

Why We Do What We Do The Way We Do What We Do: Church Membership and Church Discipline

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and have it at the ready. Across the past five weeks, we preached topically through the five solas of the Reformation! and looked at their implication and application for the church today.

We are very close to Advent season, and as we've done in the past, we're going to do again this year. We're going to preach through the five Advent candles, the topics, and consider Christ's coming and what that means for us. So we have a couple weeks in between.

This past spring, we started a sermon series that we just said we were going to kind of sprinkle across time called Why We Do What We Do and Why We Do What We Do the Way We Do What We Do.

Some of you may have been here and remembered that. The very first one that we did was about our musical worship, why we do music the way that we do music. And of course, I hope you know us well enough now to know that we root that explanation in the Scripture itself.

So today, we're going to kind of pick back up on that and hopefully across time continue to do so and consider today church membership and church discipline.

[1 : 20] So why and how do we see people into the life of our church? Why and how do we correct people in the life of our church?

And why and how do we see people out of the life of our church? This sermon is for those of you who are not members of a local church or are not in the process of becoming a member of a local church.

Of course, I can always allow some exception for those who are looking for a fellowship, taking some time to see what's in an area as they're new to an area, or for those who are working through the steps of becoming a member of a local fellowship.

Not only is this sermon for those who are not members of a local church, but it is also for those who are... We need to always give careful consideration to the degree of our commitment to our local fellowship.

It is one thing to say that you are committed. It is another thing all together to be committed. Those of you who are members of our church also need to be able to make kind and compelling cases to your friends, roommates, classmates, co-workers, and family who profess to follow Jesus Christ, but are not members of a local fellowship.

[2 : 52] We need to be able to make that case. I need your help in making that case in our fellowship. So, this sermon is for everyone in the room, myself included.

Before I can make a convincing case to you of your need of church membership and discipline, I think it's necessary to make a case to you what the church is.

There's a lot of misunderstanding about that in our day. Far too many people for far too long have thought of the local church as nothing more than a club.

Far too many people for far too long have thought that to be a member of a local church means that you show up at significant meetings, that you pay your dues, and that you believe in the cause of the organization.

Far too many people for far too long have joined local churches because the church agreed with their political ideology or met some stylistic preference or offered them an affinity-based friend group or made them feel good about themselves.

[4 : 06] Beloved, the local church is not a club. It is not a fraternity or a sorority. It is not a campus organization.

The church is not an organization that puts on events and supports causes and your participation is optional.

The church is God's people called together by grace through faith around an event, a single event, the completed work of Jesus Christ.

And because God's global church cannot meet under the same roof each and every week, we gather in local fellowships to worship God in word and deed.

Jonathan Lehman, who I mentioned earlier in the introduction, is quoted saying, The local church is not a club. It's where we Christians, quote-unquote, go public to declare our highest allegiance.

[5 : 17] It's the outpost or embassy giving a public face to our future nation. Turn with me, please, to 1 Peter 2, verse 9.

Get your fingers nimble. We're going to flip a lot together today as we consider this thematically. 1 Peter 2, verses 9 and 10.

Peter writing here to churches as this letter was distributed around, but he's speaking to a church as he says, 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.

So, beloved, we are a people called together around this completed work of Jesus Christ, an event, right, in order that we might make that event known to everyone, everywhere.

[6 : 42] On your bulletin, the quotation today from Martin Lloyd-Jones, he said, we must cease to think of the church as a gathering of institutions and organizations, and we must get back to the notion that we are the people of God.

A Christianity devoid of life in the local church is found nowhere in the Scripture. Even in those cases of frontier mission work, the missionaries are commissioned and prayed for by the church, the missionaries are starting churches, and the missionaries are received back to their sending church to hear the account of God's working.

Mission, without the church, is missing the main ingredient. Christ died for the church, and it is his intention to make himself known through it and by it.

