

Church Membership

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[0:00] But it's good to be with you all today and have the opportunity to open God's Word to you. We're going to begin with a memory verse that I don't at all have memorized.! This was handed to me about one minute ago, maybe two.

And so I'm going to read it. You all recite it from memory as you're able. And it's Isaiah 62, 6b and 7. So say that with me. Isaiah 62, 6b and 7.

You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest and give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Well, we come to a God who is faithful, a God who doesn't sleep. Amen. He is awake, alert to our needs. And He meets those needs in His perfect time and His perfect wisdom.

So we take comfort in a faithful God this morning. Let's pray and ask His blessing on our time here and then we'll begin. Father, we thank You for Your mercies that are new each morning.

[1:08] We thank You for the opportunity to gather here on a beautiful fall day with the sun shining and beautiful colors all around us. These reminders that You indeed are God, that You are faithful, that there is a Creator.

And You are that Creator. And we are glad to come into Your presence today to learn from Your Word. We pray that You would teach us, that You would be our help and our strength. We pray that You would meet with our children as they gather in their different classes.

And ask that You would bless them and their teachers, give those teachers help to point our children to the truth of Your Word. And we pray that You would help us as we look into Your Word. Make the time profitable. We pray that You would be glorified in what we say and do here this morning. We ask for Jesus' sake and in His name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. But you can turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Acts chapter 2.

Does everyone have a handout? If you don't have a handout, just put your hand up. Mr. Bill, so being in the back, my wife is missing one. I didn't think I could have covered that, but there's another here.

[2:25] Oh, you're out? Well, all right. Share with your neighbor if you're out. Yes, well. I'm right there for a bathroom. I think Larry there. Anybody else?

All right. Well, it's a joy to be with you this morning and to have the opportunity to spend some time together in God's Word. I think I know most everyone here.

If you don't know, I'm Aaron Hoke. And believe it or not, I'm one of the pastors of this church. The reason that you rarely see me here is that in 2010, Grace Fellowship Church voted to send me and my family to Bremen to plant a church there.

And that has been my full-time work since September of 2010, which is why I'm not here very often. That work of church planting has been rewarding. It has been challenging beyond anything that I imagined before we did it.

It has been encouraging at times and discouraging at other times. And we are very thankful for your support, your help in that work, your visits.

[3:41] Almost every time you have a fellowship lunch, I can bank on seeing Jim Fisher and Dale Cram walk through our doors on that Sunday evening. And others of you as well have visited on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings as you've had opportunity.

And those visits encourage us to see some of the empty seats filled and to see familiar faces and to be reminded that you're praying for us. Thank you for those prayers. I understand that you pray for us regularly here and we deeply, deeply appreciate that and need it.

Just to let you know a little of what's going on down there. Early on we enjoyed a period of fairly steady growth. And God blessed us in that way. Around the beginning of this year we sort of

plateaued and leveled off numbers wise.

Excuse me. And then in the last several months we've lost a few families. So we've come back down a little bit and have leveled off again. Continue to see a number of visitors and we look forward to seeing what God will continue to do in our midst.

But thank you for your prayers, for your financial support of us and for sending us there. It truly has been a blessing and a learning experience. But we're at a point in our life as a church plant in Warsaw that we're giving serious consideration to constituting.

[4:58] To establishing ourselves as our own independent, self-governing local church. No longer being a church plant, it's a Grace Fellowship Church.

Not because we don't love and appreciate you and all that you've done for us. We do very much. But because we want to be what we see modeled in Scripture. And that is our own independent church.

And in preparation for that, we've completed a series of extended membership classes. I don't know where my place is going.

I think it's fine. But it just sounds a little scratchy. But we've completed membership classes to help our people understand what membership in the local church looks like.

What they will be committing themselves to should they join our church so they know exactly what they're getting into. And what I want to do in the Sunday School Hour this morning is to give you just a little bit of what we've covered in one of those classes.

