

Why Membership?

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[0:00] This is remnants from my kids here. Or maybe it's from my...

That's probably from my gun. If you would, please take your Bibles and go to 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, chapter 12.

1 Corinthians, chapter 12. 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, if you're visiting with us and you left your Bible or your cell phone at home, no, my cell phone's at home, you can pull out that black Bible, go to the back where the New Testament is renumbered and find page 136 in that black Bible.

1 Corinthians, chapter 12. I'm gonna start reading in verse 12. 1 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 12. 1 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 12.

We are baptized into one body. For even as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

[1:22] For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

for the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, I'm not a hand, I'm not of the body, it's not for this reason any the less of the body.

And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I'm not of the body, it's not for this reason any the less of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body just as He desired.

I'm going to read you an excerpt from this organization that talks about membership, meeting, attendance, and membership within this organization.

[2:30] There's a question it asks, why make such a big deal out of meeting attendance? The attendance may at times seem unnecessarily rigid, but being present at these meetings is one of the basic obligations a member accepts.

The Constitution emphasizes that this participatory organization highly values regular attendance. When a member is absent, the entirety loses the personal association with that member, and the member loses touch with the activities.

Attendance is the glue that holds thus together and provides the basic framework for service. It's a vital part of the operation and success.

Now, I left out some words for you because this is actually taken from the Rotary Club membership. Now, let me fill in the words for you.

Rotary Club and Club membership. The attendance rules may at times seem unnecessarily rigid, but being present at club meetings is one of the basic obligations a member accepts on joining a Rotary Club.

[3:43] The Constitutional rules emphasize that Rotary is a participatory organization that highly values regular attendance. This is a Rotary Club.

When a member is absent, the entire club loses the personal association with that member, and the member loses touch with the activities of the club. Attendance is the glue that holds the club together and provides a basic framework for service because it is a vital part of the operation and success of every Rotary Club.

I got that excerpt from Sinclair Ferguson. He wrote a book called Devoted to God's Church. I highly recommend you reading that book. And he placed this in his book, talking about membership, to show how even something as meager as a Rotary Club highly values membership and attendance. And he says, I'll step on your toes now. In contrast to how Christians view the church. In contrast to how Christians view a local church and what it means to be a member of a local church.

I told you last week we were doing two special sermons, which I think is not just today and last week, not just a message for maybe some of you who might be new to us at Cottonwood Bible Church, but even for us who have been here for, let's say, 15 years.

[5:14] I don't know. Two questions. Why pastors or elders? And today, why membership?

And I put 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 18, that's where we're going to head, focus a lot of, quite a bit of our time. But there's other pastors we're going to look at, and really, I'm going to give you, five reasons why membership is so vital.

Five reasons why membership is so vital in a local church body. Why is it so important? Why do we value that here at Cottonwood Bible Church?

Five reasons why membership is so vital in a local church body. Now, keep in mind though, what is a true church? We asked that question last week.

What constitutes a true church? A true church is an assembly of baptized Jesus followers in a specific particular location who've covenanted together to gather regularly to worship the triune God and to minister to one another.

[6:28] That's a true church. And we respond this way because of the gospel. Because we love the Father, we love the Son, we love the Spirit, we love the triune God.

We're sinners, He should have condemned us, but He saved us. He's shown us grace. We've turned from sin, we put our trust in Christ. And if you're here, you're not a Christian, you should repent and trust Christ.

That gospel message is for you. You are welcome to come and be saved just as we have been saved. And the reason why we gather here together, the main reason why is because of the gospel, is because of grace, is because of Jesus and His death for us and His resurrection.

That's what makes a true church. That's why we gather. That's why we do this thing called church. To praise Him, to thank Him for this. So is membership in the Bible?

Yes and no. There's no verses that say, thou shalt become a member of the church. That's the 12th commandment. It's in Exodus chapter 20.

[7:39] Exodus chapter 20. I'm just kidding. I started that right now. That's just where I normally get in trouble. There's no Bible verse that says, thou shalt become a member of the church. You won't find that. But there's other teachings in the Bible that are not delineated like that.

