

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

Every member a minister, part 1 of 2
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 7/23/23, Matt Heerema

Please find a Bible and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

I have a question to start us off this morning. How many memberships do you have? Think about it for a second. Costco, Amazon Prime, Sam's Club, The ISU Alumni Association, Maybe a golf club, a gym membership, Rotary, Toastmasters, Kiwanis, maybe you are a member of a professional association related to your vocation. You can be a member of a coffee shop rewards program, or if you're like me, you can be a chick-fil-a signature status rewards member because you eat there too much. Your memberships can tell people a lot about you, can't they? Member of the libertarian party, the NRA, and the Isaac Walton league. :)

What does it mean to be a member of the church? Is that the same kind of thing? Is it just another card you carry in your wallet that adds an ingredient in your overall personal identity? Or is it something different? Something more foundational? You can guess how I'm going to answer that question.

When we speak of being a member of a church, we're speaking of a fundamentally different idea. I'd even say a different definition of the word "member."

This year our ministry emphasis at Stonebrook, from a leadership standpoint, is "every member a minister." In fact we have four points to this emphasis that is directing our ministry programs this year, and I wanted to take these next two Sunday mornings to highlight a few points of them.

The four points are: (By God's grace and according to His calling and timing)

- **Every attender a believer:** each attender become a member of the body of Christ. Every event and program we put on aimed at this goal. Question: Are you loving and obeying Christ with your whole heart?
- **Every believer a member:** each regularly attending believer become a member of Stonebrook. Question: Are you devoted to the fellowship?
- **Every member a minister:** each member of Stonebrook an active minister. Question: are you lending your gift to build up the body?
- **Every minister thriving:** each minister abiding in Christ and equipped/encouraged through the every-member-one-another-ministry of the church. Question: are you walking in the Spirit, in the Gospel, and engaging the spiritual battle in joy and peace?

Our premise is something like this:

Every believer is a member of The Body of Christ, His universal church on the earth, and is under commands, and with promises from the Lord in the scriptures that require devotion to a local expression of the universal church body (i.e., a local church). At Stonebrook (alongside countless other churches throughout the ages), we work that out through a formal membership process, to which every believer who has made Stonebrook their church home should submit.

Today I'd like to take a look at formal church membership. And we'll start by reading one of the primary passages (there are others) from which we get the word, and the concept.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (CSB)

12 For just as the body is one and has many **parts**¹, and all the **parts** of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. 14 Indeed, the body is not one **part** but many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a **part**² of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God has arranged each one of the **parts** in the body just as he wanted. 19 And if they were all the same **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!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those **parts** of the body that are weaker are indispensable. 23 And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts³ are treated with greater respect, 24 which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, 25 so that there would be no division in the body, but that the **members** would have the same concern for each other.

26 So if one **member** suffers, all the **members** suffer with it; if one **member** is honored, all the **members** rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and individual **members** of it.

¹ Greek. *melos*, literally: "members" or "limbs", see verse 26. Each occurrence of this word is highlighted in the above citation.

² This is where English translations can get confusing. This is not the same word "melos"—the greek reads "any less of-the-body".

³ Again, the word "parts" is absent in the greek, added for clarity. Literally: "our unmentionables" and in verse 24 "our respectables".

THREE EVIDENCES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE BIBLE

1. A believer is part of a specific body

1 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

If we think about the implications of this passage for a bit, we see our first evidence for church membership. We need people. We need people who are not like us. We are told to rely on other members of Christ's body with different gifts. We cannot say "I don't need anyone else."

Throughout the scriptures, we are given commands that assume we will be committed to a specific group of people. The commands would be impossible to follow otherwise. I had the ushers hand out an appendix containing the "one another verses" – commands that describe how we are to interact with each other in the church. There are about 57 of these commands. 16 of them are simply that we are to love each other. But they all imply a specific group of people.

This implication is not strange. We see in Acts 2, when the church was first born, in verse 42 that the first thing the church did was devote themselves to one another, to the fellowship. To observance of the scriptures and worship together as a specific group of people.

Acts 2:42 (CSB)

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

"The Fellowship" - this is a noun, a group of people, not a verb. Later in this chapter we see that they actually kept track of numbers. As Acts goes on and as we see in the epistles, as persecution came and the church spread out on mission, they stayed together in specific groups. There are instructions given to us on how to know who is in and who is out of the group, and that we are to maintain the borders in a sense to ensure that the local congregation of the church is representing Christ well. People are to be included and claimed by a specific group, or in the case of continual and unrepentant sin, excluded from that group.

2. A church submits to specific leaders

Hebrews 13:7 (CSB)

7 Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith.

Hebrews 13:17 (CSB)

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

This passage indicates that a believer should be able to identify their leaders (I think in this case the author is talking about the group of pastor-elders among the church), that there is enough connection and relationship that you are able to carefully observe their faith and life, and that they should be connected well enough to you to be able to give an account for your soul.

Not only should you be able to identify those leaders, you should submit your discipleship and spiritual care into their hands. This is a dangerous statement, and I want to put up some guard rails to this in a bit.

The third point is related to this.