[5:59] Or a couple of those classes. Regarding especially the foundation or the biblical warrant for church membership. Why we have church membership at all. Now, many of you here are members of Grace Fellowship Church.

You've joined and so maybe you think that's an irrelevant point. I'm a member. I'm convinced that I should be a member. But maybe some of you don't know exactly why you joined. Why did I join a church? Why is there a formal membership?

Why do we do that? And that's something of the question that we want to answer today. And if we have time, we might talk a bit about some of the benefits of church membership. But is it necessary?

Is it important? Well, I'm going to share just a few thoughts on these things this morning. And trust encourage you in fulfilling your calling to be a member of the body of Christ.

A member of the church. You can follow along on your handout. It will give you some of the references that I'll be pointing us to. You'll notice that some of the references are in italics. And what I would like this morning is some help from you all.

[6:59] Volunteers that are willing to read the passages in italics. And so every so often I'm going to stop and I'm going to assign some of these passages. So you can look ahead and say, let's see, I'm going to, he asks, I'll be ready to read Ephesians 5.25.

So I'll start by assigning just those first two. Who would take Ephesians 2.19 for me this morning?

All right, Jim, thank you. And then who would take the other one?

1 Corinthians 12.13. Don't be shy this morning. All right, Tom, thank you. And then others of you be ready as we move down the sheet. We'll be adding those in.

So what is the basis for a formal church membership? Why should you join? Admittedly, this is something that's implicit in Scripture. There's no direct command that I know of that says you must join a local church, become a formal member of a local church.

But I hope that you'll see this morning that it's a biblical notion and the weight, the cumulative weight of looking at these different areas. You'll see that it's something that we should do and that it's important for the proper functioning and structure of the church and for your life as a believer.

[8:09] It's important for you as a member of the church. So we'll just look at some different areas that build towards that point that we ought to have a formal membership in the church.

The first is the notion of being added. And we've turned to Acts chapter 2. And you can follow along with some of these. I'll read some passages and you all will read some. But notice Acts 2 and verse 41.

So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

And then skip down to verse 47, the second part of the verse.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And then turn over to Acts 5 and verse 14. And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men

and women.

All right, so early in the church when people received Peter's message, when they were baptized, when they were saved, when they believed, they were added.

[9:10] Well, added to what? Our translation supply in some cases added to their number. That's not exactly in the original, their number, but they added to help us understand.

More literally in Acts 2.47, they were added to them. And here in Acts 5.14, it's either they were added to the Lord or those who believed in the Lord were added.

They were added to the body of believers. They were added to the church. And this simply shows us that the church from its earliest days was made up of believers who were added to a definite group.

There was not an ill-defined group. There were people who were part of the church and people who were not. And those who were not were saved, they were added to those who were part of the church.

The notion of universal and local church helps us somewhat here. When you become a Christian, you're immediately part of what we call the universal or the invisible church.

[10:11] It's all of God's people through all of time in every place on the globe. And it's invisible because we can't see it. Not all of us. We don't know who all belongs to the universal church.

That's bigger than we can comprehend. There's people that are dead now that are part of the universal church. And people that are yet to be saved that will be part of the universal church. So it's invisible. We can't see it. But when you're saved, you're added to the church, the universal church. And some Christians are content to stop there. You know what? I'm part of the big picture body of Christ.

I'm part of the universal church. So I don't need to bother with membership in a local church because I know that I belong to the body of Christ. The problem with that is that the universal church and the local church, which is a local body of believers, gathered together as a visible representation of the invisible, a universal church.

This is a local church. Are you the people? Are a local church? The problem with separating the two is that they're vitally linked. An obligation to church is not just universal, but to the local church.

[11:23] So if you're a Christian, you're already part of the universal church. I think Jim has Ephesians 2.19. So go ahead and read that for us, please. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

All right? Fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household. Right? The household of God. When you're saved, you become part of the household of God. I'm going to ask you to keep your place because we're going to need that verse and a few more a little bit later.

