

A Biblical Vision of Membership for the Local Church

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[0:00] Amen. The scripture passage for today is Ephesians 2, 11-22.

! At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare this the word of the Lord, and the church in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will together say, Thanks be to God. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at a time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so make him peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, therefore killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

[1:32] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Lord.

And you're here. You're present in our midst, Lord. So manifest that through conviction from your word. Manifest that through transformation of the heart.

Enlighten the eyes of our hearts, Lord. And make us, Father, forge us into the people that you long for us to be in Christ. Christ, you died to make us yours.

You died to make us one. You died to make us holy. So would those things become increasingly true of this body this morning, we pray in Jesus' name.

[3:03] Amen. Well, good morning, Shoreline. So glad that you're all here this morning. For those I have not met, my name is Mike, one of the pastors here.

And I'm so glad that you guys have joined us this morning. You know, when I moved to Connecticut back in 2011, I was 23 years old. And I signed up for a gym membership at Planet Fitness.

And all I had to do, yeah, all I had to do was sign my name on a piece of paper, as many of you know, and agree to pay them the low monthly fee of \$10 per month, a steal at the time.

I don't think it's gone up that much, in case you're wondering. And I had unlimited access to my home club. I didn't have the black card. So I had unlimited access to my home club in Waterford.

So as long as I upheld my end of the deal, they didn't care how often I came, right? They didn't care if I actually saw gains. They just wanted my \$10 a month.

[3:59] And, you know, in the first few years that I was out here, like clockwork, I went to the gym three times a week, pretty much every single week. But then my life started to change. When Brittany and I got married, I would still go, but definitely not as consistently.

And then a couple years later, when work got extremely busy, I stopped going entirely. And then Adeline was born, and then I became a lay elder here at Shoreline. And so my level of responsibility, my priorities at age 30, were not the same as at age 23.

And I would go through some spurts of working out at the gym again, maybe in January, only to peter out into non-attendance for months on end. And I finally came to the realization that I needed to just end the gym membership.

Like I was wasting \$10 a month. I wasn't getting anything out of it anymore, right? So it needed to be done. Now, when we talk about church membership, what often comes to mind for people is my experience, your experience at the local gym, or perhaps membership at the YMCA or a golf club or a rotary club.

You know, you sign a piece of paper, you pay some money, you belong to a group of people with common interest, and then you receive the benefits of membership. So as long as you get what you pay for, everything's cool.

[5:20] But if it no longer seems worth it to you at some point, the membership, you know, can go. You end that membership. You go somewhere else. And I want us to ask the question this morning, is that what church membership is like?

And what does God have to say in his word about what it means to belong to the local church?

Now, that's the question that we're seeking to answer this morning. The title of the sermon today is A Biblical Vision for Membership in the Local Church.

Now, we've been walking through the book of 1 Corinthians together, right? We're taking a break from 1 Corinthians today, but we're not taking a break from the higher level pursuit of ours as a church this year.

Our pursuit, Shoreline, is to grow in spiritual maturity, right? Our pursuit is to grow in health as a corporate body. Our pursuit is to put Christ on display increasingly in all things.

It's to live lives that are consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ, and so we're still pursuing those same things today. But, you know, Matt was just talking about all the different people that have come into membership.

[6:29] We've had a lot of new faces here, and so we thought it'd be helpful because a lot of people don't know much about membership. They don't know why it exists or if it's even biblical, and we want to help answer that together.

We walked through some of these things in our equipping class on the nine marks of a healthy church, but we thought it'd be beneficial just for the whole church to hear a sermon specifically on the topic of church membership.

So Kevin read for us from Ephesians 2, 11 through 22, because that's a helpful passage. We'll be referring to that passage, but we're really going to be all over the Bible today, all over especially the New Testament, in our quest to discover a biblical vision for membership in the local church.

So have your Bibles ready. Pull them out if you don't have them out yet. If you don't have a Bible, there's Bibles available on the back table. Feel free to snag one. You can keep it as a gift to you.

Now here's where we're going today. This is our roadmap for today. We're first going to consider a biblical vision for the local church. So that's where we're going to start. Then we're going to consider, in light of that vision, the implication, the outworking of church membership.

