

Thoughts on Church Membership

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Please turn with me in your Bibles. Is my mic working? It's on here. Working, test, test, test, test.

There we go. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 2. I'm going to be honest. I'm not ready for the Christmas themes just yet. The Cairns kind of got ahead of me here on the stage, right? It's beautiful. Thank you very much for those who put that time in. But I'm going to talk about something that's non-Christmas related, if that's okay with you guys. Good. I know he didn't, and I'm glad for that. It's still November, people, okay? And you guys know this, Filipinos. When I was visiting in October, you hit the mall. It's just Christmas joy everywhere. They start early over there.

[1 : 04] It was emotionally scarring for me, so I was glad to come back to the coldness of Canada. All right. If you take a notice in today's bulletin, the title of today's message is Thoughts on Church Membership.

If you've been paying attention to the bulletins the last few weeks, there's actually a little bit of an advertisement at the top about attending a membership class.

Now, so it tends to be a subject that varies between different Christian people.

So I thought I would take some time to bring some clarity to the subject. My clarity, of course.

Hopefully, as one person said in the church, they have never heard a sermon on church membership that, how would I say it?

And I don't want to call them out for this, but supported it in the way that they would have liked, I guess is the best way to say it. So today I'm going to take my shot at it.

[2 : 19] So a couple things. You guys, I've been here for almost five years, and I have never talked about church membership. That doesn't mean I don't believe church membership is important, but there was some certain aspects that it just really wasn't my priority.

And the reason it wasn't my priority is we're going to get to that in a little bit. Now, essentially, there's two types of people in church, right?

And it's kind of obvious. There are members and there are non-members. Those that are church members, when I say church membership, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

In fact, some of you guys are reaching into your wallets and purses, and you just can't wait to show your membership card, right? Yes, I am a member. When you start attending a new church, if you happen to move, within the first couple of weeks, you're already hitting up that pastor for, hey, when's the membership class?

I want to have a talk. Let's talk membership. But then there's a lot of other people who aren't members. And the reason why people aren't members, the reasons actually vary across the board.

[3 : 32] So I'm going to give you some of the reasons that I've heard that people have provided for me, why they aren't members, they don't believe in membership. Some people just don't even know what membership is, which brings me to one of the first reasons, is they've never been taught about church membership.

It's never been an issue in their church. They've never talked about it. It was kind of interesting when I was younger, I went to this one church, and they did not have membership. What they had was partnership.

And they found out that just in our culture, membership is kind of a bad word. So they kind of switched it to partnership. Then they ended up going back to membership because it ended up causing some confusion.

But some churches don't address it. They don't teach it. So maybe you are here today, and this is the first sermon you've ever heard on church membership. I'm the first pastor to ever bring it up,

and that's okay.

One of the other reasons why people aren't members is they're actually quite indifferent to it. Like I said, they've heard it. They know their parents are members, or friends are members at churches, but they really haven't given it much thought over the course of their lives.

[4 : 49] And it just hasn't been a priority to think about it, explore it, or anything else. Another reason, I call it the indecisive reason.

You are aware of church membership, but you really haven't made up your mind. And the reason why you haven't made up your mind could be for varied reasons. One, you might be kind of on the commitment phobia, right?

You don't like to commit. You're like, you know, I'm only going to be in Squamish for 10 years. Ah, you know, I don't know if I want to be a member and commit for that time period, right? When I was involved in university ministry, this is one of the biggest things you would hear.

I was involved in a pretty large college ministry when in my university town, and a lot of kids who were college students said, well, I'm only going to be here for four years. And I remember them telling them at that point, I think I was about 42, and I said at that point in my life, four years was the longest I'd ever spent in town at any one time of my life.

And I'd always been a member of the churches that I belonged to. So four years isn't a short amount of time. So sometimes people like to keep their options open.

[6 : 00] Others, they're wondering, is it really biblical? The other reason some people aren't members is they're kind of the Lone Ranger type of Christian.

They like to be associated with the church kind of from afar, but they don't want to be saddled with any of the extra responsibility or burden of church membership.

And for some, church membership includes voting and all these other things, and that really doesn't interest them. And then the last type of person I've met is they believe there needs to be an emotional connection.

And generally, that emotional connection is usually the church you were raised in or the church which you got saved. So I remember at one church I was at, there was, I don't know, about 400 people on membership, but yet there was only 200 people at worship, right?

So that was kind of rare. There's usually more people attending and less members. And then I just started going through it. And a lot of people just, the church just didn't have a process for removing people, but people had moved all over the world at some point.

[7 : 10] And I remember we sent out a letter and some people said, hey, I really want to keep my membership because that's where I was saved, but that was like 25 years ago type of thing. So it just led us to.

So one of the root problems, there's so many different thoughts on the idea of church membership is I believe it's not really taught well.

I'm also aware that some of the reasons why people aren't members is because they've had bad experiences with churches.

They've seen bad examples. They've seen friends hurt. Perhaps some of you have been hurt by a church, a member of a church, or even a church leader.