God intends for the world to be able to look around and say of a people, church, and to say of another, not church, which frames our concern for church membership and church discipline.

So let's begin by looking at church membership and ask a series of questions. First, what is church membership? I'm going to define it in this way.

[8 : 13] Church membership is a formal relationship between a local church and a Christian in which the church affirms the Christian's profession of faith and gives oversight of the living of that faith, or of their faith.

It is through church membership that we do the one another's of Scripture, right? By people's estimation, 50 to 60 or so New Testament, one another's of Scripture.

Let me give you a few examples of those. Mark 9, 50. Be at peace with each other. John 15, 12. Love one another. Romans 12, 10.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Romans 12, 10. That's Romans 12 again. Honor one another above yourselves. That might be the wrong reference. Romans 12, 16.

Live in harmony with one another. Romans 15, 7. Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you. Romans 15, 14.

[9 : 22] Instruct one another. 1 Corinthians 12, 25. Have equal concern for each other. Galatians 5, 13. Serve one another in love. Ephesians 4, 2.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4, 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another. Ephesians 5, 21. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3, 13. Forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. 1 Thessalonians 4, 18. Encourage each other.

And these are just a sampling of all the many things that were meant to do with one another. If church membership is not membership in a club, then it must be meaningful membership.

That is why we call our membership here at Christ Family Church covenant membership. We're trying to raise that idea above simple club membership.

[10:28] Simple sign a card, show up occasionally, pay your dues. Covenant membership, right? You make promises to us. And we make promises to you when you join our fellowship.

So covenant membership, in summary, to make it meaningful, has four points to it. First, covenant membership is amongst the regenerate.

Those who have, in fact, placed faith in Jesus Christ, as far as we can tell, have believed on Christ. We are saying to one another, church. You are part of this thing that Christ has created called church because Christ has worked renewal in your heart and in mine.

Secondly, covenant members are regular attenders and partakers. Those who are in covenant relationship with one another want to be together.

[11:37] And we want to be together whenever we can be together. And so we make plans for that. We put it on the calendar. We note it down. We prioritize our lives so that we can come together.

Because the things that God has given us to do in our gathering are weighty. And we should want to take them up. Their privileges and responsibilities.

Not only are they regular attenders, but they are partakers together. We come together to practice ordinances, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Third, covenant members are regular contributors. Covenant members come and give to the church in various ways.

First, and related to the second point, with their time. They give of themselves. They give of their talents, the ways that God has gifted them to give.

[12:41] You see so often particular prominent ways of service, preaching, music. But there is a multitude of ways to serve. As many as there are you in the room, there is some place in which you can offer your talents to the life of our fellowship.

And also we give of our finances. We pull together resources so that we can take the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Covenant members are also responsible.

Pick up the responsibilities of being members of a church. They participate in the process we call church discipline, which we'll talk about at length momentarily.

They are carefully listening to what's being taught in the church and making sure that it is sound, that it is consistent with scriptural truth.

So they are taking up the responsibility of contending for the faith once for all delivered. They are protecting the doctrine of the church.

[13:47] And they are also concerned about how those things, the things that we believe to be true, work out. Do we do what we say we believe?

So the direction of our church, if you like to alliterate. The discipline, the doctrine, and the direction are responsibilities that covenant members pick up and exercise together.

Now, I'm going to read our church covenant. I hope this will be of benefit to those who are already members who may have not looked at this document in some time. I want you to know that as I'm reading this, I'm not upset at any of you.

I love you all very, very much. Right? So this isn't aimed at anybody in the room. But I just want you to stop and consider. Like, am I doing the things that I promised to do? And then if you're not a member of our church, I want you to consider, right, the full expression of Christian living that's found in a document like this.

Now, this document's not in any way authoritative. But it's thematically pulled from the Scripture. What do we see God instructing us to do together in the Scripture?

[14:56] And so we've summed it up in this way. Having been led by the Spirit of God to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

And in profession of that faith, I most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with Christ Family Church. To make promises together. There's seven of them, right?