[7:38] And then we're going to conclude with a few points of application. So that's where we're going. First, a biblical vision for the local church. And under this heading, we're going to answer and ask two questions.

What is the church? And what is the church like? Those are the two questions we're going to answer here. What is the church? And I want to start by bringing us back to the first sermon preached this year on the identity and purpose of the church.

So if you have your Bibles, turn them to 1 Peter 2, verse 9 and 10. 1 Peter 2, verses 9 and 10. We have Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, the New Testament.

1 Peter 2, 9 and 10. Now, before we read these verses, let's remember the historical series of events leading up to this great declaration in 1 Peter. And this is what we talked about in the first sermon.

Creation, fall, Israel, fail. Right? God made mankind to know him and to make him known, to bear his image, his holy image, to put his glory on display to the world.

[8:46] But mankind sinned, right? And this is just a sweeping overarching narrative of human history. Mankind sinned. And so God, he then redeemed and formed a people, right, for his own possession.

This is the nation of Israel so that they could fulfill that creation mandate. So they could bear his image and his likeness. But Israel failed over and over again.

So what did God do? God sent Jesus, his one and only son, to be that once-for-all sacrifice that we needed to atone for our sin, to make us right with God.

And so Peter writes here, 1 Peter 2, verse 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and 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. When sinners repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of their lives, not only are they fully forgiven of their sin, and they are, not only is their relationship with God restored, and it is, but they also become part of a new and redeemed humanity, the true Israel.

[10:06] Through the gospel, we are once again able to rightfully bear God's image in the world, to know him and then to make him known, to put his glory on display to the world.

And for this reason, we said the church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe. The church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe.

We see this here in 1 Peter 2, verse 9, and then also, and especially in Ephesians 3, verses 10 and 11. So turn back now to Ephesians. We'll be there for a little bit. Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 10 and 11.

We have Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians. I have to do this in my head. Maybe you do too. Ephesians 3, verses 10 and 11. Paul says here that he was called to be a minister of the gospel, verse 10, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. See, God's, his manifold wisdom, like a multifaceted diamond, is complex and stunning and beauty.

[11:26] And as sinners from every tribe and tongue and nation yield their lives to Christ and find eternal life in his name, and then begin to live out this new life in the community of the saints, God's multifaceted wisdom and glory is displayed not only to the world, but to the cosmos, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

And that is our great purpose, church, to put on brilliant display for not only the nations, but the universe, the wisdom and glory of God.

That's our purpose. That's an amazing purpose. Okay, so that's our starting point for today. And this is on the screen here. Our starting point. What is the church? It's a new and redeemed humanity that is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe.

But let's fill out this picture a little bit. Now, here's the second thing that we see that the church is. It is the kingdom of heaven on earth.

The kingdom of heaven on earth. Look back at Ephesians 2, verse 19. Paul says, Jew and Gentile alike.

[12:47] People of every tribe, tongue, and nation, through faith in Jesus Christ, become fellow citizens with the saints. Now, citizens of what? Citizens of Israel?

Well, in a sense. Citizens of Rome? No, no. Citizens of heaven, right? Citizens of heaven. Paul says this explicitly in Philippians 3.20. But our citizenship is in heaven.

And, you know, we read in the great hall of faith, Hebrews chapter 11, that even the saints of old, they acknowledge that they were strangers and exiles on earth, desiring a better heavenly country. These passages show us Christians that by faith in Jesus, we become citizens of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God. Now, this is not a physical kingdom of this world, right?

That's what Jesus told the authorities. This is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of heaven. This kingdom does not have an earthly king, an earthly president.

[13:47] It's ruled by King Jesus. And he's Lord over all. Amen? This kingdom has no physical boundaries. You can't draw it on a map.

But it transcends all boundaries. It transcends all dividing lines that this world seeks to impose. This is the church. And, you know, at the same time, this kingdom of heaven, this spiritual kingdom, it manifests itself in real time, in real space, through the local church.

Now, in this life, before Christ returns and fully and finally unites himself to his bride, the church, as one, the kingdom of heaven shows up tangibly on earth.