And because you were hurt, you just a little on the gun shy side of things. Other people have seen churches treat members differently than non-members, and they don't really think that's a very nice thing to do.

[8 : 19] Other reasons that I've seen is they believe that church membership means leadership gets to dominate your life. It gives other members the right to snoop around in your life.

And people generally don't like that sort of thing. And then others simply believe it's really what I do that matters.

It's not whether they get to vote or not. And the reason they think that is because they can observe other people in the church who are members, and they can say to themselves, I'm actually not an official member, but I serve more than them.

Isn't that the most important aspects of membership? And finally, some people just simply state, I really only believe in membership in the universal church, and the Bible actually doesn't say biblical membership, so therefore it's really not that important.

So let me begin by saying, I get it. I get all those reasons. I understand where you are with some of those reasonings. There's most reasonings I've never encountered.

[9 : 45] If you've been hurt, haven't been taught well, or have seen bad examples, I get why you are gun shy and not interested in the aspect of church membership.

However, I do believe that church membership is a part of something bigger than just being a member of a church.

And I will clarify that statement in a bit. But the first thing, before we truly understand what biblical membership is, we need to understand what a church is.

What is the church's function? If you have a wrong view of church, it will lead you to a wrong view of membership, right?

If you have a right view of church, it doesn't always necessarily mean you'll have a right view of membership either. But I really believe when we capture the biblical understanding of what a church is in its functions, then we will understand biblical membership in a different way.

[11 : 03] So this morning, whatever view you have, I'm hoping you will give me your ear. I think I'm going to be able to give you a side of things that perhaps you have not considered before.

not just on what church is, but how the church is meant to play out in our lives.

So my hope is that this time together will help you understand church membership, my heart for church membership, why I believe it's important.

And how do I want to say this? Some mistakes. I've learned on this subject actually quite a bit over the last couple of dozen years.

But I really believe it matters. I do believe it's biblical and I hope to explain my point of view in a very clarifying way.

[12 : 16] But before I say any more, let's pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, Father, I just pray for a humble heart, humble words that come out.

I understand people who've shared deep pain over hurts that have occurred in church. Father, it grieves my soul deeply to hear some of these stories, to witness some of these stories and how wrongly God's, we of God's people, even with the best of intentions, have caused harm to your saints, O Lord, or mistaught or misunderstood.

Father, I really believe it's not that complex of an issue. But I pray that you'll give my words clarity, clarity to hear and to be understood.

And I pray it'll begin a dialogue with some of the saints that gather here for deeper and further conversations into this subject. I ask you these things in your name I pray.

Amen. So if you remember at the very beginning of the sermon, I said it really wasn't a priority to me. And I want to tell you why it wasn't a priority to me.

[13 : 38] It wasn't a priority because when I started as a pastor, I wasn't really quite sure that this was the type of church that I'd want to invite people to be members of. Now, I know that sounds like a harsh statement, but it's a statement that I needed to understand.

I know you guys hired me and you think, wait a second, I'm a pastor. I'm not supposed to say that. The fact of the matter is this church has been around since 1964. I'm talking about Squamish Baptist Church here in Squamish and some of you people have probably been around or I don't know if anybody been around since 1964.

Maybe George, are you that close? Yeah? Close, right? So some of the saints have been here for a very long time. You might ask, PK, didn't you read this statement of faith?

And yes, it's true, I did. But one of the things that I wanted to be sure of is that we were functioning like a church, right? It's one thing to say that we are a church, we have a constitution bylaws and we are a church, but the question comes out is, are we functioning like a church?

So let's take a look at the book of Acts. There's a lot of sections of scripture that I could have turned to. We could spend several sermons looking at what a biblical church looks like, but I thought this would be an interesting passage to look at because it's kind of the first passages in all of scripture where we find the group of Christians gathering together and operating as a community together.

[15 : 14] So if you look at Acts 2.42, and just to give you the quick context, Acts is the book that follows after the gospels. Jesus Christ in Acts chapter 1 has now ascended into heaven.

He's now seated at the right hand of the Father and he's handing over the keys to his kingdom which he began to his disciples. And remember in Matthew 28, he says, I need you to go and preach the gospel, baptize, and teach all that I have taught you.

So the disciples are beginning to do this, but they need this power. Jesus has gone and he promised them something. And we read in Acts chapter 2 about the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit comes down, the people are indwelt, and the beginning of the ministry of the Holy Spirit begins. And it goes out and people are speaking in tongues and they're evangelizing and they're sharing.

And it talks about like thousands of people are coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And the apostles continue the ministry that Jesus Christ gave to them.

[16:32] So look at how it describes how the Christians acted. And we begin in Acts 2.42. It says, 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 people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. So from this text, I believe we see five functions of a church.

And the first function or the first priority is that the church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ. Amen? Notice it says that God is saving.

[17:48] They're hearing a gospel message. We see this in verse 44. And all who believe, verse 47, says, the Lord added to their number.

