

# Is Church Membership For You?

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you're visiting with us, this is sermon number two in a series paired up with Sunday School on the biblical church.

What does the Bible say about church? And for this series, we're using a different portion of scripture for each lesson based on the focus, kind of following through the Constitution that we're proposing for the church to adopt.

After this, we'll continue back in our series, which is going through the book of John, the Gospel of John, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. So today's sermon text is Hebrews chapter 8, starting at verse 6.

I'll read this out loud and you can follow along. We believe this is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and sufficient word. It's God's very own word for you who are his people.

So when I'm done reading the scripture for today, I'll say this is the word of God and you can all respond, thanks be to God. Hebrews chapter 8, starting at verse 6.

[ 1 : 04 ] But now Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry. By how much more also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which he has established on better promises.

Verse 7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then there should be no place to be sought for a second. Verse 8.

For finding fault with them, he said, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Verse 9. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

Verse 10. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be my people.

[ 2 : 12 ] Verse 11. And they shall not teach everyone his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities. I will remember no more. In that he saith the new covenant, he has made the old obsolete.

And that which is now decaying and perishing away is ready to vanish. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God indeed.

You may be seated. Isaiah 40 says that the grass withers and the flowers fade, But the word of the Lord endures forever.

Would you pray with me? Oh Lord, you are the covenant-keeping God.

[ 3 : 23 ] You keep your covenant to your people. And your covenant people know you through Christ. Lord, you promise to feed and to nourish everyone who belongs to you through Jesus Christ.

We pray that by your power, your spirit will do that today. For your glory we ask. Amen. Amen. Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, The question I invite you to decide for yourself today is this.

Is church membership for you? Is church membership for you? Church membership is not for everyone.

Members belong to a body. And each part of the body is very important. If one part is missing, then the whole part, the whole body suffers for that one part not being there.

I read of a marine sergeant, Sergeant Jones, and his job in the Marines was to be an explosive ordinance disposal tech. That means that if there's a bomb that's going to go off, it's his job to go in there wearing the full suit and disarm it.

[ 4 : 41 ] Before someone is killed. He told the story about how one time he was serving in Afghanistan, and a local person gave them a clue that there might have been an improvised explosive device, an IED a few miles south.

So he set off and he invited others to come along with him as opportunity to train them. Things went bad on this mission. There was an explosion. And when the dust settled, there was so much shrapnel in his legs.

With the infection and the complications on the field, both of his legs had to be amputated. So he's now missing these important parts of his body, his two legs.

And the pain was so great, even years later after having amputation, he reported that phantom pain that where his feet and shins should have been. He said it felt like someone was crunching his toes or twisting his foot so badly it was going to pop off.

He said sometimes it feels like someone's trying to run my feet through a grinder. He looks down, there's no feet there, there's no pain, but those members are missing. Medical professionals explain that each part of the body is interconnected to the rest of the body through a number of complex systems.

[ 5 : 55 ] Think about several involved with amputation. Circulatory system, muscular, skeletal, and in this case the nervous system. Our bodies are all interconnected, aren't they?

If one part of the body is gone or injured, a healthy body feels it. Well, this book of Hebrews, it was written to the church.

And it's written to the church who had a mixed congregation. And there were many who had given up on meeting together. And others who had returned to the Jewish practices, keeping with the tradition of their ethnicity.

Instead of the new covenant that they were belonging to if they're part of the church. And the author of Hebrews, I think it's Paul's sermons taken down as Luke's sermon notes. That's what we're reading in Hebrews.

He says, hold on. That same covenant language that where God says, I will be your God and you will be my people. That's repeated for you, church. Look in our sermon text today.

[ 6 : 56 ] Hebrews chapter 8 and verse 12. The message is this. If you truly are united to Christ, if you belong to the body of Jesus Christ, God is your God.

You are his people. You are in his covenant. There's no going back to anything else. And if you belong to Christ, you belong to his body on earth. Some were in the habit of no longer meeting with the rest of the body.