Through the local church, God marks off his kingdom citizens from the unbelieving world. And you might say, behind enemy lines. This world is under the dominion of Satan. That's what we see all over scripture. That's why Paul said, we just looked at this in 1 Corinthians 5, regarding the unrepentant sinner, Paul said to deliver this man to Satan.

[14 : 58] Now, he simply meant remove him from membership in the local church, out of the domain of Christ, place him back into the domain of Satan, which is the unbelieving world.

In 1 Corinthians 5, we see the church wielding what Jesus calls the keys of the kingdom. It's in Matthew 16, Matthew 18. These keys are the authority, Jesus says, to give in to the church, to bind on earth what is bound in heaven, to loose on earth what is loosed in heaven.

Now, what does this mean? It means that the church, the local church, because this isn't just theory. This is reality. This is what Jesus wants for his church. It means that the local church is delegated authority by Jesus Christ himself.

So this isn't something made up. This is what Jesus says in his word. The local church is delegated authority to affirm right confessors, right confessions of the gospel. The local church declares who on earth is a citizen of heaven and therefore represents heaven.

Now, this might sound unfamiliar or strange to you, and I get that. But I want us to consider that God has always been marking off his people from the rest of the world.

[16 : 20] I mean, even in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were marked off as belonging to him, and they were to then spread his life-giving goodness out into the world. But then after the fall, God calls Abram.

He marks him off from the world, and that eventually gives rise to the nation of Israel, right? God marked off his holy people from the unholy world, and to underscore that holy-unholy distinction, he instituted a whole set of moral, civil, and ceremonial laws.

You can read this all throughout the Pentateuch. God wanted his people whom he had made holy marked off, set apart from the world.

Now, this is seen especially in the role of the priest in the Old Testament. The priests were wholly consecrated for service to God. They represented God to the people and the people to God.

But now, writes Peter, believers in Christ have become a royal priesthood. We have been marked off by the blood of Christ, shed for us on the cross, to be a holy, distinct people, a people who can represent God to men and represent men to God.

[17 : 37] But this marking off, it's no longer on the basis of ethnicity, right? It's no longer on the basis of national boundaries or a national king. It's on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

And that faith, the church is then called to assess and affirm, to assess and affirm true confessions of faith in Jesus. And so mark off those who are not citizens of this heavenly kingdom on earth from those who are not.

So forget for a moment membership to Planet Fitness. Okay? Membership in the local church is far more like being a citizen of a country. Okay?

And the local church is like an embassy for that nation in a foreign land. Okay? So think about a U.S. embassy in Spain, for example. That U.S. embassy in Spain, it does not make Americans living there citizens of America.

But it does have the authority to declare whether one is actually an American citizen or not, right? So if you lose your passport and you're in Spain and you need to get a passport if you want to go home, you go to that U.S. embassy, they declare, yes, you are in fact a citizen, here is your passport.

[18 : 50] All right? And that's like membership in the local church. The local church does not make one a citizen of heaven. But it does have the authority to declare whether one is or is not.

And then it issues a passport, so to speak, through membership, which is to say through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Okay. So we could talk a lot more about that.

And I just want to say, like, this is one sermon on a topic that is confusing for many. And so I know there will be questions. And so we would welcome your questions. We're also working to get more resources on the back table.

If you haven't noticed, we're really trying to put good resources in your guys' hands. Good books are good for the church and help build us up. So we're trying to do that. We'll have books back there next week.

Okay. So now we've fleshed out our answer a little bit to the question of what is the church? And next I want us to consider the question, what is the church like?

[19:50] What is it like? And let's go back to our passage in Ephesians 2, verses 19 through 22. And I want you to notice how Paul stacks metaphor upon metaphor in these few verses.

So look for the metaphors that are here. Okay. Listen to this. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Did you notice the metaphors? Paul says that the church is, first of all, a kingdom.

That's implied because he's talking about citizens. The church is a kingdom with citizens. Second, it's a household, right? Or family with family members. Third, it's a building with Christ as the cornerstone the apostles and prophets as the foundation.