Now, I've seen churches that just provide membership to people who attend and are willing to sign the agreement. Sadly, eventually, when you get a church of people who aren't saved, it moves from being a church which is the center of God worship to a social club.

Right? It's essentially a bunch of people who feel the same. It could be about, and it's mostly social justice issues. Just had a friend share with me about his home church that he was a part of, and he's come back, and the desire to engage the culture has superseded the spread of the gospel, people, and they've taken in people who don't even believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but they like Jesus the prophet who did nice things.

Right? So this different dynamic occurs, and I believe at that point it ceases to become a church. So that's the first observation that we can make. The functioning is we see a gospel is being preached. People are being led to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The second aspect that we see about churches, we see this thing called qualified leadership. All churches are led.

[19:11] They're a group of people, and they're led. And notice in verse 42 it says, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So Jesus had called these men to continue that ministry.

So the question you might say is, well, do we still need apostles today? Am I an apostle? Now you will hear some churches believe that there's a line of succession from the apostles which would include a pastor?

No, I do not believe that is true. I believe the apostles' rule, so to speak, ended when the apostles died. But if you notice in Ephesians 4 12, and I'll just read this, this is Paul, and he said, and God gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, and I believe I fit under the description of shepherd and teacher, that's the same word for pastor, elder, it's an all-inclusive word, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry for building up the body.

Right? So there's this leadership and we read about the qualifications of leadership in 1st Timothy, Titus chapter 1, 1st Peter 5, so there's actually parts of scripture which define for us who should be leading in a church, and it doesn't need to be another elder telling another elder is qualified, you people in the church body should be able to recognize who elders and shepherds are.

You see them not only being qualified of character, but they're doing the work of ministry. One of my former elders had this saying, the reason, how you spot shepherds is that they smell like sheep.

[21:10] Right? Shepherds smell like sheep. They know the people, they're in the people's lives, and that's why we here at Squamish Baptist, there's multitude. I'm not the only shepherd here.

There's several other shepherds here as well, and our role is the same before God.

I preach as that fits into my giftedness that has been recognized by the elders and by yourselves, and that's why I'm a part of this process.

But there's other parts of giftings that are used by shepherds in order to care for the flock. So we see that going on in the church.

The third aspect is we notice in verse 42 that there is gospel preaching and worship. We've already talked a little bit about that, but if you know Sunday is our time for corporate worship where these action takes place, the fourth function that we see is they are rightly administrating the ordinances. And what I mean by that is when Jesus left this earth, he gave us two essential commands for people to continue to do in the church. One is baptism. And if you look in verse 38, this is before this, the call that Peter gives is you are to repent and be baptized.

[22 : 28] Okay? I believe that is a church function, baptism. And we're going to talk a little bit about that in a minute. But in the early church, we don't do this so much today, and there's certain reasons for it, but as soon as you were saved to identify with a body of Christ, you'd be baptized.

baptized. And forgive me for this, and this is some of the fault of my leadership, when we practice communion, the early church practice that you'd be saved, baptized, and by baptism, we're going to get to it, you actually entered in a church membership, and then you shared communion as a church body.

We've kind of gotten away from that. One of the aspects is I know there's people that are not baptized that share in communion. I would actually like to change that.

If you're at that point, and you've heard me speak about communion, and you've shared communion, you're ready to be baptized. Do you know that? You are ready to be baptized. You're ready to declare yourself as a believer who identifies with the people of Christ, because you're already doing it as a part of the communion table.

baptism. But the first step that Jesus actually talked about was baptism. And that was an outward symbol of an inward reality that happens in your life.

[24 : 02] And what was interesting, when you look at church history, when Christians and churches were being persecuted, you actually weren't persecuted because you were a Christian.

you were persecuted if you were baptized. Because baptized meant you really were a Christian.

You with me on this? Because anybody can make the statement, I'm a Christian.

You can make that statement on your own. But when you were baptized, you were making a whole declaration to the community you lived in that I am a follower of Jesus.

And that's what the early governments feared. because they did not want that power. In fact, they didn't want church membership. Because they recognized that those who were baptized and entered into a membership of a church were those that took their faith seriously and ultimately wouldn't bow the knee to Rome.

You with me on that? So there's a great history with all of that. And there's several reasons why we haven't done it this way. But I believe if we are going to take this table as seriously as Jesus Christ calls us to, I believe that is part of the process of baptism.

[25 : 25] And I know there's a whole bunch of reasons why people are scared to be baptized. They don't want to speak publicly or whatever. But that's something we can deal with later on. But if you've been taking communion and you haven't been baptized, please talk to me.

Let's talk about this. I'm not here making an edict by any chance, but I want to open up this discussion with you. I do want to know, is there a barrier to baptism?

It allows us to talk about your Christian faith and those sort of things. You with me on that? All right.

So you had the rightful, rightly administrative ordinances of breaking bread and baptism.

