

Living Church Membership

Church Membership

By Don Green

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Truth Community Fellowship

Creation Museum

2800 Bullittsburg Church Road

Petersburg, KY 41080

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I'm delighted to welcome all of you here again this morning. Last week we said that church membership is a formal commitment to identify with a local body of believers in their doctrine and in their practice so as to share in the privileges and responsibilities of the church. You make a commitment of church membership in order to identify yourself with that body. You recognize, you come, you learn what a church teaches from the Scriptures and you say, "That's what I believe too. I want to identify with that church. I want to share in the life of that church. I want to contribute to what it does, not just financially but with my very life and I want to receive the benefit of the ministry of that church because I believe that this is a church that represents what Christ laid his life down for." If you believe that about the church that you attend, then it is a responsible part of your obedience to Christ to identify with that if you're a born again believer in Christ. For someone who comes and says, "I don't agree with what this church teaches. I dislike and I don't trust the leadership," well, then a person like that should simply find another place to go to attend and worship because part of the existence, part of the identity of a true church is that there would be a unity, that we are pulling our oars in the same direction. The church is meant to be a unified body and so part of what we have done in recent weeks is we've made it plain what our doctrine is.

We've been teaching since the first of the year, we taught a series on what we believe as a church. There are no secrets. There are no hidden agendas. Everything is out and open and plain for people to see and we've made other things available so that it's very clear what we stand for. We think that that is part of a church with integrity is to publicly make plain what it believes. I'm not at all impressed with churches that hide their doctrine. You go to their website and it's very difficult to find a statement of faith to see what they believe. They are tricking people that way. They're trying to be all things to all people rather than standing for the truth and while that may generate a large crowd, it's really not reflective of what the church of Jesus Christ should be. When the apostles were preaching in Acts, their message was clear, "Repent and believe in the gospel. Repent. Be baptized," and things of that nature. There was a clear doctrinal content to their preaching and it called for a commitment. That's the way it should be. The effort to make the church the lowest common denominator of anybody who can make the barest profession of some kind of belief in a vague God has nothing to do with the biblical church of Christ and we reject all of that and that's why we've tried to be here at Truth Community, we've done

our best to be articulate, to identify what it is that we believe so that people can say, "Okay, I know what you stand for. I disagree. I'm going someplace else." Well, okay, God bless you as you go. For others who say, "No, that is what I believe and I do want to be a part of it," then church membership is the appropriate response.

So, as you can gather, we've taught a lot on the church recently and I'm going to assume a lot of the content of some of those past messages; I'm not going to repeat so many important things that were said in the past. The messages "What is the church?" and "Why does the church exist?" are kind of assumed in what I'm saying here this morning. Today is a more narrow message; today is a message about the joys of being part of a church, the responsibilities of being a church member. There is a foundational passage that we'll just look at briefly that can set our mind in the right direction. Turn to Ephesians 5. We have been singing about this verse this morning. There has been reference to the love of Christ for his church in the very hymns that we have sung this morning but I want to take you to Ephesians 5 just to kind of set the tone. Why is it that a Christian, an individual Christian who has been saved from their sins by the righteousness and shed blood of Jesus Christ, why is it that a Christian should be committed to the local church? That is the question. I realize that a lot of people think that they can just be a Christian on their own and they want to worship at home and not be a part of a body, here's why today's message will help you understand why that could never be, that that is a serious distortion of what the life of a Christian should be.

Ephesians 5:25, in a passage where Paul is speaking about the responsibilities of a husband and wife in marriage, he makes this statement in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives." Why should I love my wife? "Just as," there is a parallel to the love of a husband for his wife to something very significant and even more transcendent truth, "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." Now, that tells us something very significant about the work of Christ, something very significant about the love and the affection and the motivation of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was an object to his affection. There was an object that was the receiving beneficiary of his shed blood on the cross and this passage tells us that it was the church. It was those who would believe in Christ and come to know him personally having repented of their sins and put their trust in him for the salvation from their sins. Christ died for those people. He died that they might be forgiven from their sins and not only be forgiven and be relieved from the penalty of eternal punishment but that he might transform them and make them a people for himself.

Turn over to the book of Titus at a verse that we've looked at in the past, Titus 2. I want you to see this as well. This is so very foundational and understanding church membership and our responsibilities and privileges in church membership flow from understanding and recognizing this foundational aspect of the work of Christ. Titus 2:14 says that Christ Jesus "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Now, brothers and sisters in Christ, friends from different parts of this region, I want you to

realize that when you see the idea that Christ died to redeem a people, that Christ gave himself for the church, there is a community significance to that. Although we are individually the recipients of the blessings of the redemptive work of Christ, he died to place us in a body with other believers. We do not become Christians to live in isolation. We become Christians in order to participate in the life of a body that Christ died to redeem. He had bigger pictures in mind than just our individual redemption and if we are to grow in Christ and become the people that he wants us to be, we must understand that we live out our Christian life in large measure in the life of a local church and that is what underlies the principle of church membership. Christ died for the church. He died to redeem a people and those who belong to Christ realize implicitly and also as they come to the word of God, they realize that Christ died and placed us in a larger context in a body of which we are a member and so that's what undergirds it.