And fourth, specifically, that building is a temple, right? The very dwelling place of God. So I want us to quickly consider a couple of these and then a couple other metaphors that are used throughout the New Testament for the church.

[21:14] And we've already talked about the church as God's kingdom. So let's move to the church as the family of God. The family of God. When we become new creations in Christ, we are joined to Christ and to his family, right?

We're joined to a family. Christ becomes our older brother. God, our heavenly father. And every believer are brothers and sisters. Within this family, there is a relational intimacy.

There is shared identity. We're called to love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

We are not saved to serve the Lord as isolated individuals, but as a family. The church is also the temple of God. The temple of God.

A conversion we become part of, as Paul says here in Ephesians 2, the very temple of God in which his spirit dwells. Paul uses the same metaphor we saw in 1 Corinthians 3.

[22:21] And then Peter in 1 Peter 2, he calls believers living stones as part of this spiritual house. So as we gather together corporately, as we engage in a shared life of mutual love and submission to one another, he identifies with, God identifies with, and dwells with his people.

Church is a temple. The church is also the flock of Christ. Jesus says in John 10, 11, I am the good shepherd.

Further down in verse 27 in John 10, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. The church is a flock of sheep, weak and pitiful in and of ourselves, but led by the powerful, the strong and kind, heavenly father and good shepherd.

You know, I was reminded as we were singing that song, the shepherd leaves the 99, right? He goes after the one. And then what does he do? Does he then go on an adventure with the one? No, no, no. He brings the one back to the flock because we're a flock. The church is the flock of Christ. And as the good shepherd cares for the sheep, so the sheep also care for one another, like under his loving leadership.

[23:43] Okay, just one more metaphor. There's so many in the New Testament. One more. The church is the body of Christ. You know, in our series in 1 Corinthians, we are moving towards chapter 12, in which Paul expounds on the body metaphor that he hints at throughout the letter.

He says in verse 12, for just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

And further down, he's telling the Corinthian church, now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. As members of the body of Christ, we are mutually dependent upon one another.

We all have unique and needed gifts of grace. That's what the spiritual gifts are. They're gifts of grace. And they're given to us by the Spirit to build up the body.

The body of Christ, the flock of Christ, the temple of God, the family of God, the kingdom of God. Each of these metaphors helps us better understand not only what the church is, but also what it's like.

[24:54] You know, the kingdom of God is going to one day be visible in all of its glory with all of its citizens from around the globe and across the generations. That's going to be a good day.

Anybody long for that day with me? That's going to be a good day. But that kingdom, it manifests itself here and now, right, as embassies in a foreign land through the local church.

Similarly, the family of God. One day, it's going to be visible. All of the saints. All of them. We're going to enjoy this unhindered relational depth and intimacy with Christ and one another.

And that family becomes visible today through the local church. That's amazing. And the way that the body, the family, cares for one another, loves for one another, sacrifices for one another, that heavenly family is visible here now in the local church.

You know, we could say similarly about all those other metaphors which become visible and tangible here and now in and through the local church and that is God's design.

[26:07] That's God's design. Search the New Testament. You will not find a believer separated from the local church. The only arguable case is the Ethiopian eunuch. And that's frontier mission stuff.

Like, I bet he went back to his home country and evangelized the lost and started the church. Because that's what we see all throughout Acts. Right?

The church is living out God's vision for his people. And it's in that context then that all the one another commands of the New Testament can be carried out and we'll talk about that.

But you know, it seems, if we could be real for a minute, it seems that that our cultural climate, the air that we breathe, it kind of hinders us from seeing this in Scripture.

We are absorbed in American individualism. And it's really hard for us to separate ourselves from that. And that's led many of us Christians to think that our faith, and I've been prone to this too, like I'm coming out of this as well.

[27:09] I'm not saying I have this all together here. It's led many of us Christians to think that our faith is primarily a private relationship between us and Jesus. We feel the freedom, indeed the American right, to partake of or abstain from whatever activities of the church we find to be personally helpful.

We go to church primarily to have our needs met. We have relationships in the church primarily to be served. And we'll perhaps serve if the conditions align just right.