Others had taken the Lord's Supper, been in the fellowship, experienced what it is to belong, physically at least. And they had abandoned the faith. And he says of those, they were never of us.

Do you know anyone like that in your life? Maybe they were fervent at one point in life and they haven't been to church for years now. You should be very concerned for their soul.

Do they truly belong to Christ? Or did they never know him? Ephesians 4 builds off the same metaphor. Christ is the head.

[ 8 : 03 ] The church is his body. So to truly belong as the member of a church. Disciples beware. Cost the count of discipleship. To truly belong to a church body.

It will expose you like Sergeant Jones and the Marines to great pain. When one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. Count the cost.

But it also is the only way to experience the great joys of heaven right now on this earth while we're still alive. Romans 12, 4 and 5 build on this same metaphor.

The church as a body. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, As in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one body in Christ.

And we are individually members one of another. So is church membership for you? I want to walk you through today's sermon text with six points of reflection.

[ 9 : 04 ] Search yourself. Number one. Church membership is for you if you are blessed by Christ's ministry.

Look at verse six. We read that Christ has obtained a ministry. Christ has obtained. He has accomplished.

He owns. He possesses a ministry. What is it about this ministry? This ministry in verse six, we're told it is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it is enacted on better promises.

So the contrast here to the church, it's between the Mosaic covenant, the covenant that God made from Mount Sinai for the people of Israel through Moses as the mediator.

That's in contrast with this new covenant, the second covenant. And the mediator of this covenant is Christ himself. God who took on flesh. Christ obtained this ministry.

[ 10 : 08 ] It will never be taken out of his hands. There is a great contrast between these two. One of the contrasts I want to pull from the bookend of this passage.

Look all the way down at verse 13. See, this whole chapter, Hebrews 8, it's the apostle quoting from the Old Testament. And he's quoting from Jeremiah chapter 31.

Jeremiah was writing to a rebellious nation of Israel who had not kept God's covenant. They had rebelled. They had turned to idols to the point that Nebuchadnezzar and his army were marching to capture Babylon.

And yet that prophet Jeremiah bringing this great judgment of the Lord, prosecuting the covenant of works to them. And through Jeremiah comes this glorious prophecy. God will be faithful still.

There will be a remnant preserved through Daniel. Through those who have taken into exile, the Jews. God will be faithful to you too. And through national Israel will come the one who will mediate the new covenant.

[ 11 : 10 ] So the contrast is there, but now look at verse 13. He says, like the first covenant, this new covenant is different.

See, the first covenant is now going to be obsolete. It's becoming obsolete and is growing old and is ready to vanish away. So God was mediating grace to national Israel under the Mosaic administration, the ceremonial law, the civil law.

And his moral law says, this is how my people live. I ransomed you out of Egypt. This is who you are. Well, the new covenant will never be obsolete.

The new covenant will never vanish away. In Hebrews, he's already made the case. Jesus Christ is the high priest forever. I think for many, we even need to make sure we're not skipping ahead in the story here.

We need to catch up with where this congregation would already be familiar. Do you know that you need a mediator between your soul and God, the creator, the holy God?

[ 12 : 18 ] Ancient Job before Moses, well before Christ. Ancient Job knew this. Listen to what Job said in Job 9 verse 32 and 33.

God is not a man as I am. I can't go to trial as if I were his equal. Job said there is no arbiter between me and God.

There's no mediator who can take my hand as a man and God's hand and bring peace to us. Job recognized that. I need a mediator. I need someone to mediate between me and my creator.

I can't approach him on my own. Now look back at verse 6 of our sermon text here. Christ obtained a ministry.

Christ became that mediator. And what was only in shadows with the Mosaic commands, the ceremonial law, the shedding of blood, the priest giving a blessing after sins had been pardoned according to what God ordained, the moral law over the people that would lead them to repentance, what was only in shadow form is now here in substance.

[ 13 : 30 ] Christ has obtained this ministry. The civil laws over the nation of Israel. Those civil laws now were enacted by the king himself.