I like what the theologian Bruce Milne said about the church. He said and I quote, "The church is a necessary part of Christian experience to be taken with utmost seriousness. It was God's love for the church that brought Christ to Calvary hence the measure of our conformity with the mind of Christ will be the extent of our concern for the church." Do you hear what he's saying? Individually those of you who love Christ, those of you who love him because of the fact that he laid down his life and shed his blood for the redemption of your soul, you're not a Christian if you don't understand that and you're not a Christian if you don't love Christ for what he did on your behalf. A true Christian loves Christ; a true Christian recognizes that he has a hope of heaven only because he is relying on the merits of a Savior that is outside of himself. And so there is this wonderful vertical affection that we have for Christ because of what he means for our individual redemption, what he means for the salvation of our own soul. Well, here's the next step in that, beloved: it's to realize that Christ's concern, the object of Christ's affection, was for an entire body of people like you and therefore if you are going to be conformed to the mind of Christ, if you are going to grow in your walk with Christ, then obviously the more that we become like Christ, the more that we are going to share in the affections that motivated him to go to Calvary and what motivated him to go to Calvary was his love for the church.

So part of the measure of your spiritual life, part of the way that you can assess yourself to understand, "Am I growing spiritually or not?" is to say, "What do I think about the people of God? Do I care about the people of God? Do I contribute to the life of a local body or not?" because that is what Christ died for and if we belong to Christ, then there is going to be an overflow of similar affections coming out of our own lives. That's what we want to address here this morning. Church membership is for true Christians only and it is for true Christians who understand their responsibility to obey Christ in commitment to a local body and it's for true Christians who embrace that, who want that, who say, "Of course. It's not that I obey contrary to my desires, I share in an affection for the church because I love Christ and I know that Christ gave himself for a body that he could call his own." So there is a sympathy, there is an aligning of our affections and purposes with what Christ established 2,000 years ago when he went to the cross. Christ died to make us a part of his church and we live life in response to that reality.

That leads us to the question, a very practical question this morning. We've kind of given the theological grounding of it, the foundation of it, now for a practical question as we, speaking to those that are a part of our body here: what do we do as members of Truth Community Church? What are the specific things that should occupy our time and attention? What do we aim ourselves after? What do we do? And this would be true of any church gathered together, members of any particular church. This isn't unique to Truth Community, this is what would be true of the members of any healthy local church. What do we do? Well, first of all, I'm going to give you three items this morning. Somehow I tend to focus on the number three, don't I, for my preaching points? I'll vary that sometime: I'll do two or four and you won't know what to do with yourselves when that happens. For today it's three.

First of all. What do we do as members of a church? First of all, we meet together. We meet together just like we're doing this morning, just as we do in other times of the week. Church members make regular attendance at church meetings a life priority. It is where we worship God together. It is where we serve each other together. It is a biblical mandate. It is not optional. It is not something that we do when we feel like it and then go elsewhere when we don't, there should be a life priority of commitment to gathering together with the people of God. Turn to the book of Hebrews which makes this exceedingly clear. Hebrews 10, in a familiar passage and I'm going to give it a little more context than perhaps is normally given for this but I just want you to see that the responsibility to meet together flows out of the implications of the blood sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In Hebrews 10:19, it says, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh," so this passage is grounded in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. He says in verse 21, "and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Here's what he says, "Beloved, remember the sacrifice of Christ and as you remember that, come together. Come together to encourage one another. Assemble together so that you might stimulate one another to love and good deeds. This is part of the life of being in the body of Christ." And for true Christians and for the vast majority of people that associate themselves with Truth Community just for the sake of you visitors, we don't have to compel people to do this. We don't have to take attendance and call people up to get them to attend. People gladly come; they want to be together. I love that about our church. Our people love to be together. Well, do you know what? There's a reason for that and it's because of the work of the Spirit in your hearts that it is like that. It's not out of a sense of external obligation. It's where you want to be and it's a sign, beloved. For those of you that attend our church, I just want you to realize the significance of this. It's more than that we have a place to meet together and we have fellow Christians to be together, this is a sign, this is a mark, this is a signature token of the fact that Christ is at

work in our midst, that there is something supernatural happening when a group of people want to be together around the word of God and to fellowship together. It's reflective of the life of Christ flowing from the death of Christ and it is a mark that a real true spiritual work is at place and is at work in our midst. I think that's exciting. I find that very encouraging and our assurance is deepened as we meet together, as we take this seriously together, as we respond to the word of God together like that. It's a mark of the work of Christ in our midst. I don't know about you but if Christ is at work in something, I want to be a part of it. I want to be there. I don't want that happening away from me. I don't want to miss out and that's part of life in the church.