There's lots of other teachings in the Bible that don't say, blah, blah, blah, blah, what we believe. We actually grapple with Scripture and we deduce it. When we look at specific, key specific verses, we can deduce that it is a biblical concept and is vital to the health of a church.

So look at specific verses here and there and even really touched down a little bit longer in 1 Corinthians 12, more or less. Here's five reasons why we believe membership is important here at Cottonwood Bible Church.

Why membership? Because, number one, and this goes back to what we talked about last week, Christians need to be shepherded by a pastor of a local body or by pastors of a local body.

You need this. This is not me saying this. This is Jesus, or I should say the writer of Hebrews. Pastors or elders are called to shepherd God's people.

[9:05] You need to be shepherded, 1 Peter 5. You need to be shepherded. Acts chapter 20, verse 28, it goes back to what we looked at. Why elders? Why pastors? Because they're supposed to shepherd. We looked at that last week extensively.

Pastors are God's way of giving His gift, gift to pastors and elders to the church body. So pastors or elders are called to shepherd God's people.

And I gently touched on this last week. Pastors or elders must know those whom they shepherd. There must be a process by which these pastors know who they're supposed to shepherd.

Who are the sheep that I'm supposed to shepherd? I mean, just take the concept of a shepherd with sheep there in the Middle East. He knows the sheep. The sheep know Him.

I mean, it's just kind of logical. How can pastors shepherd if they don't know who is in and who's out? Answer? A process of membership.

[10:09] And even churches who glory in quote-unquote we don't believe in membership like Calvary Chapel, they still have a process by which they know who is part of them and who's not a part of them or who is no longer a part of them.

Now, there's nothing in writing but they know who's in and who's out. So for us here at Cottonwood Bible Church, we have a process by which you can become a part of this local body.

Which you can become a part of us. And I got three steps. There's three steps to that. Step number one, you go through the ABCs of CBC.

This is where we read through our key distinctives, our doctrinal statement, church covenant, and constitution, which you find that on the website. But then we read through it and then you can ask questions. You can just drill me if you want.

People love to do that. Have fun with that. Drill me. It's just fine. It's fine. And really, excuse me, anybody can sit in on that. Actually, members can even sit in on that if they want to.

[11:17] Anybody can sit in on that. I like to have a group of people who just go through this and people ask questions and this person might ask a question like, oh, I never thought about that. You know, that's why you get together in a group. You learn more about us by doing that.

So that's just step one. Step two is a little bit more intense. Do a membership interview. As with me, and usually I have another person, most of the time it's Kaylin.

Where is he at? There he is. Kaylin sometimes had Travis, Mike Matthews, and then another female, Carolyn, side end. Doug and Barb have side end, too. And we ask your address.

What's your birthday? I won't ask you your year. If you want to tell me your year, that's fine. When you were baptized. But most essential are these two questions. When did you become a question? And what is the gospel? If you were to give someone the gospel in 60 seconds and I will time you, what would you say?

[12:23] So in this interview, I mean, these are two most important questions to us. These two questions are vital. If you're a Christian, then you know the gospel.

Why? Why these two main questions? Well, because if you're going to be a voting member of Cottonwood Bible Church, you should be a Christian. That's usually how it goes.

You feel the sarcasm there? Laying on real thick there, people. And second, you should know the gospel. I mean, just if you were to even say, Jesus died and rose, repent and believe.

I mean, that's just like seven seconds, I think, maybe four. And that's the heart of the gospel, right? I mean, how can you be a member and not be a Christian? That happens.

How can you be a member if you don't even know the gospel? That happens. I took a lot of flack when I first came here to say this is what's going to happen.

[13:25] This is the process by which we're going to do membership. Because what they used to do, this is a Southern Baptist church, so what they used to do, they have a little altar call and somebody would come down and say, hey, I'm a member of First Southern Baptist Church, so and so and so.

They would come down and they'd say, this person is a member of First Southern Baptist Church, so and so and so. Let's have them become a member of this church. Everybody in favor, say I, I, I, I, I, member. I said, you're kidding me.

That's not going to happen here. We don't even know who this person is. We don't even know if they have the gospel, if they know Christ. It doesn't matter if they're a member of some other Baptist, this other Baptist church.