3. Pastors care for a specific flock

1 Peter 5:1-3 (CSB)

1 I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: 2 Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Who is the flock the elders and I are to oversee? Any random Christian we happen to know? No. This passage implies that we are only pastor/elder/overseers over a specific group of people. In Acts 20, the elders of the church at Ephesus are told that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers/pastors of a specific flock.

Acts 20:28 (CSB)

28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

Pastors are to know and keep track of, like a shepherd over a group of sheep, a specific group of Christians. Formal local church membership is about helping the shepherds know who the sheep are that they are to watch over.

This is the basic case for membership. There are more pieces to this, and we'll be discussing them at an upcoming Saturday morning Core seminar to which you are all invited. Check out the website and stay tuned for upcoming announcements.

THREE OBJECTIONS TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FROM THE WORLD

1. Isn't this legalistic / cultish?

Isn't this just a leader demanding allegiance from followers? A play for power and control? I can really understand this skepticism, I really can. But boy if there is some sort of power and influence that and the luxury and comfort that supposedly come from that, I must be playing this game all wrong. The juice is not worth the squeeze if that's what this is supposed to be about.

This call for commitment to membership is not about building a following. It is coming from the heart of a shepherd who has been charged by a master, a good master, with taking care of the master's sheep.

Maybe the concern is some sort of legalistic over-formality or operating like a business rather than a family. "I shouldn't have to sign a card." And I really get that too, this is a family, fundamentally. The primary metaphor (and it is a metaphor) is family, not a business or a club, so why should you have to sign something?

Well, we have to administrate this somehow. There are administrative tasks to be done, even in a family, and we know that because God has provided gifts of administration (see "leading" in 1 Corinthians 12:28) to help make that happen.

But my primary concern with this objection is not administrative efficiency, it is whether you are devoting yourself to the fellowship, this fellowship, as the disciples did in Acts 2:42 as the church was born. Are you raising your hand and saying "I'm in. I'm with you all." Or are you holding the body at arms length?

I think that once you do raise your hand and commit this way, this room will feel different to you. Sunday morning will feel different to you. This family will feel different to you. Don't miss out on that.

If you have a legitimate concern with signing a card, let's talk. We'll probably accept a handshake or a verbal commitment in its place. (And then we'll put your name on a card after that...)

2. I get what I need from the global church, hopping from ministry to ministry, congregation to congregation, don't need to commit to a specific congregation

Hopefully I have answered this objection by the three evidences I've given, especially based on our passage today.

This objection comes from a self-centered and consumeristic mindset. Hear how you are talking: "I get what I need." The Christian life is not primarily about you having your needs met. It is about the body working together on mission, joining their efforts to the glory of God.

With this attitude, you are in effect saying to that other body part, "I have no need of you." The very error Paul was correcting in the Corinthian church in our passage today.

We are designed to operate as a body. As a single part/member/piece of the whole. You aren't getting what you need on your own, because if you are not joined with a body, and you are an eye, you won't be able to smell anything.

If this has been your approach to church in your life, you don't know what blessing you are missing.

3. I can't trust a church / leader

I know some people in this boat, and let me say that I have heard and seen stories that make this objection very understandable. My heart goes out to victims of spiritual abuse... to those who have been in churches under unqualified leadership or false teachers... to those who have been part of churches where the members acted more like a social club playing politics and favorites than a church abiding by the commands in your handout. This can make it difficult to trust again.

Here are some safe guards that ought to be present in a church, and hopefully are in place here.

- First, Notice that in the Hebrews 13 passage about submission to leaders, it is submission to leaders PLURAL NOT SINGULAR. Submission is to the plurality not to an individual. This passage does not command you to submit to Pastor Matt, or Pastor Luke, or Pastor Dave, but rather submit to the counsel of the pastor team. Notice also that the passage limits our authority to the ministry of The Word. We can command your obedience to God's word. We cannot tell you how to live every minute detail of your life. You might come to us for advice and input and in search of wisdom, but you are not bound to "obey" us if we are not showing you from the text to obey God.

- Second, Elders of a church are also members of it. We are not above it. We are bound by the same commitments and covenants, and in fact more. Teachers incur stricter judgement in the scriptures. If we are found to be operating “above the law” so to speak, we are out of bounds and in need of correction.
- I’m certain that this raises some difficult questions. I’ll be glad to stick around after and attempt to answer.

But if a church is in submission to the The Lord Jesus, and is guided by the scriptures, and is in fellowship with other churches in the area, it is a safe place to join, even when it is scary.

THREE BENEFITS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FOR THE BELIEVER

1. External Assurance and encouragement - The elders of a church are to give an account for your soul. The members of the church are to encourage one another daily so that we aren’t hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Are you struggling in your faith? What a gift to be a member of a local church whose members can counsel with you provide you with the reminder of the assurance and encouragement we have in the gospel of Jesus.

2. Flourishing in your design- In our passage today we see that every member of the body of Christ is designed by God with a role to play and a gift to bring. We are designed to be part of this body! We cannot fully flourish in our design apart from the church. As we receive from other gifts, and lend ours, we become who we were created to be!

3. Glory for God! Most importantly: God is glorified as we band together with brothers and sisters, obeying his commands out of love for Him and for one another, we will bear fruit, and this brings him Glory and bring us Joy:

John 15:8-11 (CSB)

8 My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.
 9 “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 “I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.