Okay? So when you become a believer, when you're saved, you're part of the household of God. That's universal church language. 1 Corinthians 2.13. Tom. We were all baptized by one spirit into one body.

Whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one spirit to drink. All right? Baptized into one body. All believers all over the world are part of the household of God.

They're part of one body. But that should also be expressed locally. The saints in the New Testament were organized into particular local churches.

[12:32] Earl Blackburn is a pastor friend. He wrote this little booklet, Why You Should Join a Church. He's also more recently written a book called Jesus Loves the Church and So Should You.

And I wonder if some of this material from earlier isn't in that book. But he writes that the New Testament knows nothing of a churchless Christianity.

And I hope that you'll see that as we progress this morning. In fact, a lot of the New Testament is letters written to churches. Right. Or to leaders of churches like Timothy and Titus about what they should do in the church.

And so 1 Corinthians 1.2. You don't have to turn to these passages. But 1 Corinthians 1.2. To the church of God that is at Corinth. There was a particular church at Corinth. Same with 2 Corinthians. Galatians 1.2. To the churches of Galatia. Philippians 1.1. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philip High with the overseers and deacons. Church isn't mentioned specifically there.

[13:35] But all the parts of it are. The officers, the overseers and deacons. And the saints. The members of that church. 1 Thessalonians 1.1. To the church of the Thessalonians.

Same with 2 Thessalonians. So in the New Testament you see that believers were organized by geography into local churches. When Paul went on missionary journeys, he didn't just seek converts.

Members of the universal church. Once he had converts, they were organized into churches.

Churches were established for them to join. Turn over to Acts 14. Acts 14.

Acts 14. And notice verses 21 to 23. There in Derbe, when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. Paul goes around on his missionary journeys.

[14:53] He was born on his missionary journeys. Converts are made. People are saved. And he goes back to those places and he visits and he appoints elders in the churches. Churches have been established in those places for those converts to join.

And so membership in the universal church should be expressed locally. It's clearly how the church operated in the New Testament. And then there's some helpful pictures in the New Testament that indicate that believers should be added to the church, should be an integral part of the church, that they should be bigger than just themselves, or part of something that's bigger than just themselves. Christians aren't to be left alone, to walk through this world all by themselves, but rather should be joined to a church. And some of the imagery in the New Testament helps us.

1 Peter, I'm going to assign a few passages here. Who will take 1 Peter 2 verses 4 and 5? Jim Webb, thank you. And then Jim, you're already at Ephesians 2:19.

This time it will be verses 19 through 22 when we get there in just a minute. And as we go, I realize I'm sort of going 90 miles an hour.

[16:06] If you've got a question, just throw up the stop sign. And if I'm not looking, holler, shout at me if you've got something to add or a question about it. But first of all, here, I'll just pause.

Any questions or comments so far? Okay. First, this imagery of stones being built into buildings.

Jim, Ephesians 2 verses 19 through 22. 1 Peter 3, verse 19 through 22.

All right. All right. You notice the language again. We just saw this. Members of the household of God. You're part of his household. Part of his family. We talked about that in universal church language.

But notice that those of his household are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And the whole structure is joined together. Built together. Individual Christians are to be joined to one another as part of the whole.

[17:29] Not separate from one another. Okay. Jim, 1 Peter 2 verses 4 and 5. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious.

You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.

And offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

All right. You're spiritual. You're living stones built into a spiritual house. You're a member of something bigger than yourself. And Wayne Mack and David Swaebley wrote a book called Life in the Father's House.

A good book about church life. And he gives an interesting quote from Spurgeon about bricks and what their purpose is. He says, I know there are some, this is Spurgeon, I know there are some who say, Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.

Now, why not? Because I can be a Christian without them. Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient.

[18:39] There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house.

It is a good for nothing brick. So, you rolling stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.

Spurgeon usually doesn't pull any punches to get an idea of what he thinks if you haven't joined a church. But you see that bricks are to be living stones that are built into the whole.