All kind of like membership to Planet Fitness. But do any of these New Testament metaphors, does the biblical vision for the local church lead us to such a what's-in-it-for-me mindset?

No. No. They convey commitment, belonging, shared identity, relational intimacy, sacrificial love and service, interdependence, mutual submission, and on and on.

And all of those things, they take shape. They're made real, tangible, visible, in and through the local church. Now this is clear, again, all throughout the book of Acts.

[28:29] This is clear all throughout the New Testament epistles, which were written to who? To local churches, to instruct them as to how to be the local church that God calls them to be.

Now before we move to the next point, I want to revisit an analogy that we used before, that of a composer and a symphony. You know, Jesus Christ is the great composer of the greatest symphony ever created, the church.

And he gets all the glory from that. And while there's one symphony, it's more like there's thousands of orchestras scattered throughout the globe, scattered throughout the centuries.

And the underconductors are taking their cues from the chief conductor from Christ. And each person is beautifully playing their part in all of it. All of it rises to form this one beautiful symphony.

And one day, all of those orchestras are going to be gathered together as one in glory. And that, friends, is the church. That's the church. In light of everything we've just talked about, the elders of Shoreline believe that church members membership.

[29:36] I've been waiting to use that word here. Church membership is simply the implication and the outworking of a biblical vision for the local church. So that's the second thing here.

The implication and outworking of church membership. Now before we move any further, and I should have put this on the screen, I'm sorry, let's put in front of us a definition of church membership.

Now this is from Jonathan Lehman in his book Rediscover Church. I think we have copies of those, but this, that, he has one chapter that the book Church Membership expounds on.

So those are the books we're going to have next week, Lord willing. Now here's how he defines church membership. Church membership is a church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's profession of faith and discipleship combined with the Christian's submission to the

church and its oversight.

So in church membership, you know, let me read that again. Church membership is a church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's profession of faith and discipleship combined with the Christian's submission to the church and its oversight.

[30:47] See, there's two components there. In church membership, a church affirms a believer's profession of faith and commits to overseeing that believer's discipleship. And the believer submits his or her discipleship to the oversight of the local church.

Now I want to provide five ways in which church membership is implied and then works out a biblical vision for the local church. Here's the first thing. It marks off the saints from the world. Now we talked above about how the church is the kingdom of heaven on earth and how God has always marked off those who are his from the unbelieving world and how the church is given the authority to declare who belongs on earth to this heavenly kingdom.

The church membership is just taking those principles seriously. That's what it's doing. It's providing a means for that to actually occur. You know, when the church baptizes a person and receives them into membership, that church is declaring, look, here is another true confessor of the gospel. Like, let it be known. Here's another follower of Jesus. Here is another citizen of heaven. When the church participates together in the Lord's Supper, which we're going to do today, we're corporately reaffirming one another's belonging in the kingdom and family of God.

[32:10] You know, similarly, as we saw a few weeks ago in 1 Corinthians 5, when the church exercises that final act of church discipline, excommunication, the church is saying, we can no longer affirm this person's faith in Christ as credible.

We can no longer declare this person to belong to the kingdom of heaven, and so that church removes them from membership. They remove them from participation in the Lord's Supper. That the saints are to be marked off from the world implies church membership, which then works out this biblical practice in, this biblical truth in practice.

And there's so many benefits just to this one thing. I'm just going to list them really brief, and we're going to keep moving, though. Church membership, it clarifies the boundary between inside the church and outside the church, and that has a number of positive effects.

It provides assurance of salvation for the saints. That's a good thing. God wants us to have assurance of salvation. Read the whole book of 1 John. It protects the flock from wolves.

[33:17] It guards the doctrine of the church. It exposes counterfeit faith. If people have a counterfeit faith, it's loving for them to know that they might actually come to have a true saving faith.

And the last thing, it preserves a better witness for Christ and the gospel to the watching world, so it's actually evangelistic. It's evangelistic to clarify the lines. Okay, second, it underscores that commitment to Christ is commitment to his church.

And as we already discussed, all those metaphors offered to us throughout the New Testament, they fall apart if we strip Christianity of its local church context.

The New Testament is abundantly clear that commitment to Christ is at the same time commitment to his church. I mean, you remember Saul's conversion in Acts 9?

