

# SERMON GUIDE

## Ecclesia: Membership and Ordinances

### Romans 12:4-5



#### SERMON NOTES

One of the statements we like to say around TJC is a statement that originates from the great English pastor of the 1800s, Charles Spurgeon: the local church is the hope of the world. What we mean by that is the local church, who carries the message of the gospel and the aroma of Christ, is the hope a lost and broken world is seeking. We have the answer to life's most important questions: Who am I? Who made me? What am I here for? What's wrong with me? How can I be made right? Where is all this going? The church can answer all those questions because we have been entrusted by Jesus with His Word and His gospel which answers them all.

The local church, when she's healthy and operating the way she's supposed to, is an unstoppable force in the world. The church becomes a city on a hill, a place of refuge in darkness. The church is defined by Paul in 1 Timothy 2 as a pillar and buttress of the truth in the world. We hold the line. Again, when we are healthy and getting it right.

But the church has fallen on hard times. Many churches are unhealthy and have ceased to be the hope they were created for. Many are dead or dying. It appears perhaps that the Lord has removed the lamp stand from many churches today as they fail to reach people for Christ, ground people with a biblical worldview, or serve as a refuge for hurting and broken people. Instead, many churches have become bastions of tradition, moralism, or private clubs for insiders. Now don't get me wrong: not all tradition is bad, we are for biblical morality, and relationships ought to be strong and meaningful to those within. But many, if not most, have strayed from our call.

One of the big issues that we've discussed already in this series is that churches have lost sight of our main mission and understanding of the Lord's purpose for us, and so it's no surprise that most Christians don't understand the role and purpose of the church. We don't know why churches have things like "membership" or what baptism and the Lord's Supper is about. Today I want to show you the purpose for these things in the local church. Jesus establishes the local church (it is His church) and the idea of membership is biblical. And Jesus gives us two ordinances (baptism and communion) to

practice and administer. Why is that? What is the purpose this body has for doing those things? We're going to examine all of this today.

### **Exposition**

**Romans 12:4-5 – <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**

### **Church Membership**

Did you know the majority of professing Christians in the US don't know how to explain or defend why the church has membership? This is not their fault. Most churches don't know why they have membership or what it's supposed to be. Most think the word is connected to the idea of being a member of a gym or a country club. In both of those settings, it is about joining an entity that has perks and benefits, services they provide. But that is not even remotely close to what church membership is about.

The word "member" is used not to designate a consumer choice you made. Rather it is connected to a covenant relationship established. The member language is used by churches to emphasize our individual status in a corporate body. We are literally a limb or appendage of a body. We're a member. We are one part of a whole.

Paul emphasizes that one body (physical body) has many members (thumbs, fingers, legs, ear, etc.) and each member does not have the same function (they are made uniquely by God to serve their function to the body) so we (the church) though many (individual people), are one body in Christ (a church), and individually members one of another (we belong to each other and need each other). He goes on further to describe how each in the body is given during gifts according to the grace God has given them and to use it for the building up of the body (vs 6-8). This analogy of members of a body is Paul's description of the church. This is not the only place he emphasizes this image and teaches the Christians and churches to see themselves.

You see the same teaching as in Romans 12. We are each members of the body. We are connected to Christ and one another. We need each member. This is where we get the concept of church membership. It's not a consumer choice, it is a covenant relationship. We are committing ourselves to a

particular body and local church. So this is where church membership originates in the Bible. This is where we get the term and concept.

Okay, I'm going to say something that may catch you off-guard or make you raise your eyebrows...the local church isn't the people who gather on Sundays at a service to worship or attend services at a particular building. The actual church, as defined by the Bible, is a group of people who are in mutual covenant relationship with one another. The church is a defined body and group of people who are in covenant with Christ and one another. The church service or gathering is a gathering of the church (those covenant members of one another) and other Christians who may be joining. But the definable church isn't just the rotating people that show up for worship. This goes against our own ideas and I want to show you that not only church membership is biblical, but it is a definable group.

What biblical evidence is there for church membership as I'm defining it? I'm going to give five strands of evidence in the New Testament for church membership. Each reveals something in the New Testament which would be minimized or denied if there were no definable local church membership.

### **1. The Metaphor of the Body**

I just covered this so I'll move to the next ones.

### **2. The Church Is to Discipline Its Members**

I'm getting into much greater detail about this next week. But I'll briefly mention something. Church membership is implied by the way the church is supposed to discipline its members. Consider the implication of Matthew 18 where “the church” (ekklesia) appears to be the final court of appeal in matters of church authority as it relates to membership. If there is no church membership, how can you define the group that will take up this sensitive and weighty matter of exhorting the unrepentant person and finally rendering a judgment about his standing in the community? It's hard to believe that just anyone who showed up claiming to be a Christian could be a part of that gathering. Surely, “the church” must be a definable group to handle such a weighty matter. You know who you mean when you “take it to the church.”