Then there is the imagery of the body. Turn over with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

This is familiar language to you, a familiar picture. We will read it without too much comment, just a little bit. 1 Corinthians 12. Notice verses 12 through 20.

[19:46] 1 Corinthians 12.

And if the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?

2 Corinthians 12. If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. You see, we're members of the body of Christ.

Amputated fingers don't do much good, and they can't survive apart from the body.

Let's say you've got an arm. It's sort of gross, but an arm severed, and it's laying on the ground over here. A couple of problems. The arm's not going to survive over there.

[21:07] It's not going to live. It's not going to do well. It's not going to be healthy. It's going to shrivel up and die. And the body that's missing the arm isn't going to do well. The body needs the arm to function.

And so Christians, you've got a lone Christian. He's over here by himself. He's not part of the church. He's not going to do well. He needs the church. He needs the fellowship, the life that flows through him, the grace that flows through him, or to him, through other channels of grace.

And the church needs him. They need his gifts, his ability to serve. And the church. And so these pictures. Stones aren't left alone. They're built into a house.

The body parts aren't left alone. They're parts of the body. The pictures show us that you should be part of something bigger than yourself. And then some truths about Christ and the church.

Christ's love for and interaction with the church. Who would take Ephesians 5.25? Hey Tim, thank you. And then Ephesians 1.22 and 23.

[22:15] Name? Help me out? Name. Dan. Thank you. I should know that. No problem. Dan visited in Warsaw once. You should remember these names. And then Revelation 1.12 and 13.

Alright, Paul. Thank you. Okay. Christ and his church. We want to talk about Christ's love for and his interaction with the church. Tim. Ephesians 5.25.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word.

Christ loves the church. Amen. That's the title of Earl's little book. Jesus loves the church and so should you.

And if Christ loves the church, then shouldn't you be part of what Christ loves? If you claim to love Christ, shouldn't you be part of the body of believers that he loves?

[23:20] Dan, Ephesians 1.22 and 23. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every world.

Christ is reigning in heaven right now. And perhaps because he is not bodily present with us, sometimes we may think of him as distant. He's not physically here with us, though he's dwelling in us by his spirit.

But as Christ reigns from heaven, he is reigning over all things for the church. God has given him his head over all things to the church.

That's the special focus of the reign of Christ. And then Paul, Revelation 1, verses 12 and 13. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The one with the appearance of the son of man is Jesus.

[24:31] And the lampstands are the churches. And Christ is among his churches. He's walking among his churches in that picture in Revelation 1.

And then in Revelation 2 and 3, which we're not going to read, but those chapters are the words of Christ to his churches. And it's clear that he knows what's happening in them. And he cares deeply about it.

Earl Blackburn again says, How can you know and receive the fullness of the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ, if you are not a member and part of one of his churches, where he is in the midst?

Christ is not just involved in a generic way with his universal church. He is ruling over that. But he is involved in particular local churches. And you see that in the letters to particular local churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

And so, before we start, the rest of these things somewhat are exhortations and commands that we're going to think about. But the New Testament is chock full of evidence that the church is of great importance.

[25 : 39] It's the church that sends out missionaries and receives them back. And those missionaries, as they go out, establish other churches. Letters are written to and received by churches and church leaders.

Christ loves his church. Christ is walking among his churches. And the churches are made up of saints who have believed in Christ and been added to that church.

The emphasis of the New Testament is not on individual Christians, but it's on the church. And that should be our emphasis as well. So, should you be a member of such a church or not?

You should be. Now, a couple more things to make that point a little more clearly or add a little bit more force to it. I'm going to assign a whole, pretty much the rest of these passages down to the line that says benefits of church membership.

So, I need you to be ready and willing. Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 25. Jim, I almost knew Jim was going to take that one because he quotes it to me often.