King Jesus rules over the new covenant church. How did he obtain this ministry? He became the lamb of heaven.

He poured out his blood. He obtained this ministry. Now he says in verse 6 that this new covenant is better because it's enacted on better promises.

See, for national Israel, the promise was peace in this land against all the other nations. But through Jesus Christ, you have peace with God himself.

Under Moses, you would have prosperity in Israel. Under Christ, you have the riches of heaven. Under Moses, you have the best that Israel could hope for were clear borders established in this desert piece of land.

[ 14 : 34 ] Well, through Jesus Christ, those in his kingdom, they inherit the new heavens and the new earth. You see how much better the ministry of Christ is. Why would you turn back to a covenant of works for yourself?

And he says it's enacted on better promises. Without even drawing from the New Testament, listen to how Christ's ministry was enacted on Old Testament promises.

And if you're in Christ, this is for you. You belong to Christ's church. If God has put enmity in your heart against Satan, sin, and the world.

As he promised he would do in Genesis 3.15. You belong to Christ's church if he has removed your heart of stone and replaced it with a soft heart.

As he promised he would do in Ezekiel 36. You belong to Christ's church if you are one of his sheep who know the shepherd's voice.

[ 15 : 33 ] As he promised, and what we heard this morning in Ezekiel 34. God promised, I myself will search for my sheep and I will seek you out.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek out my sheep and I will rescue them. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.

And I myself will make them to lie down. As one Puritan commentator wrote, It's the resurrection, the fact that Jesus Christ lives today.

The resurrection, it is the amen of all of God's promises. So you are blessed by Christ's ministry, aren't you?

If you are blessed in Christ's ministry, then you belong to his church. He obtained every one of God's promises for you, for his glory.

[ 16 : 44 ] Is church membership for you? The second point of reflection, church membership is different than Old Covenant membership.

Church membership is different than Old Covenant membership. Look at verse 7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

For he finds fault with them when he says, now he quotes Jeremiah 31, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt.

For they did not continue in my covenant. And so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. This quote from Jeremiah is describing the covenant that God made under Moses.

He delivered them out of slavery. He's showing them grace, giving them his moral law. Yet they rebel. They turn their back on God. They turn to all the other idols of their nation. And so they bring on the curses of that old covenant.

[ 18 : 01 ] I want to make a couple observations. First, in verse 8, look at what he says. The first covenant found fault with what?

What did the first covenant find fault with in verse 8? Found fault with them. This means personally, every individual under the old covenant was exposed by the moral law of God.

And it exposed that their hearts were the problem. Their hearts were made of stone. Now look at verse 9. Because their hearts were of stone, on the whole nationally, they could not live for the glory of God.

Notice what he says is not at fault. He says the law of God, which is a reflection of God's essence, who God is, is the law found fault in them. Does he say the law was at fault?

No, the law is not what's at fault here. It's our hearts that are at fault. We want to bring the goalpost a little bit closer, don't we?

[ 19 : 14 ] We want to try to just change God's standard so that we can achieve it by our own works. He says, no, my law is not what we're moving here. It's your hearts that need to be moved toward me.

I was trying to think of a good picture for this. Let me ask you this as an open question, maybe a trick question, okay? Is it right for parents to expect their children to help wash dirty dishes?

Yes or no? I see some of the parents here that have kids of a wide range of ages are hesitant to answer because they're thinking of every single one of them.

If your child is a three-year-old, that's probably a wrong expectation. If your child is a 30-year-old, that's a good expectation, right? So is it right for us to expect that as parents?

Well, think about Israel. He says the law was like a tutor. It wasn't wrong for him to want his covenant people to please him. That wasn't wrong at all.

[ 20 : 14 ] Of course, if you're in his covenant, how could you not want that? Well, the fault that this law shows is your heart. You never will love him unless he draws you to himself. What needs to change is not God's law.

It's the heart of God's true people. Is church membership for you? If you are still living under Adam's curse of the law, you are still trying to approach God under this principle of works where I can do more and more and more and I can be closer to God by my own good behavior, church membership is not for you.