To love the Lord God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and to treasure Him above all else. To love my family, the church, and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To promote the edification and sanctification of the church by sharing God's work in my life and praying for the church. To devote myself and my family to the only standard of truth, God's holy Scripture.

And to adhere to the statement of faith of Christ Family Church only as it accords with Scripture. To hold myself and the brethren to the standard of Scripture. Submitting myself freely to the discipline

of the church for my restoration and spiritual gain.

[16:06] To contribute to the work of the church with my talents, time, and finances. To live to the glory of God, upright and blameless. In the example that Christ has set for us through His sinless life.

I enter into this covenant together with Christ Family Church. Under the common goal of obedience to, glorification of, and joyful satisfaction in Jesus Christ.

Because I believe and assert with the rest of the body that we need one another's help to do so. As believers and disciples of Jesus, we have entered into a covenant relationship with God.

Who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The blessings and promises of this covenant have been freely extended and given to us. Therefore, out of wonder, love, thanksgiving, and reverence.

We hereby accept and take up these covenant responsibilities. Which accompany said privileges together as a covenant family. Sentence diagram, that one. This is our reasonable service and we should do nothing less.

[17:10] God help us all. We rely on His grace alone and hold fast to His promise that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. May His grace provide for all that He commands.

So high commitments, right, that we are intended to make together. Jesus Christ died for the church.

There is no such thing as an individualistic Christianity. This whole notion of personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

While I have a relationship with Jesus, like Augustine. Jesus is now my friend. But Jesus came to save a people for His possession.

Right? He saved us, beloved. And He draws us into commitment with one another to live the Christian life together. So that's what membership is.

[18:10] The second question I want to answer is, where is church membership found in the Bible? Right? See, those of you who are wondering and waiting for it. The Bible speaks of us being members of one another in Ephesians 4.25, Romans 12.5, and 1 Corinthians 12.25.

Although each of these texts speak to our unity as a local fellowship and not necessarily formal relationship called membership. Right? So I'm telling you where we see the word member in the New Testament.

But it's talking about the way we're united in Christ and could have application both for local and universal fellowships. In order to note the formal relationship of membership in the church, we must draw conclusions from other places.

Right? And I hope that the following five will be satisfactory for you. So, first, turn to Matthew chapter 18, verse 15. Matthew 18, 15.

I'm going to read through 17, but I'm going to kind of read this abridged, because we're going to look at this text in a little more detail in just a little bit. So I'm going to kind of skip over some things. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.

[19:38] If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

That is to say, don't consider him any longer part of your fellowship. Jesus says in Matthew 18, if a brother is unwilling to repent of sin, then no longer consider him a brother.

Christians take sin seriously. Christians experience the conviction that the Holy Spirit brings by the Word of God. Under its authority, works in our hearts the conviction of sin.

So if someone is unwilling to repent of obvious, egregious sin, then we should no longer consider him a brother.

This is what Jesus is teaching here. So, the ability to exclude someone from the church presupposes that it's known who belongs to the church as a member in the first place.

[20:50] How do we know? We have counted you amongst us in order for us to no longer count you amongst us. We once had a confidence, but we say in church discipline, we no longer have a confidence anymore.

So we can read in this that membership happens. Some formalization of the commitment that we have to one another. Secondly, turn to Acts chapter 5.

Here in Acts 5, the heat has been turned up on the church, right?

Persecution has begun happening in the church. This is not quite the rosy days of just following Pentecost now. Beginning in verse 12, Acts 5.

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles, and they were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.

[21 : 58] So, people faced the decision of whether or not they would join the church in Jerusalem, right? They're still gathering together in Solomon's portico, and people had to decide whether or not they were going to be counted amongst them.

This joining is more public and definite than an informal association, right? They were called church as they were gathered together to worship Jesus Christ.