[26 : 42] 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 12 and 13. Ed, thank you. Hebrews 13 and verse 17. Colin. 2 Corinthians 2, verses 6 through 8.

Roger, thank you. And 1 Corinthians 5, verses 2 and 13. Two separate verses. Stan, thank you. All right.

Some exhortations that God gives us. Go ahead, Jim. Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 25. I just consider always to make sure one to the other on for his love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together.

Some learn the habit of doing, but let us encourage each other. And all the more as we see the day approaching. Okay, we're to not give up meeting together.

We're to not neglect assembling together. Assembling together is something that Christians do. And it's the purpose there of encouraging one another. All the more as we see the day approaching.

[27 : 47] But I want to focus here on the gathering together. Let's not forsake assembling together. We do gather together with that purpose of considering how to stir one another up to love and good deeds.

The pattern of the early church was to gather together on the first day of the week. The day that Christ rose from the dead. So as the writer of the Hebrews exhorts them to think about how they can stir one another up.

He says, don't forsake the place where that happens. The gathering together of the saints. Then there's some commands about respect for and obedience to church leaders that are very interesting.

So, 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 12 and 13. I don't remember where I was for that. Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who are part among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you.

Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. This is written to the church of the Thessalonians.

[28 : 54] And they're told to respect those who are over them in the Lord, and to esteem them highly above. That's a local church made up of saints that are gathered together. And they're instructed to respect those who are over them in the Lord.

You can't have somebody over you in the Lord in a church unless you have submitted yourselves to them. Similarly with Hebrews 13, 17. Common. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watchful of you as those who must give an account.

Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden. That will be of no benefit to you. We're exhorted to obey, to submit to our leaders, to allow them to give an account of joy by the way that we live.

I love your voice. I think I could listen to you read the scripture all day. It's not my voice today. It resonates.

But we're to obey our leaders. We're to obey those who are over us in the Lord in the context of the church. And if you don't belong to a local church, then you have no leaders in the church to obey.

[30:06] If you're just loosely affiliated with a church, then they have no ability to exercise that authority. The scripture calls them to exercise. And you have no real way to obey this command.

Now, God has given two officers to the church, elders and deacons. There's clearly some organizational structure to the church. But with no formal membership, this is next to impossible. Who will select the officers? Who are the officers to lead and to govern if there are no members in the church? Again, I want you to listen to Wayne Mack and David Swavely. And they quote someone else within this quote that I'm going to read to you.

But they write this. God has invested in the church his manifold grace, the truth of his word, and the souls of his redeemed people.

The church must be a faithful steward of those treasures. And to do so, it must put careful thought into developing and maintaining its structure and organization.

[31:05] Why should businesses striving for short-lived financial gain be administered more circumspectly than an institution laboring to lay up treasure in heaven?

We're very careful about our business and how they're ordered and regulated so that we can make money. Shouldn't we be all the more careful how we order the church? It's about laying up treasure in heaven.

On the contrary, we should let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner. And membership plays a vital part in any church structure. Eric Lane wrote, The church is likened in the Bible sometimes to a body, sometimes to a family or household, sometimes to a kingdom, sometimes to an army.

For any of these organisms to function properly, order of some kind is required. The same applies to the church. The church is not just a loose collection of individuals.

It is a closely knit structure like a human body and has therefore to be rightly organized. For such ordering, it needs to know exactly who belongs to it.

[32:12] A family which sat down to its meal table or locked its doors for the night, not knowing who was supposed to be there and who not, would be an extremely strange phenomenon.

An army battalion which did not know who to expect on parade would soon be in chaos. If the church is to be a true family and an effective fighting force, it needs to know who exactly belongs to it.

When you sit down to your table at night, your family, you know who you expect to be there, right? You know who a part of your family is. Of course you do. The church should know who is a part of it.

It should have structure. And then this notion of inclusion and exclusion. The way the New Testament speaks, some are to be included and some are to be excluded.