I told you it's not for everyone. If you're still under the curse of Adam, you get death. But if you are under the ministry of Jesus Christ, you get life.

If you're under this covenant of works, your thoughts of God are begrudging. It's complaining about being in his presence or serving him. If you're in the covenant of grace through Christ, your thoughts of God and belonging to his covenant are joyful.

Under the covenant of works, you're passive. Under the covenant of grace, you are active. Under the covenant of works, you are stagnant like a pool of stale mud.

[ 21 : 33 ] But under the covenant of grace, you are alive in Christ. You are growing. I love how Don Whitney pointed this out. He says, just as every organ of every cell is God created to be an active member of the human body, so every true Christian is God created to be an active member of a local body of Christ's church.

Amen? So is church membership for you? Third point of reflection. Church membership is for you.

If God is transforming your desires. God transforms new covenant members from the inside out.

Not the outside in. Look at verse 10. God says, For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. As we saw in Sunday school, Austin did a great job pointing out.

[ 22 : 47 ] You don't change your attitudes, your desires, your heart, your thinking. That's back to covenant of works. You're trying to make yourself good enough again. But you see that God has truly transformed what you want.

He's transformed what you desire. God makes a new covenant. Now I need to clarify something that is confusing. He says, I will make a covenant with the house of Israel after those days.

Now remember, this is a quotation of Jeremiah 31. God is showing here, I believe he's showing the continuity. Does that mean that everything that God said to Israel just goes away?

Was that all even like relevant at any point? No, God is saying that this people of Israel, this house of Israel and Judah, it's through them. And Paul clarifies this in Galatians.

It's the seed of Abraham singular. It's Christ through Adam's line, through Israel, through Judah. It's through him that I will do this. What is in view in this future prophecy through Isaiah, I'm sorry, through Jeremiah, is the true Israel.

[ 23 : 51 ] And Paul clarifies this. Well, did all the promises to national Israel go away? No. All the promises find their yes and amen in Christ. It's fulfilled to the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ.

And it's applied so that there's no longer Jew or Gentile. There's no longer Israelite and all the rest of us. God is fulfilling his plan to redeem all people.

And he doesn't do it in a vacuum. He does it over covenant redemptive history. He gave all of the Old Testament shadows and types in sundry ways through all these different prophets.

All of them pointing and testifying that when God takes on flesh from this line, under this law, it is to accomplish his plan for all the nations.

That's what God promised all along. God did not find any fault with his own moral law. But he knew in order to draw sinners into his covenant through Christ, he would need to work powerfully inside of them, in their minds, in their hearts, is the language.

- [ 24 : 59 ] See, the new covenant is God transforming you on the inside. We know this so much more fully now with the new covenant revelation. It's the Holy Spirit who applies in your soul what Christ accomplished and what God had promised.
- I will put my laws into your minds, God says. My people will know what pleases me. You will know it. It's in your mind.
- It is not a guessing game with God. Some have taken that principle of grace, that it's not by our works, and they've turned it into licentiousness.
- This is as old as the Reformation. Oh, you say that people are saved by grace alone, not by works? Well, they're just going to go live however they want. It's going to be antinomianism. There's no law over the church.
- Well, listen to what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3, 4. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.
- [ 26 : 05 ] John is saying church membership is not for those who are lawless because they're not in the covenant of grace. They don't know God. He says, I will write my law on your hearts.
- I will change your desires. Isn't that what you need God to change in you most? It is for me. I need God to change me on the inside. They will want to please me.
- We read in 2 Corinthians 3, 3 that with the Holy Spirit of the living God, He puts His law inside of you, not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of your human heart.
- The stone tablets over the people, that's an external law on people who need to be transformed first. They are spiritually dead.
- They need to be made alive by grace. Galatians 5, 24 says, Those who belong to Christ have been crucified in the flesh, along with the passions and desires of the sin.
- [ 27 : 05 ] Praise God that He doesn't just give us these promises and leave us to try to work for them again. He actually changes our desire.
- I want to illustrate this with a true story. I'll use the first name, Christiana. As a toddler, Christiana hated to eat broccoli.
- If her parents tried to make her eat broccoli, she would gag and almost throw up at the dinner table. As she became an adult, Christiana got a master of science in nutrition.
- No one has to make her eat broccoli. She knows that broccoli is full of nutrients. It's fresh. It's crunchy. It's so yummy to her now. Do you see the difference?
- She used to be getting broccoli externally pushed onto her and hated it. Well, now she appreciates it. She loves it. Her desire has changed.
- [ 28 : 05 ] Is church membership for you? If God is transforming your life from the inside out for His glory and for your good, then church membership is for you.
- Fourth point of reflection. If you are in Christ's new covenant, the law He writes on your heart and in your mind is clear. Look at verse 10.
- And really 10 taking into account what we've seen up to this point. In verse 10, He simply repeats that refrain that's so familiar to God's covenant people over every century.
- I will be your God. By grace, I approach you. And you belong to me. You are my people. He repeats that refrain now, applying it to the church.
- I'm trying to appreciate that the continuity of God. God doesn't change. So yes, the new covenant mediated by Christ is so much better.
- [ 29 : 06 ] But God doesn't change. God makes Himself the God of His people. And God draws His people to Himself. You've got to answer this question.