We don't know. This is vital to us as a church. We hold the gospel essential here. This is most essential as Caitlin said, to us. If you're going to be a voting member of this church, it's vital, it's imperative that I, as the pastor, protect this church and that you as a member must be faithful to protect this church.

We'll look at that in a moment too. So, step one, ABC, step two, the interview. Step three, I present you to the regular, excuse me, to the members at a regular members meeting.

[14:41] And I talk to them about your interview. We talked about, blah, blah, blah, yada, yada, yada. And they vote on you because the final say does not rest with the pastor.

The final say rests with the congregation. By the way, the final say rests with the congregation for members coming in, for members being disciplined and coming out. Discipline or going out. And in reference to budget, the budget for the year and major expenditures. That's why we're going to have a special call members meeting after the service. There's two major expenditures we got to do.

So the members decide that. Not the pastor. That's how you're a part of this. You're involved as a member of Cottonwood Bible Church. And then I have you sign the doctrinal statement and the church covenant.

The doctrinal statement, this is what I believe. And the church covenant, this is how I'm going to live my life. And you sign that. In covenant with the other members saying, I'm covenanting with you and you're covenanting with me.

[15:46] So again, membership is important. Because Christians need to be pastor or shepherded. Now, here's where the shepherding part really comes into play.

When you become a member of a church, membership gives Christians the opportunity to obey God's word in Hebrews 13, 17. Hebrews 13, 17.

What does that say? Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief for this would be unprofitable for you.

How will you obey your leaders if you're not even part of a local church body? It just doesn't make any sense. How can you obey your leaders by obeying that passage if you're not even part of a local church?

How do you do that? How do you do that? You should join a church where you are saying, I want to be shepherded. I want to be pastored.

[16:50] I need that. I know I need that. Reason number two, it expresses your commitment to a local particular, excuse me, it expresses your commitment to a particular local body.

You express, it's the way you express your commitment to a particular local church. In membership, you're telling other Christians, those other Christians, those other members, you're saying, yes, I want to unify with you for gospel ministry.

Yes, I want you to be a part of my life and me to be a part of your life. We're in this together. That's where you have 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12 through 18, and even chapter 12, verse 7, but to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

And there's different aspects to your body. As I'm moving my arms, preaching, I'm talking to you with my mouth, I'm listening to you with my ears, and looking at you with my eyes and my hands are moving, everything's working together.

That's how the body functions. So in membership, you unify with other Christians or members, and you're given the opportunity to love and edify them, to build them up, where you can be the hand, or you might be the eye, or you might be the ear, or you might be the knee, or you might be the foot because somebody needs to get kicked.

[18:26] No, I'm just kidding. You know, you might be something, a part of that in that church. And keep in mind, corporate identification has always been God's intention from the very beginning.

God saw that the man, he was alone, and that was not good. That's why he created woman.

Ever since the beginning, there was always not just a single person, it was togetherness. I mean, even the very fabric of who God is, God is one God, but there's three persons.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And the Father loves, the Father loves the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father, and they're all loving each other. It's that community, it's that fellowship, it's that connection that the three persons have as one God. It's always been God's intention to have a corporate identification. Which is why there's no such thing as a maverick Christian.

[19:44] I mean, that whole concept is foreign to the New Testament. The New Testament automatically assumes Christians will connect together. It automatically assumes that.

At CBC, we believe membership is biblical, even assumed in the New Testament. And I explained to you how you can become a member here if you're not one. And this is how, this is how we know, as a church, we know you want to be committed to us and how we will in turn be committed to you. That's why for some churches, lots of times, that's how, that's why they connect baptism with membership because in baptism, you are publicly proclaiming, I'm a follower of Jesus and you're publicly proclaiming to these people, I want you to hold me accountable to this.

And I'm going to hold you accountable to this. We're in this together. That's why membership is so, so identified with baptism because of this commitment to each other, this devotion to each other. You're saying, yes, I want to be committed to you. That's why we have a church covenant. That's why we covenant with each other to live a certain way devoted to each other as the church body. That's why we do this.

[21:03] This. This. This leads to the third one. The second and third are very similar. Third reason, it confirms from that local body your salvation.

It confirms from that local body your salvation. What do I mean? Membership brings with it accountability, community, responsibility.