Now in 2 Corinthians 2 verses 6 through 8, in just a minute, there's one who has done some wrong. He's sinned in some way in the church. He's been punished, but now is the time for his restoration.

[33:13] So, Roger, I think. 2 Corinthians 2 verses 6 through 8, please. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough. So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

So I beg you to reaffirm your thoughts before him. Notice that the punishment there was by the majority. This punishment by the majority is sufficient.

The majority of who? Well, Paul's writing to the church of God that is a Corinth. And to have a majority, you need to have a definite number. Some people are included in the church, and they are a definite number.

The punishment on this man who had sinned was inflicted by the majority of them. And then, so there's this, some people are included. They're part of the church.

Others are excluded. 1 Corinthians 5 verses 12 and 13. Excuse me. Verse 2 and then verse 13. Stand. All right. And you are proud.

[34:18] And you are proud. And you are proud. Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? God will judge those outside.

Expel the wicked man from among you. All right. We're going to talk more about church discipline in just a minute. But notice that some are in and some are out. There are definitive dividing lines for the church.

It's not just sort of a nebulous group who attend, but are part of the formal membership. There's a defined group, a membership. And I think the final argument that makes this inescapable, at least for me, is that of church discipline.

And I'd like you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 18. Matthew's gospel chapter 18. We've just noted some are considered included and some are excluded from the church.

That is membership language, as I understand it. And in Matthew 18, Jesus gives us some instruction regarding church discipline. So notice verses 15 through 18 with me.

[35 : 33] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

So if a brother sins and he's not won or brought to repentance by the one he sinned against going to him, or by that one with a couple or one or two others going with him, then it's to be taken to the church.

And if he doesn't listen to the church, he's treated as a Gentile or a tax collector. In other words, as one who is outside of the church, one who is not part of the body of Christ.

[36 : 37] Other passages speak similarly. We just saw 1 Corinthians 5, the two verses there. Let him who has done this be removed from among you. Purge the evil person from among you.

Again, there's this clear line of demarcation. It lies between who is in and who is out. And in order for someone to be disciplined by the church and removed from the church, they must have been a member of the church in the first place.

And for the church to have that kind of authority over an individual, they must have submitted themselves to the oversight of that church. So let's say you've got somebody who's just an attendee.

They come to the church regularly, but they've never joined. And they sin grievously in some way.

And they don't repent. What can we as the church do in that situation?

Well, we could rebuke them. We could give a public rebuke to them. But we couldn't do what the scriptures instruct us to do with an unrepentant sinner. The church can't put him out if he's not part of the church to begin with.

[37 : 44] If he hasn't been added to the church, he can't be removed from it. And so I believe that the requirement of church discipline demands the presence of church membership.

Okay, there's a mouthful. Sort of a load all at once. Do you have any questions or comments or thoughts on what we've said here?

Jim, I'd just like to back up what I read earlier from Hebrews 10. Pastor, I'm thinking of verse 24.

Excuse me, 23. It says, Let us hold unswirlingly to the faith we profess, because he who promises is faithful.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Anything else? David. So, what I'm understanding is church discipline can't be executed unless the person is a member of the church.

So, if you're dealing with a brother or a sister who's not a member of your particular church, then you can privately...

[38 : 55] I don't know what I'm asking. Jesus says in Matthew 18 to treat them as you would a tax collector. Let them beat you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

And so, you wouldn't treat someone who is going on in their sin, unrepentant, who is by their behavior proving that they are not a believer.

You don't treat them as a believer. I suppose even if they're not a part of a member of your church, you can still treat them as an unbeliever. Which is to say, you might evangelize them. You might share the gospel with them.

You don't shun them or ignore them. But treat them as you wouldn't believe. I'm not sure if... That answer my next question.

Okay. I can read your mind. It's amazing. We asked enough to get out there. Anything else? Okay.

[39:54] We've got just a few minutes. I've got listed here some benefits of church membership. We're not going to dive into these passages here at Grace Fellowship Church. First, we extend the benefit of shepherding visits.