### **3. Excommunication Exists**

Excommunication isn't telling someone they can't attend church. Excommunication is removing someone as a member of the body. They are no longer members in good standing. Church

membership is implied by the simple fact that excommunication even exists. Paul implies this in 1 Corinthians 5 where he deals with the necessity of putting someone out of the church.

There are two implications here: 1. there is an “in the church” group and an “outside the church” group. Being in the church is definable. 2. that a person can be removed from being “in the church.” Such a formal removal would not be possible if there were no such thing as a clear membership—who is an accountable part of this body, and who is not?

#### **4. Christians are Required to Submit to Their Leaders**

Church membership is implied in the biblical requirement of Christians to be submitted to a group of church leaders, elders, or pastors. The point here is that without membership, who is it that the New Testament is referring to who must submit to a specific group of leaders? Some kind of expressed willingness or covenant or agreement or commitment (that is, membership) has to precede a person’s submission to a group of leaders. Consider the way the New Testament talks about the relationship of the church to her leaders:

How is this leadership and this submission going to work if there is no membership defining who has made the commitment to be led and who has been chosen as leaders? If we downplay the importance of membership, it is difficult to see how we could take these commands to submit and to lead seriously and practically. Christians are not called to obey Christian leaders from other churches. There’s no authority there. It only works as a group of people have committed themselves to one another.

#### **5. Shepherds Required to Care for Their Flock**

Church membership is implied in the way the New Testament requires elders to care for the flock in their charge. Of course elders can extend their love to anyone and everyone, and should, within the limits of their ability. But the question is whether the Bible tells elders that they are to have a special responsibility and care for a certain group—a group of members. Consider Acts 20 where Paul tells the elders how to care for their flock.

This verse does not say elders cannot visit unbelievers or those who are not yet members. But it does make clear that their first responsibility is to a particular flock. How are they to know who their flock is? Who are we as elders and pastors responsible for? For whom will we give an account to God?

The way Peter speaks to the elders in 1 Peter 5 is even more clear on this point.

**1 Peter 5:2-3 -- “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”**

“Those in your charge” (your portion, your lot) implies that the elders knew whom they were responsible for. This is just another way of talking about membership. If a person does not want to be held accountable by a group of elders or be the special focus of the care of a group of elders, they will resist the idea of membership. And they will resist God’s appointed way for them to live and be sustained in their faith.

Without church membership being defined as a group of people who are marked out and defined (known), there are countless passages like the examples I gave in which it is impossible to make sense of how to live those out or obey them. We are called to encourage, exhort, and love one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). Every member has a role in building up the body (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Let me show you how far off we've gotten in churches when it comes to membership. Almost every church has more people in their membership roles than they have in attendance. Why is that? Because they don't manage it. It means nothing. They have people who died on it. People who haven't been there in years. People live in other states. Some could have denied the faith, but are still members. This bloated list reveals no meaningful membership in the body. No expectations.

Members of the body gather to worship regularly. They give to the body to meet the needs of the body and help fulfill the mission. They are involved in discipleship and community, using their gifts in relationship with others. They are seeking to grow in their faith and honor Christ with their lives. Church membership is about recognizing I'm a part of a family of believers who are trying to be obedient to our Savior in the world. We've made commitments to each other as we walk out our faith.

**Illustration:** My girls are dancers. They dance from August to July (with about a two week break between seasons and then back it). They are a part of a studio. This studio has teachers and trainers. My girls are in classes. Then they learn choreo with other dancers. So they have solo dances, but most of their dances are group dances (large and small), trio, and even a dance with the entire studio (called

line). These dances go to competitions and conventions. But in the dance world, there are some kids who are not a part of a studio. They show up to competitions and conventions and just do their solos. They don't commit themselves to a people, to a studio, to a regiment of training. They do their own thing. That's how many people approach their faith. I don't need anyone else. I don't need the church or won't benefit that much from being in a church. I'll do my own thing and go to the competitions. I'll attend worship occasionally, but not be a part of the body.

Now think about this, when a local church is healthy and has a healthy membership body that is serious about being faithful to the biblical expectation, there are certain things that are possible. People back in the day used to move towns and would "transfer their membership." People would become members by way of "moving their letter" rather than conversion and baptism. That means the person had already been saved and baptized at church, was a member in good standing, and the church they were coming from were testifying to this new church (the leaders were testifying) that Johnny is a member in good standing and should be admitted into their fellowship. Then what happens is Johnny is no longer under the shepherds and care of the old church, but under the new one. This doesn't really exist anymore because most don't have any requirement, standards, or accountability for membership. So when people have approached us over the years about "transferring their membership" it is unnecessary for us, because we require you to go through our process so that we know who you are.

I want to challenge everyone who has been coming to TJC for 6 months or longer, and hasn't made steps toward becoming a member, to do so. If you are newer to TJC and trying to determine if this is the local body for you, great. I'm not trying to pressure you. But if you know this is your church, but you're not a member, change that. Take the steps.

Go to Welcome to TJC, or find a Life Group or MDWK class. Find a way to connect to the body. We can help you with that. Fill out the Connect Card (QR) or go speak with someone out in the lobby at the information table. Don't just come and attend a worship service. Join the body. Be a member like the New Testament outlines.