What is the law that God puts into the minds and the hearts of those who He says, I am your God and you are my people? What law? Put your eyes back on those verses. What law is it that He puts inside of His people?

Well, one of our principles of understanding the Bible correctly is that we take a more difficult passage and we try to shed light from all the other parts in the Bible.

The more difficult part is clarified by the parts that are more clear. I think this is an appropriate case to do that. Could it be the ceremonial law? Could it be the law for national Israel that said they couldn't eat shellfish and things like that?

Unclean animals? Knowing from the book of Acts what we know? The answer has to be no. It cannot be the ceremonial law. Remember the vision that the Lord gave Peter? There's no unclean animals.

[ 30 : 13 ] I've created them all. You're in Christ now. There's no more ceremonial law over my church. Okay, what about the civil law? Could it be that this was a judicial law for ruling a kingdom?

Well, isn't that exactly what the zealots expected of Jesus? That He would be a political revolutionary? They could get behind Him and finally He would carry out all the civil law of God over Israel?

Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this earth. My kingdom is a spiritual kingdom of heaven. Paul wrote, Now, does that mean that those two types of laws, ceremonial and civil, are irrelevant to us?

We can still gain deep appreciation for the finished work of Christ as the Lamb of heaven by studying the ceremonial law. It's useful for us, for our instruction, for our growth.

There are still principles in the civil law that God gave to the theocracy of Israel that we can learn from. We can do our best to apply them in our different areas of work and industry in the world. But what is the law that He says here in verse 10?

[ 31 : 27 ] He puts into the minds and hearts of His people. Is it possible for a new covenant believer to know what pleases God? Has God given us anything to indicate what pleases Him?

What was it that the Lord wrote with His own finger? Not just commanding through Moses, but with His own finger, the Lord gave us the Ten Commandments, what we call the moral law, as a special revelation for those who belong to God.

I am your God, you are my people. This is how you shall live. So if you're in Christ's new covenant with God's help, out of gratitude for Christ, not as a principle of works, you will be joyfully ruled by King Jesus, and every king has a law.

And He has made His law very clear to us. Matthew 22. Jesus said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Notice what He said next. On these two commandments hangs all the law and the prophets. God always has and still rules graciously over His covenant people.

[ 32 : 46 ] And He does this through His moral law. Not from the outside, like a covenant of works, but changing the inside of a believer, changing your desires. You've probably heard teaching that says that Christians are governed only by a, quote, law of Christ.

And this is true. We are governed by the law of Christ. In other words, there is no law for the Christian unless it's from the hand of Christ. There's no relationship between a Christian to God through the law without Christ.