Okay, third, 1 Timothy chapter 5. Go there with me, please. In 1 Timothy 5, verses 9 through 12, Paul gives Timothy instructions for enrolling widows on the list of those receiving support from the church.

And he says, Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works.

And he goes on a bit more. And so, while this isn't conclusive evidence for formal church membership, to be absolutely clear, it's very tough to imagine that the church in Ephesus would have kept a list of widows, but not have any formal means of identifying everyone who belonged to the church, right?

[23 : 28] To compare the list of widows to the list of church members to be sure that the widow in question was actually a member of the fellowship and therefore receiving benefits from the church.

Number four. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. You can do it. The pages are getting quieter. Go, go. 1 Corinthians 5, verses 12 and 13.

This is following a pretty severe rebuke for not disciplining a brother in the church, someone who claimed to be a Christian, who was sleeping with his mother-in-law.

You want to read all of chapter 5. So that's what's going on here. Paul says, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

God judges those outside. Paul called upon the Corinthian church to judge those who were inside the church, not those who were outside.

[24 : 43] Now, can we clearly, right? We're not talking about being judgmental, right? We're talking about holding someone's life up to the standard of Scripture. The authority that God has given to us to say, this is what the Christian life looks like, right?

And as we see people in egregious sin, like in a lustful relationship, cheating with their mother-in-law, we go, whoa, man, that's not okay. That's what we're talking about here, right? Having removed the plank from our own eye, we see clearly to remove the speck from our brothers. This seems like a pretty big speck to me, but this is what he's talking about here.

We are responsible to one another inside the church, right? Do not misunderstand Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, right? Do not let it be twisting you up the way so many have, right? We're meant to do this, right? The church of Corinth were responsible for the testimony of those who belonged to the church. They were not responsible for the testimony of those who didn't, right?

[25 : 51] What have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? This passage makes no sense if the Corinthian church didn't have some public formal means by which people identified themselves with the church, professed to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Okay, fifth and last, 2 Corinthians chapter 2. And verse 6. Paul is writing concerning a man the Corinthian church had excommunicated.

And he says in verse 6, For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough. So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Paul is saying the man that's been put outside the church continue to be loving toward him, right? It's the proper thing to do. But the thing I want to point out is that this man's exclusion from the church was a punishment by who?

The majority. The majority. You can't have a majority unless you have a definite set of people from which a majority can be determined. You with me?

[27 : 17] Like, how do we know that the majority put this man out of the church unless we know it was in fact a majority? So we read out of the activity of the early church, right?

The implication that there's some formal process by which people became members of a local fellowship. So my third question, I think.

Yep, third question. Who should join a local church? And it has a simple answer and then a defense. Anyone who is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

So if you profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ, you should be a member of a local church. Let me make this case to you from a couple of places.

First, John chapter 17. Yes, please turn there with me. I want you guys to see all of these texts because half of you in this room are not members of a local fellowship. And the other half of you need to help those.

[28 : 18] John 17, beginning in verse 20 and following. He's been praying for the apostles and he says, I do not ask for these only.

John 17, verse 20 is where I'm starting. If you're not there yet. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me.

And I in you. That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one.

I in them and you in me. That they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

You see all that language, that we would be together, that we would be united. Why? Right?

Because we're meant to display the triune nature of God in the way that we're together.

[29 : 26] Jesus established the church to publicly declare those who belong to him in order to give the world a display of the good news about himself.

Now, practically at this point, you could say, isn't he talking about the entire church, that what we call the church universal? And I would say, yes, he absolutely is. But how does that church gather practically as one in a local fellowship?

Right? Are we united with all of our brothers and sisters across the world this morning? Yes.

Undoubtedly, yes. Those who have placed believing professions of faith in Jesus Christ?

Absolutely, yes. But how are we physically, actually, practically, ecclesia, church, gathered together, right?

We're here this morning, gathered as one. How is the world to know who belongs to Christ and who doesn't?

We're here this morning,