## **Ordinances**

The word "ordinance" comes from the word ordained. Baptism and Communion in the church are called ordinances of the church because they were ordained and decreed by Jesus as practices for

His followers to observe. The term showcases that these are divine in origin and authoritative from the Lord. That means an obedient church (the covenant people people) practice these things. Jesus has the authority over the ordinances and the church administers them under the leaders of the church. These acts are central to the life and identity of the church.

Why don't we call them sacraments like the Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church? A sacrament is viewed as a means for imparting grace, particularly saving grace. We do not believe baptism nor communion save us. They are means of grace to communicate God's love and presence to us, but they are pictures of the gospel and signify spiritual truths. They point to the grace already received.

### **A. Baptism: Covenant Entry**

Baptism is a declaration of our faith and a symbol of the covenant and new life we share in Christ.

**Romans 6:3-4 -- *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***

Through baptism we confess our allegiance to Christ and trust in Him. It isn't a declaration that we're practically perfect or will never mess up again. It is a declaration that Christ is perfect and His grace is sufficient for us. This is the pathway for all believers. It is in obedience to Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) that we are baptized. If you haven't been baptized, friends, and you have trusted Christ for your salvation, don't delay any longer. It is time to take that step. Use the Connect Card, come speak to one of us down front after service, or go see someone at the Information Desk. Obedience to Christ requires baptism for the Christian.

### **B. Communion: Covenant Renewal**

This is a personal thing, but it is a communal thing. We are to remember His finished work, proclaim His salvation, anticipate His coming again, and examine our own lives and repent of our sins. Communion is the ongoing meal of fellowship believers share with one another in the presence of Christ with His people.

Jesus institutes this in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion. We are to do as often as we gather. We take it with gratitude and joy in the work of Christ in our place.

Church membership and ordinances draw us closer to God and to one another. Every baptism is a story of God's grace through Christ and reminds us of our own. Taking communion joins us together in reliance on Christ and the celebration of His finished work on our behalf.

***If you are interested in becoming a member of The Journey Church, or you are unsure of whether or not you are a member, contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)).***



**THE TJC WEEKEND RECAP PODCAST**





## LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



## LOOK UP

- **REVIEW**

- Read Romans 12:4-5 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
- Additional Scripture
  - Acts 20:28
  - 1 Corinthians 5:12-13
  - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
  - 1 Timothy 5:17
  - Hebrews 13:17
- What big takeaways did you have from the sermon?
  - What did this teach you about God?
  - What did this teach you about man?
  - What did this teach you about salvation?

- **DISCUSS**

- What does the statement "The local church is the hope of the world" mean?
- What makes church membership distinct from other forms of membership like a club or a gym?
- How does Romans 12:4-5 illustrate church membership?
- What are the two ordinances of the church and how are they significant?
- What role do the ordinances play in strengthening the local church?
- Do you know what is required to be a member of The Journey Church?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEMORIZE**

- **Hebrews 10:12 – Sow yourselves righteous; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.**

## LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP:** How will you be built up this week? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
  - **Life Groups** are a time and place to connect and learn to better follow Jesus together while abiding in Him. Life Groups are the primary means of disciple-making at TJC. Our groups focus on connecting, learning, following, and abiding. Groups meet weekly on various days/times across Wilson County. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month. Contact Laura DiLeonardi ([laura@tjclive.com](mailto:laura@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Men** exists to equip men to show Jesus as incomparably glorious in every sphere of their lives. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a in the student center. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group. Contact Larry Davis ([larry@tjclive.com](mailto:larry@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Kids** believes that the Gospel saves, sanctifies, gathers and sends. It is our desire to see our kids understand that the Gospel truly does change everything and we will do this primarily by teaching our kids to love Jesus, showing them they can have fun in the process, and making sure they stay safe. Contact Nick Judd ([nick@tjclive.com](mailto:nick@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p. Contact Hunter Christian ([hunter@tjclive.com](mailto:hunter@tjclive.com)) for more information.
- **SEND OUT:** How do you plan to be sent out to engage the world around you? We have several opportunities for local and international missions.
  - **For the City:** Acts 1:8 calls us to be engaged where we live and among the nations. The people of TJC seek to bring truth, grace, and hope to Lebanon and the surrounding area by mobilizing the church to be salt and light, not only for the city, but for your city. Take

part in faithfully and obediently using your gifts to declare God's glory among those who are hopeless living among you today. Contact Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **For the Nations:** At TJC we exist to show Jesus as incomparably glorious to Lebanon and beyond. We are ambitious and passionate about strategically taking an active role in finishing the Great Commission as we actively pursue the unreached peoples of the world by mobilizing the entire church to pray, send, go and welcome international friends among us. Contact Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our staff:** John Hogan (Tech Director)
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
  - Central Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
  - Southeast Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
  - Europe Team departing on March 21, 2025
  - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on April 25, 2025
- **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
  - The Wilsons
  - The Grays
  - The Starks
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>