Because Christ fulfilled all the law. He loved God perfectly, loved His neighbor as Himself. He mediates, and then He gradually puts into us His righteousness. What He perfectly fulfilled.

He changes your heart with that same moral law. Did Christ abolish the moral law, the Ten Commandments? I believe Christ answers this directly in the negative in Matthew 5.13.

Jesus said, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. And He has fulfilled them.

[ 33 : 55 ] And He has obtained a better ministry. The reference to the law and the prophets. The law are the books that Moses wrote. The prophets are God's inspired men prosecuting that very covenant.

They're holding the nation of Israel accountable to that covenant relationship under the principle of works for the nation of Israel. Jesus said, I did not come to abolish it.

See, my people will relate to me. I will rule over my people with my law. But it will be my law written inside of them. The principle under the old covenant was do this and live.

The principle now under Christ's new covenant is live. By living in me, you will do this. A king is always clear.

A loving, benevolent king is always clear to his people about what pleases him. I thought of a couple in their marriage. And I pictured the young wife saying, I thought you loved me.

[ 35 : 02 ] Almost to cry. And the young husband's trying his really hardest. And he says, Of course I love you. I folded all the laundry. I made the dinner. I took out the trash. I mowed the lawn. Of course I love you.

And she says, But you didn't write me a note to say you love me. She's looking for words of encouragement. And he's doing all these acts of service. Well, our Lord is better than any marriage like that.

He's so clear to us. And lovingly, he tells us, This is what pleases me. You don't need to be left searching for all these other ways. Because what will happen is we will become legalists. We will start piling on all these things we think we need to do to please our King Jesus.

And he makes it really clear. Here's one more thing you need to hear from Psalm 119. For those who say that the moral law has vanished away and has become obsolete.

Psalm 119 says that the sum of God's word is truth. Listen to this. Every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

[ 36 : 08 ] Every one of God's righteous rules endures forever. God's word never contradicts itself. Let scripture interpret scripture for us. So if God is growing in you a desire out of joy and gratitude.

To obey the Ten Commandments out of love for your King. Then you're in his covenant. Church membership is for you. Number five.

Church membership is for you who personally know God. Because of Christ's work. That's exactly what he says in verse 11. I hardly need to make any comments. Look at verse 11. In this new covenant, they shall not teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother saying, Know the Lord.

For they shall all know me. From the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities. And I will remember their sins no more.

Look at verse 11. They shall all know me. Do you remember in John 3 when Nicodemus came at night. Ashamed to be associated with Christ.

[ 37 : 16 ] What was the picture that Christ gave him of regeneration? He said, You must be born again. You must be born again to know God.

Nicodemus knew the law, but he did not know God. Initially, when God saved him, Nicodemus knew God. And he followed Christ. Does a baby know who the parents are?

For some reason, I've taken babies in our congregation. They immediately start crying. Because a baby knows who their parents are. And in this new covenant, it will be like that.

Internally, a baby can't explain anything with their words. But you know. You know God. They shall all know me, he said. Well, who is it that will know him?

Look at verse 12. God says, I will remember their sins no more. Those who know God in the new covenant are those who are forgiven of their sins by the work of Christ.

[ 38 : 18 ] This has big implications. Those in the new covenant are not those who are on the rolls of attending a church gathering every week.

The children of believers are not automatically in the new covenant. They need evangelism. They need to hear the gospel. They need to have God's law show them their sin so they can approach Christ and receive his free grace.

Those who know God are those who have been forgiven by him. Whose sins have been washed away through the ministry that Christ obtained. There is our Lord Jesus Christ, the high priest from heaven now, ministering over his congregation, every little church, every congregation over the earth.

He is the great high priest. And in Hebrews 7, verse 3, just a chapter before this, the author says that the Son of God continues a priest forever.

Do you see what this means? If Christ is your high priest, your sins are forgiven by him forever. And you know God forever. You will not fall away.

[ 39 : 35 ] You belong to him. Your sins are atoned for. And his righteousness is yours for as long as Christ is priest. As long as Christ is the ruler over the new covenant.