And the last one, the last observation, if you notice in verse 43 to 45, is you had this incredible spiritual unity. You had this incredible spiritual unity.

It says, 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.

[26 : 32] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all who had need. What that means is they were loving one another. Right?

There was this true community of people coming together. So those were all the things that just as I, you know, as I'm brought in as a leadership leader and as a pastor in the church, I want to see that happen here practically.

I do believe and I've kind of divided, you guys remember last year I talked about a triangle and what our church looks like. The first part is worship. Is the gospel being declared here at SBC? Yes, right?

We preach, whether it's Dave or I or any other person we brought to speak, they are gospel declaring people. Amen? That's what we believe separates the church from the world.

And we also believe that qualified leadership fits into that worship and the music that we pray. And ever since COVID, we don't really pass the basket for giving because of the COVID issues, but it's still a part of worship giving our money to the church to be dispersed accordingly.

[27 : 45] So that's certainly happening. The other element that I was really intent on seeing develop here at church is discipleship. We needed to increase our discipleship.

Our children's ministry focuses on both informing the kids about Jesus. so there's a gospel presentation there, but also a discipleship presentation there.

Our youth ministry. It's the same thing when I first got here, there really wasn't a youth ministry, and that was one of my prayers. And I really believe any church that's worth its salt that is growing, we have to be willing to disciple our children and our youth, right?

That's the first people that we are responsible for. It's our own families. If we cannot be diligent in doing that right, I really believe we don't really have much to offer the world if this isn't of value to us.

And then the other aspect is we partnered up with Bible Study Fellowship, which provides discipleship for women in biblical teaching, and we have the men's ministry, which is Every Man a Warrior, and we're hoping to use Every Man a Warrior to grow and develop qualified men, and from the BSF, women who can serve as deacons and elders in the discipleship ministries.

[29 : 09] And then we also have growth groups. And growth groups has kind of shrunk a little bit, but we're hoping to grow it more. So those were kind of the things that I really wanted to make sure we kind of had going.

And then the third element is the church using their gifts as God providing them in the church.

We've been blessed with Dave here as a pastor who's really grown in his counseling ministry.

That's more intense discipleship to help us grow. There's the Christmas care that's going on. Many of you are a part of the ministry, and it's an opportunity to support.

We support missions. We've got two great missionary three missions that we're supporting, and they're all doing some really incredible things.

We've got Becca in the main city who's working primarily with young women who are pregnant and helping get their families. And those families are usually complete disasters that they come from.

[30 : 09] And just to be able to bring the light of the gospel into a culture that is desperately needed, right? This is a whole other subject about how broken our world is because it's been teaching that our satisfaction comes from us living out our sexuality as opposing finding our soul satisfaction in Jesus Christ.

And the world's message is having dire consequences in the world. It's destroying families. It's horrible. But I don't need to tell you about that. You know that, and we'll talk about that later.

So my call is we get to know you as members and such. I want to set you loose with your gifts that God has impassioned you for.

So there's a great opportunity that we are going to be doing. And you'll notice in your bulletin, there's this green letter. It's on the other side of partners. But we have this Christmas care and a lot of people in the community are part of the Christmas care and taking care of that.

But there's a lot of people who volunteer who actually do not know the gospel. Some do, some don't. Right? They pull in volunteers because people want to be a part of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 26] This is a great opportunity for our church to love on those people who are serving in that area. And it gets an opportunity for us to love them, appreciate them, and use it as a means to share the biblical gospel with them.

A lot of people believe they're earning points with God because they're a part of the Christmas care package, but we know that's not so. Right? We know the gospel is beyond our works, beyond our giving.

It's a work of Jesus in our heart when we understand that we're sinners saved by the grace of God. So that is an opportunity for us because we're a smaller church. We don't have all the means to do everything, but that's going on.

So I just want to conclude my thoughts. The reality is scripture is full of passages that speak to the church. Ephesians 1 Timothy talks about the church as a place where sound doctrine and truth is lived out.

That the church is to be the defender of truth in our society. Ephesians 4 talks about how the church is the place where our Christian life is lived out together.

[32 : 41] together. And that my gifts aren't for me, they're for you. And your gifts aren't for you, they're for me. Right? It's a mutual giving of loving one another.

So when people talk to me and they say, well, and I get this a little bit, I don't see church membership in the Bible. Or they're concentrating on the universal church. It's important to understand that pretty much every single book in the New Testament is written to a specific local church.

There's not a letter that is written to the church of Ephesus and Sam who lives by himself out in the woods. Right? There is no letter called that.

It was always understood that to be a Christian was to be a part of a local body of believers who knew you and you knew them. Whether it be Romans, the church of Rome, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, to the church at Corinth, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, these letters were written to people in the churches and they were supposed to continue those instructions. 1st and 2nd Timothy. It's to leadership in the church. Timothy was struggling in helping the church of Ephesus. So all these letters.

[34 : 00] So when I say, when I hear, I don't see church membership in the Bible, most people, mean it, is I don't see it as it refers to joining something.