What did Jesus say to him? Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting them? No, no, no. He said, why are you persecuting me? Christ, he so identifies with his church that it was like Saul was persecuting them.

[34:21] Commitment to Christ is commitment to his church. Turn with me real quick. Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2.

The very end, on the day of Pentecost, after Peter preaches and thousands join in the church, we see here the culture of the early church.

That is to say, gospel culture on display. Acts 2, verse 42 through 47. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

[35:25] And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Read through the rest of Acts. Read through the rest of the New Testament.

And you see this commitment to Christ equals commitment to his church culture. Right? And it's fleshed out and it's emphasized all the more as you continue walking through the New Testament. And that's what church membership is. It's commitment to the church for the sake of Christ. That's what it is. Related to this, church membership provides the context for living out the one another commands of Scripture.

That's the third thing here. I want to ask, how do you obey the many one another commands apart from committed involvement in the local church?

How do you love one another with brotherly affection or outdo one another in showing honor? How do you in humility count others more significant than yourselves or bear one another's burdens?

[36:34] how do you stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together but encouraging one another? And on and on we could go. You know, these commands are intended to be lived out especially in the context of the local church.

Or how about the greatest command given by Christ? a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. This is what church membership is. It's believers loving one another as Christ loved them for his glory and for the sake of the lost.

fourth provides the context for the relationship between church leaders and members. Hebrews 13 17 says obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

How does a Christian obey Hebrews 13 17 apart from being committed to a local church? and how do pastors know who their flock is to be able to care for them in the way that Christ calls them apart from membership in the local church?

[37:52] Let me just mention one more. It provides the context for practicing church discipline. And we already talked about this more at length a few weeks ago but if we don't know who's inside the church right if Christians haven't submitted themselves to the authority of the local church then practicing church discipline becomes very difficult.

But within the framework of church membership church discipline actually takes shape. It makes sense according to the New Testament commands. And therefore it can be obeyed and carried out as God designs.

Okay. So for all these reasons and more we believe and this will be on the screen now that church membership is a logical implication and outworking of the New Testament vision for the local church.

And that's really the main point of this sermon here. Church membership is a logical implication and outworking of the New Testament vision for the local church.

We believe that church membership is biblical and good. And therefore we think that that if you're a believer in Christ that you should join you should belong to you should submit yourself to a local church whether this one or another one.

[39:08] And that transitions us to just a few concluding points of application here. So now what? Concluding points of application. First thing join a local church.

Now by that we mean submit yourself to commit yourself to a Christ-centered gospel preaching local church that will take responsibility for overseeing your discipleship in Christ.

Now listen the Lord may not be leading all of you to membership here at Shoreline but whether here or another local church join one. Join one. Now those of you who are in the Navy or the Coast Guard and know that you're only going to be here temporarily you might be wondering does this apply to me as well?

Like isn't it silly for me to become a member when I know I'm not going to be here long term? In short yes we think this applies to you and also none of us knows how long we're going to be here. Well that's besides the point. You're here for six months or a year or three years and the Navy's going to you know send you across the country or the Coast Guard. Now listen we believe that the New Testament clearly shows that God's design is for believers to always be under the umbrella of the local church.

[40:24] So if you're only here for a few months then formally becoming a church member it might not make sense to you because it takes the process takes time. But don't waste any time diving into the community of the saints that's here.

Dive right in. We've had some awesome examples of people that dive right in even when they only have a few months. But if you're going to be here for six months or longer then we think it's wise for you to pursue formal church membership.

Okay, second point of application here. engage in the greatest work within the church the work of relational ministry. The work of relational ministry.

Now as we said earlier commitment to Christ is commitment to his church. And commitment to his church is manifested especially in relationships in spiritually intentional relationships.

Spiritually intentional relationships. See it's primarily within the context of those spiritually intentional relationships that we love one another as Christ loved us.

[41:34] That we speak the truth in love to one another leading to the building up of the whole body. It's primarily in relationships that we outdo one another in showing honor.