And that's forever. So whose sins are forgiven? Only those who are in Christ's covenant. Now, I'll just make one brief point because I have so much love and respect for our other brothers of have a different view of covenant theology.

I'll just say this simple truth right here. Who should take the Lord's Supper? Those who know the Lord and whose sins are forgiven. Who should be baptized?

Those who know the Lord and whose sins are forgiven. It's that simple. I was thinking of sibling rivalry. They shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

And if we're in the family of God, our flesh is going to want to tap into those things that we did as kids, right? Because of sin, siblings are wired to compete with one another.

[ 40 : 40 ] Isn't that true? It's because of sin. Siblings are wired to compete against one another. Who is the greatest? Just at this. Well, anything you can do, big brothers, I can do better, says the little sister.

But remember that baby in the parents' arms? The baby knows who her parents are. And they shall all know me in the new covenant.

There is a direct bond between every believer, not in comparison to one another, but a direct bond with God through Jesus Christ.

He mediates God to you directly, not in comparison to each other. Praise the Lord. So if you, when you sin, run straight to Christ, then church membership is for you.

If God reveals more and more of himself to you every time you read the Bible, you know God more, then church membership is for you.

[ 41 : 43 ] Well, the sixth point of reflection for you today is this. It's not even a point of reflection. It's just a word of encouragement.

That church membership, reflecting true membership into the covenant of Christ in heaven, it never becomes obsolete. You see that in verse 13.

Here's the contrast. The old covenant, it vanishes away, it becomes obsolete. But the new covenant, adopted by Christ, his church is your forever home.

When God took on flesh in Jesus Christ, the God-man, the mediator, Jesus fulfilled what Zechariah prophesied. Remember when his parents took him to the temple? Zechariah prophesied this in Luke 1, 33.

He will reign forever and ever. And of his kingdom, there will be no end. So your citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is as good as long as Christ is king.

[ 42 : 52 ] Church membership needs to do our best. Though none of us are perfect, I'm sure every church makes mistakes. Our goal is always that. May the church on earth, may the kingdom on earth reflect to the best of our ability what we believe is the reality.

So we don't want to ever give a false assurance to someone who's not forgiven by Christ and that knows God. We also never want to disparage those who truly are forgiven and know the Lord. And may the Lord give us wisdom.

But that's our mission as a church. It's that simple. Whatever the church binds on earth, it's as if it's being bound in heaven. So if someone strays away or stops meeting and pastorally is called to return, the desire is that it would be out of love for their soul.

Return to the Lord while there is time for you. To truly belong as a member of such a body, I said at the beginning, it sets you up for potentially a lot of pain, doesn't it?

But it also is the only way to experience on earth some of the greatest joys of belonging to the kingdom of heaven. Remember Sergeant Jones, the Marine with the explosion?

[ 43 : 59 ] Based on Hebrews 8, every part of the body is connected to the rest. And if one part of the body is missing, the whole body suffers.

So to be a Christian, but not a member of a biblical church, that is just as unnatural as amputation. You're saying, I belong to the body of Christ.

Christ is my head in heaven, but I'm disjointed on earth. I'm going to do it on my own on earth. That is as unnatural as an amputation. And the body is feeling it.

In 1 Corinthians 12, 24, we read that God has so composed the body that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. I love how Martin Lloyd-Jones, that medical doctor turned preacher in London, he said, we must grasp once again the idea of church membership being members of the body of Christ as our biggest honor, which any person can come to in this world.

[ 45 : 20 ] So if Christ is your head, you belong to his body, then church membership is for you. If you desire to serve him as an important part of his body, then church membership is for you.

If your soul needs the care that only a Christ-ruled church can provide, then church membership is for you. If you don't like to see division in the true body of Christ, then church membership is for you.

If you are ready to suffer when another member suffers, then church membership is for you. And if you want to rejoice with his body on earth as he prepares each one of us to join that great cloud of witnesses, then church membership is for you.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, your word is so clear.

Help us to apply what your spirit is teaching. Amen. Amen.