Like joining a canoe club or a ski club or a book club. These are the type of clubs that require us to sign up and commit whatever the membership requires.

And that person who makes that statement would be absolutely correct. The Bible doesn't call us to join the churches if we were joining a club.

And the reality is, Jesus Christ doesn't call us to join a church. But it's interesting, Jesus Christ actually calls us to submit to a church. That to be a Christian, there is actually no other option. church history tells us this. To be a church is to be a part of a band of local believers. The New Testament's emphasis is on salvation, the good news of Jesus Christ, and how do we grow in that knowledge.

[35 : 14] All those areas happen inside the church. There was no, now that I am saved, I go and do what I want.

It was always, I am saved, I'm now part of a body of believers. And baptism signified that entrance into the church.

So what exactly is the church? And I know some of you guys who are educated, there's different views, the gathered, these other words, but I'm going to give you this one definition which I think is very appropriate.

And it's about the local church. It says, the local church is the authority on earth that Jesus instituted to officially affirm and give shape to our Christian lives.

Okay, I'm going to repeat that. The local church is the authority on earth. Christ gave the church this authority on earth that Jesus instituted to officially affirm and give shape to our Christian lives.

[36 : 24] So there's two actions that the church does in this. One, the church affirms our faith, and I'm going to get to that in a little bit.

And the second aspect is it gives shape to our Christian lives. And one word that really helped me bring this together, and there's this great little book, we have it in the office, it's called Church Membership.

It's written by Jonathan Lehman. It's pretty, just a short, small little book. But he uses this word, and I think it's the best word to define what a church is. Do you recognize that we are an embassy?

The church is an embassy, right? Throughout all of scripture, we're called citizens of a future kingdom. Amen? Jesus Christ came to set up his kingdom here on earth.

And he's coming. There's going to be a bigger kingdom when every knee is going to bow to Jesus Christ. Amen? Even those who don't believe are going to bow. Right? But in that meantime, he set up this institution called the church before he comes back.

[37 : 33] And we're like this embassy in a foreign land. And it's in this embassy where we get the opportunity to live for the kingdom today.

This is where we can experience that slice of heaven here on earth. We can experience a depth of love, a depth of community, a depth of unity that the world does not understand.

You know that? And sometimes we're perplexed. If you know a lot of Christians, and sometimes, and this is before I was a pastor just working in the government and all my friends, and I remember one of my coworkers didn't want to forgive someone.

And at first it boggled my mind. How can you not forgive someone? Right? But then I started to realize that most of these people are living their lives, obviously, outside the message of forgiveness.

They really didn't have true friends in which they could share what was going on, their needs. If they had cancer or sickness, there was no one to pray for them, no one to care for them.

[38 : 40] If it didn't exist in their immediate family, they didn't have it. And I kind of took it for granted that even when I was living in Ottawa, I was a part of church, I was a single guy, but I had people taken care of.

I had a cancer diagnosis at that time, and I was serving the college ministry. They're like bringing me over food and all that stuff and taking care of it. And I'm like, I can do a Wendy's run.

Don't worry, I got it. But there was this desire to love on me. There was a desire to take me to my cancer treatment and stuff like that. And trust me, when you're 28, you think you're independent, you know everything, and you're strong.

It was hard to accept that, but I knew and I took solace that this church loved me, even though I was on my own and I hadn't experienced it. So the church is an embassy for God's kingdom here on earth.

It's a slice of our lives where we get to live out our lives under the authority of Jesus Christ, right? We're not here living under the authority of the government of Canada.

[39 : 40] We're actually here living it under the authority of Jesus Christ. And this kingdom is supposed to represent how Jesus wants us living together. And the scripture is quite clear in teaching us we are a people of a different nation.

We are born into this nation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in him, we are welcomed in as a citizen.

The obvious question for me to ask you is, what do your lives indicate? Are you more a citizen of God's kingdom or of the world in which we live in?

You see, this embassy has two functions. So, this is the reasons I'm going to give you for church membership.

It's certainly not exhaustive. One, the church acts as an affirmation of yours and mine's faith. Do you understand that?

[40 : 49] We affirm one another's faith. You see, the church affirms our testimony is in Jesus Christ.

Being a church member is an official recognition that we are Christians. I'm sure we all know plenty of people who call themselves Christians, but they're kind of living out in the hinterland.

And it's not for me to judge them, but I don't have a testimony to that. So, when you guys are going in to this neighborhood and you're talking about, I'm a Christian, I'm sharing this, when you let people know that you're a part of Squamish Baptist Church, you are telling them that there is a group of believers who affirms that I've saved.

They've seen my life. They see how I am. They testify to my baptism. Right? And then I'm a part of the communion of believers. That's a very important thing.

And it's also important for us. There's a lot of people that I met. One of the most heartbreaking stories when I was involved with Athletes in Action, there was this young man in my residence, and he came out, and there was a presentation by some of the pro athletes, and I remember him coming and crying, and he said, you know, I remember I believed in this gospel that was presented when he was in high school, but he never knew he was really a Christian because no one directed him to a church.