That we seek to show hospitality. That we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. That we live in harmony with one another. That's a slew of commands in Romans chapter 12. It's primarily in relationships going back to Hebrews 10 that we stir up one another to love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing here.

You know these spiritually intentional relationships they happen first and foremost in the whole church Sunday gathering. You all are here this morning. This is where this takes place.

This is where the relationships are formed. They also occur in other spaces like community groups and book studies and equipping classes and youth gatherings. And we also believe these spiritually intentional relationships ought to also be happening in a myriad of informal gatherings and in two broad categories.

[42:45] Okay? Discipling and hospitality. These are just two broad categories that all believers are called to engage in. Discipling and hospitality. And in discipling we can think it's this really formal structured thing.

It's just helping one another follow Jesus. That's really what it comes down to. And it can look like all sorts of things. Yes, from a structured time of prayer and Bible study and accountability.

And that's great. Right? And God gives us people in different seasons of our lives to have those kinds of relationships. But it also can look like, hey, why don't you come over with me to the park? We'll have some intentional conversation while we keep our kids from dying. You know? It can also look like that. And we think of hospitality. Okay?

Don't think exquisite dinner party with light jazz music in the background. Okay? You can do that.

Those are great. Have those kinds of dinner parties. And I love jazz music. But think Romans 15, 7.

[43:43] Okay? Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. That's hospitality. Hospitality happens in all sorts of ways from having people over to dinner, yes, to visiting a sick person in the hospital, to giving someone your undivided attention after the service on Sunday morning.

That's hospitality. Hospitality at its core is opening up our hearts and our lives to one another, welcoming one another as Christ has welcomed us.

You know, our hope for Shoreline is that we would increasingly be a body of believers freed up in self-forgetfulness like Jesus to build one another up in love through spiritually intentional relationships.

This is what membership in the local church looks like. Right? It's not a transactional gym membership about what I can get based on what I paid.

It's about sacrificial love for others in light of what Christ has already paid and already given us. that's what church membership is.

[44:58] Okay, the last point of application here. Evangelize the lost side by side. Evangelize the lost side by side. You know, so often we think of evangelism as only me bringing the gospel to my unsaved family, friends, and coworkers.

And it's certainly that. Okay? It's not that, but it's more than that. Evangelism and missions, you know, it's best carried out when we link arms together, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, Philippians 1.27.

We ought to be praying for one another in our evangelistic relationships. We ought to be strategizing with one another how we can individually and then corporately reach the lost and one very practical way that we can evangelize the lost side by side is by cross-pollinating our relationships.

Yes, invite unbelievers here to church or to community group, but also when you have a game night, when you have a birthday party or a baby shower or invite people over for your fancy dinner party, mix together members of the church with your unbelieving friends and coworkers and neighbors.

Let unbelievers see the church at work loving one another and them with Christ-like love putting his glory on display. This is what membership in the local church is.

[46 : 25] It's reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ side by side. Church membership is a logical implication and outworking of the New Testament vision for the local church.

I want to leave us with just one analogy that I'm shamelessly borrowing from Pastor Kevin McKay at Grace Harbor Church in Providence. You know, some people think of the local church as a bunch of individual matches, you know, set aflame and then scattered throughout the community.

The problem with the match is it's weak, right? One drop of rain and it gets put out. One blowing of the wind and the match is done for, right? The local church is far more like a raging bonfire.

Picture the raging bonfire you had in the fall at your house or at someone else's houses. You know, the wind might blow and it might blow strong, but that bonfire just roars back all the more.

The rain might come, right? It might downpour and the fire's just unaffected. And you know, there might be sticks or logs on the outskirts of that fire that are fizzling out, that are weak.

[47 : 40] But when those logs are moved closer to the fire, what happens? They are set aflame once again. That's the New Testament vision for the local church. And you know, that kind of fire, that bonfire, it compels the world with its radiant heat, its radiant light.

The world sees that and they're drawn in or they're repelled, but our hope is that they're drawn in and then they join into the bonfire and make it all the brighter and all the hotter.

And may Shoreline and every other gospel-preaching church in this world become an ever-brighter, ever-hotter bonfire for the sake of the lost and the glory of Christ.

Please pray with me.