They're supposed to occur about once a year. And often, at least when I was here, I didn't get around to you that often. But we want to get into your homes and find out how you're doing. And we want to know the condition of our flock. How the sheep are doing. The Bible calls us in some of the passages that are listed there. Call us to be shepherds of the flock. To do that. Those shepherding visits are extended to our members. And I think it's interesting, too, that those scriptural directions that are given to elders have to be fulfilled in local churches. I can't shepherd a universal church. I can barely handle a handful of people in Warsaw. Only the great shepherd can shepherd the universal churches.

[40:52] And when he directs his under-shepherds to shepherd the flock, it has to be a local flock. It has to be a local congregation. It's in view there. You see that in 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20.

Paul's talking to the Ephesian elders. But there's that benefit of shepherding. There's that benefit of one another in community and accountability. That Hebrews 10 passage.

Stirring one another up to love and good deeds. And enjoying that benefit. And the accountability of brothers and sisters who are unwilling to let us go on in our sin without confronting us.

You know that if you're a part of a church and you go down this path and you're sinning, know that somebody is going to call on you. They're going to grab it and say, what are you doing? I know that. I try to get the log out of my own mind. But I see this in your life. Why are you sinning? And what a blessing that is. That you have people that love you enough to not let you go. And if it gets to that point, a church that loves you collectively enough to administer discipline.

[41:55] Discipline is not pleasant for the moment. But the goal of discipline in the church is always restoration. You have people that love you enough that aren't going to let you go on in your sin. They're going to bring you back by God's grace.

It's a wonderful blessing to have that. Being encouraged and exhorted to love and good deeds.

Ministry opportunities. Formal ministry opportunities here are limited to members.

And so that opportunity to participate in those things and to be a blessing to others will only be yours if you're a member of Grace Fellowship Church. Read just a few verses from Ephesians 4. He talks about gifts that Christ has given to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry. For the building up of the body of Christ. And then he says, Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head and to Christ.

From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

[43:02] We need you. The body needs you. And you need the body. Each part needs to be doing its work. And so one of the benefits is being able to, there's opportunities for service and ministry in the church and to receive that from others.

You can't read the New Testament without seeing that the church is central to God's plan for his people. The church is that for which Christ died.

It is that for which God has given Christ his head over all things. It is the church that Jesus loves. It is into churches that believers are built. And so if the church is at the heart of New Testament Christianity, shouldn't hold a place of highest importance with us.

I know in many ways I'm preaching to the choir. But I just want you to be reminded of these things. If you know them already, be encouraged in them and be exhorted to them.

If you need that reminder, that spur this morning. Some people would argue that they don't want to be a part of a church that has so many flaws and problems and divisions. Yes, the church is important, but I haven't found one good enough to join yet.

[44:10] I haven't found one that's good enough. I see all of these problems with the church. Let me just say that if that was Christ's criteria for loving the church, he wouldn't have.

Jesus loves this church the way it is. With all of your flaws. Now he wants you to change into growing grace. You don't misunderstand what I'm saying.

But he didn't wait for the church to be perfect, he loved. He took it as it was. And some people were bouncing around looking for that perfect church. You're not going to find it.

Not to worry glory. And we are the universal church. The invisible church made visible. Gathered together in glory. Then we will be perfect. But until then, we are part of imperfect local churches that

God has called us to be a part of.

And so may God give us grace for that. Help us to see the importance of membership. The great blessings of membership in this church. But that's all the time we have. Let's pray and we'll be dismissed.

[45 : 11] Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he loves the church. We pray that we would love it too. We would be glad to be a part of it. We thank you for the great benefits that come to us from being part of your church.

We pray that we would remember these things. And that we would take comfort in the truth of your word this morning. Help us. Bless us in the hour to come. We pray that you would be honored in our worship. And we thank you for this day that you've given us.

So that we can gather together and worship and enjoy being part of your church. We pray in Jesus' name.