[42 : 22] So he had been kind of going through those last five years of his life. Am I a Christian? Not a Christian? How do I be a Christian? He just didn't go. And there's a lot of places that call themselves churches, and he would go, and there was something that he knew was off, right?

He just, this wasn't the same gospel that he heard. And when he came to me, he's crying like it was hard, and he just finally said, I finally found my people.

He came to church with me, you know, and he started to get accepted, not by just a bunch of college university students, but mothers, fathers, grandparents, this other community, and as they got to know him, could affirm his faith.

So when it came time for him to be baptized, he got baptized, and he was welcomed into that community. And he now had that affirmation of faith. You with me on that?

So we act as testimonies to one another. We're not here to judge. And I remember in residence, there was this one guy calling himself a Christian. He used to drive me nuts because I knew he wasn't.

[43 : 29] Because all his actions and people used to lump him in with me. Well, there's the two Christians on our floor. And I remember that guy, he was, you know, I don't want to say the sins he was involved with, but they certainly didn't reflect Christ or anything that I was about.

And I'm like, I don't think he's a part of any church or anything. So it first acts as an affirmation of faith. It's where we examine our lives together, our testimonies, and say that, yes, we are a Christian.

When you become a member of the church, I don't make that decision. I will listen to your testimony. But the church, the members here, make that affirmation. And we welcome you into membership together to say, yes, they're believers in Jesus Christ.

They're one of us. So that's one of the roles that church membership has. The fact of the matter is when people who want to attend church but not have their lives examined, do not want to be disciplined, and ultimately don't want to disciple others, they tend to not want to be members. And as such, we can't give that affirmation. You see, citizens of heaven find recognition and ultimately asylum in the local church.

[44 : 51] Jonathan Lehman provides this definition of a church member. It is a person who has been officially recognized and publicly recognized as a Christian before all the other nations.

You get that? We're a nation here. We're a nation of God. And we're announcing to all those other nations around the world that their citizenship is in heaven, as well as someone who shares in the same authority of officially affirming and overseeing other Christian in his or her church.

And you've heard me say there's three elements of the Christian life. There's the gospel, that's salvation. There's the discipleship aspect where we are being disciplined and discipling others.

And the third one is we serve. We give our gifts to one another. There's no such thing as hoarding all your gifts to yourself, right? To be a part is to give ourselves to one another.

So that's the first one. It affirms our faith. The other reason why church membership is so important, and just like I said, it gives shape to our Christian lives.

[45 : 59] The local church actually has the power of evangelism. We see this because we can share his love, his compassionate heart, his kindness, his humility, his meekness, his patience, his thankfulness.

When Jesus bears with us, we get to bear with others. When Jesus forgives us, we get to forgive others. There is no more powerful testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ than the church.

You know that? The Bible says that Jesus Christ died for the church. It is his bride. That is who he's coming for. He's coming for us, the church.

That is the picture. Right? The local church functions to guard the reputation of Christ's love. That's why we're commanded to do the one and others.

So how we live our lives should be a testimony to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. One of the most exciting testimonies I've ever heard was at my friend's church. It was a group of Muslim, former Muslims, had gotten saved.

[47 : 01] And I was kind of curious, how did all that happen? And one of them had come to the church for an ESL. They were offering an ESL training program. Someone invited them to the worship after they came.

And just the group worship was enough to move their hearts to Jesus Christ. Just the singing and the reverence that they saw in God.

We don't have that on our own, but we have that as a collection of people, right? And as a church, when we share membership, I want to invite people here who can see the love of Christ doesn't exist just in me, but in others as well.

And the third element, I want you to turn to your Bibles. This is Mark chapter 10. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 10. And this is about how Jesus Christ shapes our fellowship and ministry shapes our fellowship.

And I want to give you guys a little bit of a background on this. So as you know, a couple of weeks, I was at the FEB conference, and then I was at a Gospel Coalition conference, and they actually shared the same speaker for some of the sessions.

[48 : 12] And one of the key speakers for the FEB conference was a man by the name of Sam Albury. Sam Albury is kind of this interesting guy. And basically, the theme of him being at the conference was to help churches respond to the LGBTQ issues that we see in our culture.

And he talked about just different ways as church members and pastors and how to deal with this story. His testimony is he was questioning his sexuality. He was growing up, and he was really struggling with that idea and what the world had been telling him.

And then he became a Christian. And then he started to see the lies that was in the world's message that if he pursued his sexual choices, that somehow that was going to fulfill him or authenticate him.

Right? You know, he's being authentic. I'm being the real me. But as he grew in Christ, he says, well, the only place where we can find our soul satisfaction is in Jesus Christ. Amen? That's the only place we can have.

In fact, the Bible never teaches that whether it be homosexual sex or heterosexual sex, that that is where our soul satisfaction is. My wife is not to be my soul satisfaction.

