

Why Does Church Membership Matter? (1 Timothy 3:14-16)

Overview Week: *Elders and deacons are groups of exemplary Christians called & equipped by God to serve the local church under the leadership of Jesus by providing spiritual direction and meeting tangible needs.*

Elders Week: *Elders serve Jesus and His flock by modeling, teaching, leading, and praying.*

Deacons Week: *Deacons are model servants who love Jesus wholeheartedly and work diligently to meet specific needs within the local church.*

All of this might have left some of you wondering: If elders and deacons do all of that, what does the rest of the church do? Does it even matter?

Short answer: absolutely! And that's what I want to camp out in for this final installment.

Church membership matters. It shouldn't be about being able to vote at business meetings or padding some mystical roll. In fact, the whole notion that membership is about having your name written somewhere, even if you never darken the doors, actually cheapens what membership should be about. In fact (again ☺), not being an active part of a church should remove you from the status of church membership. Why? Because **church membership should be a *deliberate* choice to align yourself with what God is doing in a particular congregation and to choose to walk and serve alongside its people for your good and His glory.**

"14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:14-16)

THIS WEEK'S GIST: *The church is meant to be united through (and to) the living God; therefore, it will be committed to upholding His truth...together.*

I. The Church Is Meant To Be United

The Bible uses deliberately unifying language to refer to the church. By nature, sin makes us selfish. We gravitate toward situations that feed our desires and invest in lives that feed the same. The church calls us to love like Jesus and unite with people all across the world with whom we could have little to nothing else in common. In the local church, we're called to live together even more intentionally.

- **Household of God (Family)**

- *"...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, ...:" (1 Timothy 3:15a)*

- **Body**

- *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? 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. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

- **Building**

- We actually see a reference to this in our passage for today, as well, with the language of **pillar and buttress**. However, one of the clearest places we see this is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

- **Flock**

- *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."* (John 10:11, 14-16)

- **Bride**

- *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."* (Ephesians 5:25-27, 31-33)

- United, committed, and fully loved.

1. We were not designed to be "lone Christians".

- There are legitimate issues that sometimes keep people from physically meeting together. Most of those are health-related, and they should create in you a heavy heart that longs for the fellowship of other believers.
- Most reasons people give for not attending are not legitimate, and they are contrary to God's design for your life and His church.

2. We are meant to grow spiritually together.

- Please, study God's Word all week. Listen to good preaching and read good books. But remember, we're meant to grow in fellowship, and there is no substitute for that.

3. We are meant to hold each other accountable.

- **Congregationalism and elders?** This might be a question some of you have. If we are moving to a model with elders, and elders are meant to lead the church spiritually, does the church have any responsibilities? Yes. I can't remember exactly who used this imagery, probably several people, but though the elders will be providing spiritual guidance, they will ultimately bring this direction to the whole church, which functions as an **emergency brake**. If the elders lead well, pulling that brake won't need to happen often, if at all, but that responsibility of whole church involvement is key. Again, this means church membership has to mean something. **It's about being spiritually invested in what God is doing in this particular place with these particular people.**
- Does this imply **church discipline**? Yes. The Bible tells us we should help point each other away from sin and to Jesus: *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1) We shouldn't be content to see sin reigning in a life that claims to have been set free by Jesus. We're meant to approach this in gentleness, but we are meant to approach this.
- In addition to this, and far more commonly, this is about **keeping Jesus and His mission of salvation central!** So many churches go off the rails because of a slow fade from the centrality of Jesus and His Word. It could be a move toward **cultural relevance**, or it could be a move toward **traditional maintenance**. Either way, a move away from Jesus is a death sentence to any real church, and church members help guard against this by prioritizing Jesus in their own lives and expecting that from their congregation's leadership.

II. Through and To The Living God

"...which is the church of the living God..." (1 Timothy 3:15b)

Ok, a few observations here, as well.

1. Church is not a social club.

- When you live somewhere where Christianity is a cultural expectation or norm, it is easy to let it just become the place we go. Oh, we can still be deeply invested, but not because of Jesus, but because the *place* is part of our identity.

2. It is a group of people saved by the real Jesus and called to really follow Him together.

- Church Members are sinners saved by grace.
- Affirming membership is the church saying, "Yes, we see evidence of Jesus' work in your life."
- Ways to join a church—already being saved and uniting in His work here, or getting saved and being baptized as a testimony of His work—and then choosing to join in His work here.

3. The church is His, so being "the church" has to be all about Him.

- Not us.

III. And Therefore Committed To Upholding His Truth...Together.

"a pillar and buttress of the truth. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:15b-16)

This is our **mission**.

1. Theology matters for all of us because we need rescued & changed by His Truth.

- As a church, we must be committed to the gospel.

- God is holy. We aren't. The cost of our sin is Hell. BUT Jesus came & lived the perfect life we couldn't, died the death we deserved, took Hell in our place, & rose victorious. If we believe in Him & ask Him to save us & be our Lord, we will be saved & changed forever.

- **As a church, we should be committed to the whole counsel of God.**

- That means we *all* need to prioritize diving into God's Word. We don't have time to walk through all the implications of this *mystery of godliness*, but you can see that it outlines key teachings about Jesus:
 - **He was manifested in the flesh:** Jesus' virgin birth.
 - **Vindicated by the Spirit:** He was confirmed by the Holy Spirit to be God (ie. His baptism, miracles...etc.).
 - **Seen by angels:** His divine nature & angelic birth testimonies.
 - **Proclaimed among the nations:** The gospel was shared in Jerusalem and beyond to the Gentiles.
 - **Believed on in the world:** His salvation spread (and continues to spread).
 - **Taken up in glory:** He ascended to Heaven and is returning.

2. And theology matters to the world because they need rescued & changed by His truth.

"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." (Romans 10:13-15 CSB)

3. So a church will be a place where His people prioritize His Word and share it widely.

- Studying God's Word in everything we do.
- Sharing God's Word--locally...and to the ends of the earth.

Pastor Stuart Olyott said something like this: the local church is the pillar that upholds the beauty of the gospel. The church is then upheld by two buttresses: elders and deacons.

TAKEAWAYS

1. The Church Is Meant To Be United

- a. We were not designed to be "lone Christians".
- b. We are meant to grow spiritually together.
- c. We are meant to hold each other accountable.

2. Through and To The Living God

- a. Church is not a social club.
- b. It is a group of people saved by the real Jesus and called to really follow Him together.
- c. The church is His, so being "the church" has to be all about Him.

3. Therefore Committed To Upholding His Truth...Together. Mission

- a. Theology matters for all of us because we need rescued & changed by His Truth.
- b. And theology matters to the world because they need rescued & changed by His truth.
- c. So a church will be a place where His people prioritize His Word and share it widely.

4. Pray that we are a church that reflects Him to each other and the world more and more.

5. Pray to be part of that.