Now, before you get nervous, and maybe you already are, I'm good at that. I'm good at making people nervous.

I make my wife nervous. Poor lady. A local church does not declare you to be a Christian. That's where we as Protestants, we break with the Roman Catholic Church.

And the Roman Catholic Church, they say, they declare you're a Christian. You are a Christian. They declare it. We don't have that power to do that. That's ridiculous.

[22:07] When you repent and trust in Christ, you're saved. Jesus saves you, not the church. I should have had a whole bunch of amens to that. Jesus saves you, not the church.

Oh, thank you very much. That's very fair. Jesus is the one who saves us. A church doesn't save you. Faith doesn't save you. Jesus saves you through the means of faith alone.

But be careful you don't swing the pendulum way over to the other direction. The church doesn't declare you to be a Christian. We do not declare you to be a Christian. No, no, no, no, no. But a local church testifies that you're loving, that you are loving Jesus.

Because we testify to that. I mean, we read Ephesians 4, 1 through 6, 1 through 3. Acts chapter 2, verse 42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread, to fellowship, to prayer. They devoted themselves to that and they were connecting with each other. That was the confirmation that they're trusting in Christ.

[23:18] And that happens as you live the Christian. You don't live the Christian life in a vacuum. How does the world know that we're Christians? When we love each other.

Not how we love the world. Not how we love worldly people. Not how we love the unsaved. How we love each other. How we display Christ with each other.

That's why we don't say the mountains are my church. You ever see that bumper sticker of the mountains are my church? I've seen that.

Now, I got in trouble for saying this and so I need to make sure I clarify. I'm not saying that if you go to the mountains or you go like down to Verde River and you take your Bible and you're reading the Bible and you're praying, I'm not saying that's bad.

That's good. Praise the Lord for doing that. But what people do, they say, I'm going to do that instead of, or they say, that's my church. That's completely, how in the world do you do that?

[24:21] How do you live out Ephesians 4, 1 through 6 by being down at the river by yourself? Doesn't happen. Again, those words, accountability, community, responsibility.

And this also begs not just attending, check that off my list, but also connecting with each other, getting involved in each other's lives.

You know, we're a Southern Baptist church and Southern Baptist, they're so good, they understand you're supposed to be a member of a church, but you know what? They've forgotten the reason why to become a member of a church.

They've forgotten why it's so important. It's good, you should become a member of a church, but why? Why is it so important?

You build relationships with each other, which is why we as a church, we don't have a lot of programs. People come visit here, they want lots of programs. We don't do a lot of programs, because we want relationships to happen organically, on our own, where you're connecting with each other, and you're not having something happen on Monday night and Tuesday night and Wednesday night and Thursday night and Friday night and Saturday night and then Sunday.

[25:39] We've got five different things happen on Sunday. Not to mention a fact, you're going to wear me out, people. Yeah. And you get worn out.

I've got to go to all these different programs. How about you just have somebody over for dinner? Maybe just go have coffee, go get a Starbucks together.

Just talk about the Lord. That's real ministry. It frees you up to do that. It confirms your salvation from that local body.

That's the third reason. Number four. It is how we, as a local body, can evangelize the world. Membership is important.

Why? Because membership is how we, as a local body, can evangelize the world. Look, elders are called to have a good reputation with those outside the church. 1 Timothy 3, verse 7. It's a

testimony to the world of their lives.

[26:46] So in the same way, the local church is called to be a corporate witness to the community. Friends, this is daunting.

When the world sees how we act or respond to situations and then we find, they find out that we're members of, say, Cottonwood Bible Church, it says volumes to them more than any words you could say to them.

And this can go both ways. It can be negative or positive. Oh, she or he is a part of that church? Or, wow, she or he is a part of that church? See the difference? It's between, man, those people are fake versus, man, those people are the real deal.

We do this all the time. You go to Safeway, Fry's, Walmart. You know, you're over there looking for something.

[28:07] I can't find this. And a worker comes up to you like Sandy, where's Sandy? Sandy and Chanyo. Sandy, she's good at it. I'm pointing you out. I'm sorry.

You know, you're looking for something. And just a worker comes up, hey, can I help you find something? Yeah, I'm trying to find this. Oh, no, that's not over there. It's over here. Come on. Bring over here. Yeah, it's right over here. Oh, wow.