[49 : 34] My kids are not to be my soul satisfaction. Your husband is not supposed to be your soul satisfaction. But sometimes in some churches, we've elevated family like that is the pinnacle of the Christian life.

It is a part of the Christian life, but it's not the pinnacle. The pinnacle is Jesus Christ. Amen? And we're all different, and we're all coming to that. And God works through our sin and all that kind of stuff to get there.

So he's now an Anglican priest, and his ministry is going around equipping churches. So he brings us to this text.

And let me just read it. We're going to start in verse 23. And this is just after the rich young ruler had heard Jesus. And if you guys remember where we are in the life of Christ, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the final Passover.

And the rich young ruler approaches him and says, hey, Jesus, look, I've done all these things. I've followed all your commandments. What more do I need to do? And Jesus Christ, knowing his heart where his idols are, says, you know, you've got to give away your riches.

[50 : 42] So Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. When I was at TGC, my buddy who's a pastor, he was telling me the problems he's having in his church because he's got this guy who's a billionaire at his church.

It's hard. Like this guy's got so much money, he can live outside his life and do whatever he wants and not become under the authority of the church at all.

And he ended up leaving the church because they weren't doing what he wanted to do. And now he's a member of an online church. In Africa. Like it's just, he just picks and chooses, right?

It's hard. It's hard. So when some of us, you're praying for riches and fortunes, there's a risk that comes with that. And Jesus reminds us of this many times.

How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God.

[51 : 46] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Then for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, then who can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said, with man, it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. Now this is where I really want you to pay attention. Peter began to say to him, see, we have left everything and followed you.

And remember, we've been looking at this, right? The cost it was for a Jew when Jesus is preaching that gospel. You're outside of the synagogue. That was your whole social world. That was your whole family.

That was your whole existence. And when Jesus said, you got to come out of that, right? You got to come out of that false religion. And then Jesus just nails it here.

He says, Jesus said, truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time.

[53 : 01] Houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions in the age to come. What Jesus is saying, when you become a Christian and follow Jesus, you might lose your mother, your father, your children, your brother, your sister.

There's a cost. But get this, he's saying, but when you become a Christian, when you enter the kingdom of God, when you come into this church, you will notice this. And I say this church because he says, in this time, this is the church age, which he's beginning.

This isn't something that happens when you get to heaven or when Jesus comes and he rules here on earth. But you will notice now in this time, he's saying a hundredfold houses.

That's a place to live, a place of comfort, a place of intimacy. Notice he says, you will have brothers, sisters, mothers, children. When you leave your old family, you get a hundred new mothers.

You get a hundred new brothers. You get a hundred new sisters. You with me on that? This is the promise that Jesus Christ is giving his disciples and those that are hearing him on this day.

[54 : 13] Now, this is the punchline. Now, it's up to us to honor that promise for Jesus. You with me?

It's up to us to honor that promise for Jesus. That when you become a Christian, you will gain something far more than you had.

This is the church. This is you and I, Squamish Baptist Church. We are the ones to make Jesus truthful in this.

When we leave family to follow Jesus, we get a new family with Jesus, with the church. We gain a whole new family, a new community, a new intimacy.

See, this is what Jesus promises for us. The reality is this church, our church, has to be living proof that Jesus is worth it.

[55 : 25] Amen? This is big, guys. This is big. One of the areas I'm just struggling with as a pastor, and I think most pastors struggle with this, is how can we get that level of fellowship and intimacy that we so desperately need in a time, and I know Chris Mitchell hates this word, the busy life that we live, right?

What are we setting as our priorities? And this is how we know. Do we live more for the world or for Jesus?

So when you commit to membership, you are committing to this way of life as a Christian.

Do you know that? All we're asking you is when you join membership, and what it means is that you are taking these responsibilities seriously. You are willing to speak into my life.

You are willing to speak into the person's life next to you. You're willing to have people speak into you, share with you. You're willing to open up. And I don't mean, we still have wisdom, right?

[56 : 35] It doesn't mean you go and share everything with everybody. But we are living for Christ. Nowhere in Scripture has it ever found that there is a way to live as an individual Christian outside of the church.

The fact of the matter is, we are defined by a loving friendship with one another. John 15, 12 says, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. So practically speaking, when we look at this bulletin, and it's a membership class, what are we talking about?

Well, we come together to know one another. It's an opportunity for you to ask me questions, considerations, issues that you might have. To join, when we join a membership at Squamish Baptist Churches, it's, you're willing to affirm our statement of faith.

You might not believe everything that's there, but you affirm it as a part of the member, that as you identify with us. And if you notice those three essential words that you see in our bulletin, we're here to exalt, equip, and engage.

[57 : 54] Those are the three things I've been talking about. Right? Exalt is the worship. Equip is the discipleship. And to engage is to use your gifts. That's really what it is. So when we meet as a membership, we just talk about that.

We talk about what our affirmation of statement is. It's a way for us to know that you do understand the gospel. I've seen many people in membership class actually get saved.

