

I Am A Church Member **(Small Group Bible Study)**

Session 1: “I Will Be A Functioning Church Member”

Opening Illustration & Introduction

A man was coming out of church one day and the preacher was standing at the door as he always did ready to shake hands.

The pastor grabbed the man’s hand, pulled him aside, and said to him, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!”

The man replied, “Preacher, I’m already in the Army of the Lord.”

The preacher quickly asked, “How come I don’t see you except at Christmas and Easter?”

The man whispered back, “I’m in the secret service.”

This may be a humorous conversation but it helps set the tone for our discussion this morning about church membership. Membership in a local church is important in the life of every believer and it is necessary for us to consider what it means to be a functioning church member. God’s Word will help guide our discussion as we seek to understand better our responsibility and call to use our gifts to serve in the body of Christ.



What does it mean to be a member of a church? How is it different from being a member of a civic organization or the country club?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes that churches will operate like they should only when every member is functioning within the body. We will see that every member has received different spiritual gifts that need to be used in service to the church. Ultimately, the foundation for exercising these gifts is love.

1. Membership Means We Are All Necessary Parts Of The Whole

If you think about it, there are a number of things made up of various pieces that operate as a whole – cars, computers, cell phones, etc. You would not expect a car to operate in the way it was intended if it was missing the steering wheel. In the same way, the body of Christ does not operate as it was intended if it is missing a key part of the body (namely YOU!).

Scripture speaks clearly to the fact that every member of the body is needed for the church to be built up and to grow. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-16:

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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.

Paul reminds the church in Ephesus that God has given them pastors and teachers to equip them to carry out the work of ministry. This work of ministry is primarily the call to make disciples. He emphasizes the reality that when each member in the body works together properly, the result is very clear – the body grows.

? *Is it possible that the primary reason churches do not grow (numerically and spiritually) is that the members in the church are not working properly? Do you feel that you are using your gifts to build up the body? Why or why not?*

It is easy to look to specific programs, great ministries and amazing worship experiences as the things that will grow a church. However, this passage we just read makes it clear that growth in the body (numerically and spiritually) has less to do with what we offer and more to do with whether we are functioning as the body of Christ, with all members doing their part. Rainer wrote,

"God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel. Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down."



How do you view your membership at this church? Do you focus on the privileges and perks you receive or on how you can serve?

2. Membership Means We Are Different But We Still Work Together

One of the beautiful things about the body of Christ is that it is made up of unique members with different spiritual gifts. Often, churches do a disservice when we emphasize the particular importance of certain gifts (preaching, teaching, etc.) to the exclusion of others. This should not be the case because Scripture is clear that every believer's gift is necessary for the body to function as it should. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:1-26, emphasizes this truth:

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 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. 13 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. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 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. 16 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. 17 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? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 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." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 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, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have

the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Spiritual gifts are given to believers at the moment of salvation. These gifts are not chosen by us but given to us by the Spirit according to His discretion. The gifts we receive are to be used to build up the body of Christ and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.



What is your spiritual gift? How have you tried to exercise that gift within the body of Christ? If you do not know what your gift is, would you like to find out?

In this passage, we also see that we need to celebrate every gift as it is exercised within the body of Christ. Paul stressed that we should not devalue the gifts of others because they are needed for the body to grow. In the same way that our armpit is a needed part of our physical body, we need to see that every member and their particular gifts are vital to the health and growth of the body of Christ.



How can you encourage other members as they use their gifts within the body of Christ? Why do you believe some members are hesitant to use their gifts?

Rainer wrote, “With a country club membership you pay others to do the work for you. With church membership, everyone has a role or function. That is why some are hands, feet, ears, or eyes. We are all different, but we are necessary parts of the whole.” As different gifts are exercised, the body is built up in the same way that a weightlifter’s body is built up as he lifts weights. If he were to only lift weights with one arm and not the other, one arm would grow and be strengthened while the other would atrophy. In the same way, if one member of the body does not use their gift, that part of the body will atrophy and the body will not be able to grow as it should.

3. Membership Means Everything We Say And Do Is Based On A Biblical Foundation Of Love

Most of us have heard 1 Corinthians 13 – the “love” chapter but we need to understand these verses within their immediate context. Even though these verses are read at weddings, they must be understood within the context of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts. He wanted people to understand that the foundation of using our spiritual gifts within the body of Christ is love, both for God and for one another. Consider the following verses – 1 Corinthians 12:27 – 13:13:

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire

the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

13 *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

As we consider these verses we must recognize that Paul was writing these words to a church that was experiencing conflict. The specific conflict, detailed in chapter 14, surrounded the exercise of spiritual gifts within the body. Some gifts were recognized as being more important than others and some people were being regarded as better Christians because they had particular gifts. Paul told them this should not be the case. Paul emphasized that the conflict the church was experiencing was a result of lacking something – love!



How is the “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, related to church membership? What happens if love is not present within the church? What if it is present?

Love must be the foundation of everything that happens within the church. It was love that caused Jesus to step onto this planet to rescue us from our sin (John 3:16). He reminded us it will be love that distinguishes the church from the world (John 13:35). Rainer wrote,

“We are not to love fellow church members just because they are lovable. We are to love the unlovable as well. We are not to pray for and encourage our pastors just when they are doing things we like. We are to pray for and encourage them when they do things we don’t like. We are not to serve the church only when others are joining in. We are to serve the church even if we are alone in doing so. Church membership is founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.”



Do you love your church and the people in it? Does that love drive you to serve, give, and pray? If not, can you really call it love knowing love leads to action?

4. Church Membership is Functioning Membership

The only thing you have to do to be a member of a country club is to pay your dues. Biblical church membership is completely different. Rainer wrote, “Do you know how to remain a biblical member of a church? Give abundantly and serve without hesitation.” You can be a member of a church and not do this but you cannot be a *biblical* member of the church without giving abundantly and serving without hesitation.

 *What would it look like if every member of our church gave abundantly and served without hesitation? What would it take for that to happen?*

Rainer emphasized, “The concept of an inactive church member is an oxymoron.” The idea that you can be a church member without serving and giving cannot be found in the Bible. “One of the ongoing questions you should ask yourself and God in prayer is: ‘How can I best serve my church?’ You should never ask yourself if you *should* be serving your church.”

 *Are you willing to ask the question, “How can I best serve my church?” Better yet, are you willing to write the Lord a blank check, allow him to fill it out, and serve and give whatever he writes?*

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

The First Pledge

I am a church member.

I like the metaphor of membership. It’s not membership as in a civic organization or a country club. It’s the kind of membership given to us in 1 Corinthians 12: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Because I am a member of the body of Christ, I must be a functioning member, whether I am an “eye,” an “ear,” of a “hand.” As a functioning member, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will evangelize. I will study. I will seek to be a blessing to others. I will remember that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

Sign and Date