

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

1 Corinthians 12:4-27

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INTRODUCTION: Today, we are going to talk about church and why church membership matters. I will cover:

- Church involves community.
- We are made to work together.
- Every member is vital.
- This is not up for negotiation.

I want to be very clear here: We have a large television audience, many of whom cannot get out of their homes. I understand. I have no intention of creating a guilt trip for someone who is physically unable to be an active church member.

Before we get into the specifics of this sermon, I want to talk with you about what we mean when we refer to the church.

The first time the word church appears in the New Testament is in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said to Peter, *“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

The original Greek word used there is *ekklésia* (ek-klay-see'-ah). This word comes from two separate Greek words *ek*, which means from or out, and *kaleo* which means call or invite. When put together, the word *ekklesia* means a gathering of people who have been called out (*ek*) of something and invited to (*kaleo*) something. Christians, therefore, have been called from their former lives and to a new life in Christ. But also, this word indicates that they have been called from their

homes to a public place, particularly a religious assembly or congregation. Therefore, in its most original sense, the word church both refers to all believers who have ever placed their faith in Christ, and to the individual groups of believers who gather locally in one place.

From Matthew 16 on, the word church is used 113 more times. Although the word is used in 17 of the 27 New Testament books, the majority of references are in Acts, Revelation, and the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians. In fact, the great majority of the references (34) are in Paul's letters to Corinth. Combined, these two books create Paul's most extensive correspondence with a single church. It seems that Paul had to write so much because this church was always having trouble.

Corinth was a culturally and politically important city in the ancient world. Unfortunately, the city was known for its moral depravity. The word Corinth actually became a word used for living an immoral life. The church at Corinth was composed of mainly Gentiles of poorer economic status. Because they had been called out of pagan lifestyles but were still living in the middle of a depraved society, the temptation to return to their former ways was strong. Paul's letters addressed the problems that they were encountering and offered intimate discussions about the inner life and workings of an early congregation. Therefore, it is an excellent place for us to learn more about what church membership means and why it matters.

1-CHRISTIANITY INVOLVES COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

EXPLANATION: Just like Jesus's use of the term *ekklésia*, the term used here for gifts indicates a plurality. The Greek word is actually a familiar one, *charisma* (khar'-is-mah). We associate that word with a person's charm. In fact, the dictionary

definition is “a compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others” or “a divinely conferred power or talent.” Biblically speaking, the type of gift mentioned here is a gift given by the grace of God for use in promoting the common good. In other words, any spiritual gifts you have—including the gift of the Holy Spirit—have been given to you to help others within the church.

ILLUSTRATION: Broadly speaking, sports can be divided into two categories—individual sports and team sports. Golf, tennis, and boxing are often individual sports. Volleyball, basketball, and football are team sports.

APPLICATION: Christianity is a team sport. Yes, the decision to follow Christ is a very individual matter. No one can make that decision for you. You and you alone must come to the Father, repent of your sins, accept his love and forgiveness, and commit your life to him. But once you have made that commitment, you are then grafted into a family, a community of believers.

Nowhere in the Bible does God indicate that we are meant to live out our faith alone. In fact, Paul and other New Testament authors made it abundantly clear that God expects believers to do life with one another.

- Christianity involves community.

2-WE ARE MADE TO WORK TOGETHER

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:8-13

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. ¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

After Paul lists the different types of spiritual gifts, he goes on to compare the church to a body. Just like the parts of a physical body work together, so must the individual members of a church body.

ILLUSTRATION: Can you imagine how incapacitated we would be if each individual part of our body did its own thing, without any cooperation with one another? Let's take the eyes, for example. The eyes work together as a team to send a message to the brain. In order for you to have clear vision, both of your eyes must be focused on the same target. However, there is a condition in some people called convergence insufficiency where the eyes fail to come near enough to the same target. When this happens, when one eye is focusing a little higher or lower than the other, the brain cannot adequately read the signals, and the result is a fuzzy or blurred image. Can you imagine what would happen then if one eye was looking completely to the right and one eye was looking completely to the left?