Even though they've been a part of a church for a long time, they've never really had it discussed in that way. They never knew that they were to use their gifts for the body. It's a conversation that we use to get to know one another better.

And another reason for being a member, for better or worse, we are part of the province of BC, and there's actually a governing body. Which is called the BC Societies Act, which as a charitable entity, we are responsible to act like we say we're going to act.

What that means is when we meet as a membership and we make decisions, it has to fit into our constitution, which when you're a member, you're part of that voting process, you're part of that discussion, to make sure we are acting together.

[59 : 10] Because like I said, scriptures don't teach us as elders to do all these things. It actually holds you guys accountable. It's your responsibility to make sure we function as a church.

It's interesting. My buddy was at this church for a while. He wanted to join membership, and they said they have no membership. But there has to be a membership in the province of BC. So he looked it up, and it turned out all the members were the family of the pastor.

And what that means is they had all the legal authority to the money in the building that existed. Right? Like they could have made a decision that we now function as a church in Turks and Caicos and take everything and go and live over in the island, right?

You don't want that to happen. We don't want that to happen. So it is a measure, and it's God's grace that God gives us a government that cares enough to protect us. So one of those things is that's a part of the membership, making sure that we function according to our constitution.

So if you want to speak more about church membership and what this means, and I could say so much more, please contact the office. I will make the time to create a class to put people in there.

[60 : 28] My goal this morning was to perhaps present to you something you haven't thought about when it comes to church membership. And I hope, I've been here for five years, just as we're growing as a leadership in a church, that this is a place where you know that we're not domineering elders.

That is not our desire. Even in the subject of church discipline. Church discipline is actually a function of us as elders teaching you what the Bible says.

It goes back to that affirmation, right? The reason we practice church discipline is when one of us isn't acting like Jesus calls us to act. It's not a mean thing.

We do this to say you can't be a part of the body if you're acting in that worldly way. And our desire is for you to come and live within us. And my role is to teach you what Scripture says, but it's your role to act on that.

Do you know that? So it's not us telling you to do these things. I want you to see it in Scripture and understand who you represent.

[61 : 35] And that the testimony of ours outside of this building matters. So that's all I say. If you want to ask any questions, I'd love to talk to you.

If you've experienced pain in a former church, I'd love to walk through those issues with you. You know, some people that I've walked through, they've been hurt by pastors, they've been hurt by leaders.

And like I would hate anybody to think negatively about Jesus Christ and his church because it's something I did. Listen, I'm imperfect as the rest of us.

My wife knows I'm doubly imperfect. Right? And we are going to mistakes. We are going to hurt one another. But we never want that to be a barrier to our testimony to who we are.

But I would hate that I would be the impediment for someone loving Jesus Christ and his church. So please don't go unsaid.

[62 : 35] I'd love to talk to you about it if you're not a member. Please consider coming to the class. It doesn't mean you're going to be a member. And like I said, if you haven't been baptized, but you feel great taking communion, you're ready to be baptized.

Let's take care of that. Let's take care of that obedience piece before Jesus Christ. All right, let's pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I just pray that what I've shared today just from my heart in looking at what Scripture is what you call us to, that we would perhaps think about church membership in a much different way.

Father, my heart and prayer is to continue the ministry that SBC has been doing for 64 years and representing since 1964. But representing your gospel in what is now known, I think there was a study, survey came out to say that Squamish was the most unreligious city in our nation.

I would argue with that because I believe there is a religion, but it's a false religion that is perpetrated here, a false religion of individualism, of broken community.

There's many people that I've met in this city who are hurt, who come here to escape. Most often it's their own family life, a tragedy in their lives, and they come to enjoy the better things.

[63 : 57] This is a beautiful place to get restored, but we all know unless there's not true restoration of the soul, as the psalmist writes in Psalm 19, there is no change.

And we want to be transformed by the living God with the living word. We want to grow wise in your word so that we can disciple and live this life in such a way that people are attracted to Jesus.

The way to make, quote unquote, Jesus attractive is not to be like the world as much as possible, but actually to be more like Jesus, which is actually contrary to what the world teaches.

Jesus Christ did not get married. Jesus did not find his identity in his sexuality. He never taught that. He was perfect in all his ways.

And he taught that our soul's satisfaction is found in him and him alone. Father, this city has all been created in the image of God.

[65 : 12] That's who we are as men and women before you. And we are all due respect because we were created in that image.

So, Father, I pray that we would come to understand not only the effects of sin, but how that sin leads to brokenness and how it leads to despair and it leads to crushed lives.

But we know that there's only one person who can fix that. And it's only through your son, Jesus Christ. So, Father, my prayer is to come together more fully, more often, to continue to know and grow with this wonderful community of believers that I've come to know and who I call brothers and sisters in Christ.

We each have this responsibility to one another, and I pray that we will all take this commitment and live it out to the utmost as we bow the knee to you, our King and our God.

We ask these things in your most holy, precious, and everlasting name. Amen.