage tells us that this kind of selflessness is rooted in Christ's own example: **"For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' 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."**
    1. Paul uses a messianic prophecy from Psalm 69:9 to point out that Jesus stood in the face of insults, torture and even execution for God's will to save sinners. To the Romans, it was a shame to associate with the physically or philosophically weak, but Jesus looked on the weakest and loved, forgave, identified with and saved them.
    2. He says that all of these things in scripture instruct us as to how to live, and that our hope comes from endurance and holding to those ancient writings.
  - C. **"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus"** He then says that it is God who inspires and enables such endurance and encouragement. And get this! He does so that you and I (the church) may live in mutually sacrificial harmony, just like Jesus did with us!
  - D. And for what grand purpose is all of this loving service, hard endurance and gut-level encouragement? **"that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Jesus has united us into one harmonious voice to bring praise and glory to his great name throughout all eternity!
    1. If we can't be members of one body here, learning to lay our lives down for each other, and lifting a unified voice of harmonious praise, glorifying God, how do you ever imagine that we will do it when we get home?
    2. Don't you remember that this is the great call of our lives as believers? That it is the reason we have been saved in the first place. Peter said, "But you (the church) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, (why?) ***that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.***"<sup>5</sup> We have been saved to be a united people of praise and worship giving glory to God!
  - E. And with these purposes in mind comes the command to be together, preferring, serving, loving, correcting, encouraging, and sharing with one another. Paul says, **"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."**
    1. Being members of a local church, or being in covenant partnership (whichever you prefer) is about just that; welcoming those we recognize together as part of the Body of Jesus Christ.
    2. We do so not for entertainment, or therapy, or even social interaction, but because our hearts beat with a passion to bring our great God glory!
- III. As we consider these things, and what they mean for ourselves as individuals and families, as well as for North Ridge Life Church, I want to invite you to come once

again to the Lord's table to receive the bread, symbolizing his body broken for you on the cross, and through a miracle of grace, taking all his diverse people and making them one body; with one King and one purpose: to bring our King glory.

- A. We live in an age where many try to craft an identity by signaling values and allegiances on social media, inviting everyone to acknowledge our political, religious, entertainment choices, etc., or to draw them into debate about theirs. But in the Body of Christ, such posturing is unnecessary. We have one value - Jesus Christ. We have one allegiance - the Kingdom of God.
1. This makes us very wide and diverse because you can be a part of Christ's Body no matter your political leaning, no matter your race, no matter how much (or how little) cash is in your pocket, no matter your educational status, your hobbies, your skills or talents, we are ONE in Christ!
  2. But this also makes us very focused and narrow, because we stand here, arm in arm, and say with Paul, **1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV** I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
- B. Nowhere is our inherent unity seen more than at the table of the Lord. This is true for a number of reasons:
1. First, liars, cheats, adulterers, manipulators, homosexuals, the violent, the greedy, the selfish and the proud all have to stop and remember at this place that they brought nothing to earn their way in. No one gets to brag as we consider the broken body and of Jesus and the streams of blood flowing from it to the ground. we all stand here because of mercy alone.
  2. Second, we all share the same bread and drink of the same cup. There is no VIP line or first class service. Joyfully we feast on the body and blood of the Lamb of God together. We rejoice together that our sins are washed away.
  3. Third, this bread and this cup, represent our "togetherness"; not our individuality, **1 Corinthians 10:16 ESV** The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? **17** Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.
- C. So as you come this week, come with thankfulness in your heart that we are one body. You might want to shake so body's hand (or hug their neck) as you come. You might even want to say a prayer of encouragement over them (we'll wait!). Some of you may need to forgive someone who is here from your heart. Some of you may need to ask for forgiveness before you come. But don't rush to the table and out the door. Let's take a moment and pray, and ask God to unite us as one body.
- D. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>1</sup> Leeman, Jonathan; *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*; pg. 52; Wheaton IL, Crossway © 2012

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*; pg 63

<sup>3</sup> This was Jesus' command (see Mark 1:15).

<sup>4</sup> Leeman, Jonathan; *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*; pg. 27; Wheaton IL, Crossway © 2012

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:9 ESV