And then you ask them something else. Oh, yeah, that's right over here. Can I help you with anything else? No, that's good. Okay, let me know. I'll be over here. You know those people, right? And you're like, wow, that was cool.

I had a great time at Fry's or Walmart. Somebody told me to help me. Flipping around. Looking for something. Worker walks by. Excuse me. Excuse me.

Oh, yeah. I'm looking for this. Oh, I don't know. I'm on break. Right? And you're like, I'm going to kill you.

[29:04] So then you say, Walmart, man, I can't stand going there because, or Walmart, wow, Sandy was all helping me and everything. Wow, fries, wow, they were so helpful.

We do this all the time. You know people do this with the church too. I have a friend of mine. He works for Sedona Fire and all the fire department, even down here, they know him.

I'm not going to tell you who he is. They know him and I say, oh, yeah, I know so and so. And they're like, yeah, he's cool, man. He's like the real deal. That says volumes because I know him and he is the real deal.

Plus, along with this being the corporate, excuse me, how we evangelize the world, we are a missionary organization as a church. In other words, we should be thinking about areas close to us like Jerome and beyond us that need a gospel witness.

We should be thinking that way and then we should begin to strategize how we can reach that area with the gospel, how we can plant a church. We should be thinking like that. Last, number five, fifth reason why we believe here at Cottonwood Bible Church, why membership is important.

[30:34] Number five, it is how a local body exposes false gospels. If you become a member here, this is where that word responsibility really comes into play.

It is the responsibility of the members to collectively hold fast to the faith. If you want to, you can change number five to more of a positive. It's how a local body holds to the truth.

You can put it in that way. Galatians chapter one, verse six through ten. Paul is talking to the churches of Galatia.

And he says to all the brethren who are with me from verse two. He's not just talking to elders. He's not just talking to pastors. He's not just talking to leadership. He's talking to the whole church.

I'm amazed that you're so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel which is not another, excuse me, which is not another. Only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

[31:46] Pastors, or elders, are the gatekeepers of the gospel but members of a local church are called to make sure this pulpit and this body holds to the truth of the gospel.

You're responsible to make sure this pulpit is preaching to you the gospel by grace, through, by grace alone, through faith alone and Christ alone.

You need to make sure this is being preached from here. You need to make sure you're being taught this and it's your responsibility of a member here that this body holds to the truth of the gospel who God is.

We're sinners. Jesus lived, died, and rose, repent, and believe. There's the gospel. We are a group of people who are devoted to Christ and to each other who will make sure this local gathering of Jesus followers will hold fast to the words of the faith because a time will come, Paul said to Timothy, where people will just want their ears tickled.

hold fast to the gospel. Hold fast to the gospel. gospel. So why do we believe membership is important?

[33:05] Because Christians need to be shepherded and pastored by a pastor or pastors of a local body. It expresses your commitment to a particular local body. It confirms from that local body your salvation.

It's how we as a local body can evangelize the world and it's how a local body exposes false gospels, holds to the truth. So membership is important.

And remember, what it is that binds us together is the gospel of grace. We act this way, we respond this way, we say, now, oh Jesus, use us for your glory as your body because we've been saved and we have such a different outlook on things.

Remember, we're going to live forever together. So a small way we display that is when we gather as a local body and we are covenanting together.

You have the universal church all throughout the world. Well, how does the universal church show itself in real practical ways? The local church. That's how.

[34:22] Would you pray with me? Father, we are so thankful that you've been gracious to us and you've saved us.

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving yourself as a sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God. That's how you showed your love.

And thank you, oh mighty spirit, for bringing that into play, to bringing that about in time, to change our wills so we would walk, run into the arms of Jesus.

We're very grateful. We pray that as a church you have been faithful in so many ways, you've shown your goodness. Help us to hold fast to this gospel truth.

Hold fast to the words of the faith that we would be readied to be shepherded, committed to each other, expressing our love to each other, being a witness to this community, and holding fast to the gospel.

[35:48] Help us as a church as more and more people come and visit and check us out. Bind us together in the gospel and grace.

I want to encourage you as we do each Sunday. Take these few moments of the