APPLICATION: As members of the body of Christ, it is imperative that we work together. If we do not, we will be ineffective as a body. We cannot all do our own thing. We cannot move in our own direction. We are a body, and as such we must work together for the good of the whole. Jesus himself modeled this in the way he served. Too often in the church today, we are more worried about what we will get out of the worship service than what we can give. We are more concerned about what activities the church offers than opportunities for service.

I've often said that people shop for a church like they shop for sales and bargains in food and clothing. They want to go where the best deals are. If this church doesn't have a good deal, then find one that does. Occasionally, we'll have a visitor who lets us know he or she is shopping for a church. Their tone is as if they are doing us a favor by being here, and they are courting us to see how things will work out. You know, when I sense that, I don't really follow through. I don't have time for it and am just not interested.

A few years ago, I ran into a former member and invited her and her husband to come back. Before I got the words out of my mouth, she said, "Tusculum Hills has nothing for us." She missed the point of membership completely.

That's not how God intended it to be. If we look at Corinthians, we see one of the main purposes of the church is for the mutual benefit of each other. Only when we work together can we move forward with clear vision. Only when we work together will we be able to make a difference in the world for the glory of God.

- Christianity involves community.
- We are made to work together.

3-EVERY MEMBER IS VITAL

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:14-24

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Paul continued his comparison of the church to the body of Christ by pointing out the necessity of every member. Not every person in the church has the same purpose, but every person is equally valuable and necessary.

ILLUSTRATION: Again, let's think about this in terms of our bodies. If you had to amputate one part of your body, what would you cut away? I imagine none of us want to get rid of anything, but maybe, if you absolutely had to choose, you might

choose something like the pinky toe. I mean, what purpose does the pinky toe serve? Other than being the fifth little piggie and being especially cute when you are a baby, it seems pretty needless. While we may not give it much thought, podiatrists tell us that our pinky toes are as important—if not more important—than all the other toes. The pinky toe, the heel, and the big toe knuckle actually work together to create a tripod of balance. The pinky toe is also instrumental in propulsion for both walking and swimming. If you lose a pinky toe, your body will adjust, but your gait will be affected.

APPLICATION: When you become a believer, God grafts you into the body of Christ. This body is made up of the whole—every believer anywhere—but more specifically it is a local group of believers. If you are a member here at Tusculum Hills, then you are a part of this body,

- regardless of what your spiritual gift is.
- regardless of how old or young you are.
- regardless of what you are good at or not so good at.
- regardless of how much money you make.

You are important, and you are needed.

- When you are not present, you are missed.
- When you are not engaged, we do not work as effectively as we should.
- When you are not involved and not contributing as you should, the body suffers because of it.

Review:

- Christianity involves community.
- We are made to work together.
- Every member is vital.

4-THIS IS NOT UP FOR NEGOTIATION

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

EXPLANATION: There are no Lone Rangers in the Christian faith. Jesus did not carry out his mission on earth alone. He had disciples and followers and family who loved him and served with him. The disciples, after Jesus ascended back into heaven, did not do ministry alone. They served and were ministered to by each other and other believers. Paul did not go out on his own. He had mission partners who traveled with him, who shared the burdens and the blessings. Our faith is not something that should isolate us. Church membership does not end with your salvation and baptism; it begins there. Church membership is not just about having your name on a roll, and it's not just about what the leaders can do for you. Church is about worshipping together, but it's also about serving together. It's about being ministered to, but it's also about ministering to others. Life and ministry are better when we do it together. This is the way Christ built his church. We are part of a body.

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I want to be very clear here: We have a large television audience, many of whom cannot get out of their homes. I understand. I have no intention of creating a guilt trip for someone who is physically unable to be an active church member.

INVITATION: Today, if you are a member of Tusculum Hills, I want you to pray about your part in our church body. Are you contributing as God wants you to contribute? Are you doing life with the other members of this body, or are you trying to do it on your own? Ask God to give you wisdom to see how you fit into this group of Christ followers and how you can help our body grow and serve. If you are not a member of this church and want to know more about becoming a member, feel free to come forward. We'd love to have you join our congregation. Most of all, if you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, I encourage you to not wait. God has a home for you, a family waiting to welcome you.

The first step toward membership is to be saved. That is, repenting of sin and trusting Jesus as Savior. He gave his life for you. He paid a price for your sin so that you can be made whole before God.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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