So, what do we do as church members? We meet together. We get together. Look one more time, if you would, at verse Hebrews 10:24 and kind of exposing some of my own past Christian failures in what I say to highlight. I know to highlight this because I realize there have been times where I have fallen short in this in my own life. Before I read the verse, let me just say this: your focus, it's a travesty what the seeker-sensitive movement has done to the church because what they've said is, "We're going to orient the church according to your felt needs." That's their primary motivation so that they can gather a crowd and what it is that you need, that's what we're going to address. We're going to make it so that you get out of this what you want. Do you know what that conditions Christians to be? Professing Christians using the term loosely. It conditions them to be selfish. It conditions them to think about church about what they can get out of it and so I go to church because of what I can get. The leadership says that what I want is what matters and that's how they frame it. That is turning the purpose of church meetings on its head. It is turning it upside down. We do not meet together for the primary sake of what we can get out of it and whether this particular topic that the pastor is going to speak will mean something to me or not. Or, "I feel pretty good so I don't need to be there this morning." That is not the point. Look, think about it from the perspective of how we introduced this message and you'll realize how much that could not be the case. Christ gave himself for the church. In an act of self-emptying he sacrificed himself for the good of his people so that they could be redeemed. It was an act of sacrifice, of selflessness, that brought us into the realm of spiritual salvation.

Well, that same spirit if we belong to Christ, animates us when we come together so that we're not thinking about primarily what we can get out of it, we come together with a mindset of, "How can I give to my brothers and sisters when I come today?" We come not with a self-focus, "What are they going to do for me?" we come with a mindset looking for, "How can I be a blessing to my brothers and sisters in Christ today?" Look at Hebrews 10:24 and you'll see this. This radically alters the way that we approach our meeting together. The writer of Hebrews, the Bible says that God commanding his people, Christ leading us through his word, telling us how to think about our meeting together says, "consider how you can stimulate one another to love and good deeds." Consider, verse 25, "how you can be encouraging one another." We come with an agenda to say, "I'm going to be looking for the opportunities to be a blessing to the people that I interact with." That's why we gather together. It's not what we get, it's what we give. We give because Christ gave himself for us so when we gather together as his people, we come with a primary motivation, "I'm here to give of myself to the blessing of the body

of Christ just as Christ gave himself for the body of Christ." You see, it's really remarkable, isn't it, how understanding the work of Christ and the object of his affection shapes the entire way that you approach life in the church. It's not about what I get out of it, it's about identifying with the purposes of Christ and saying, "I'm here to give."

With that said, beloved, let me take it just one more step further in this meeting together. One of the things that Christ commanded in his word is that Christ set up things by which we would remember his death on behalf of the church, that there would be ongoing repeated pictures of his death for the church that would be incorporated into the life of the church to help us always remember our Savior and never drift too far away from the centrality of his redemptive sacrifice on the cross for us. Now, follow me here: if the death of Christ is at the center of the life of the church, and it is, and that motivates and frames the way that we think about the church, and it does, then – watch this because I'm going to step on some toes here I know and that's okay. Sometimes we need our toes stepped on – then if our affection for Christ is such that we love his church like that, then – watch this – when the church gets together to memorialize, to remember his death and things that he has appointed for us to do, then it should be a priority of the membership of the church to be there when that happens. So when the church remembers the death of Christ in the act of Communion, it should be a priority for church members to be there because the membership of the church is flowing out of the death of Christ and when that is remembered, we should be there to honor the death through which we received our life.

Look at 1 Corinthians 11. As you're turning there let me just say: every church that I've been in, if there is a special Communion service, you can count on a dwindled attendance and this is a phenomenon that is a problem for churches everywhere but it ought not to be this way. When the death of Christ is remembered, the membership of the church should most particularly want to be there to share in it. And notice that this is a command of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:23. Paul said, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you.'" Do you see the theme? Do you see the common theme? Here it is, the life of Christ, the physical body of Christ given for you. He did that for the church, now he applies that and he says at that last Passover meal when he instituted the Lord's Supper, he said, "This is my body which is for you." Notice the command, "do this in remembrance of Me." Verse 25, "In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" And so Christ instituted the church ordinance of Communion and told his people, "You should gather together and do this so that you remember that which gave you life." There should be a heart desire to be together with the people of God when Communion is being celebrated. If Communion is not taken seriously, if we pass by Communion and say, "A Communion service isn't important to me," then we're not honoring Christ in the way that we should. We need to give Communion a priority in our time together. As we meet together, one of the things that we do is we meet together in order to take Communion together.

A similar thing could be said about the ordinance of baptism. Turn over to Matthew 28, at the end of the chapter. Verse 18, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" And so as Christ gave command in his Great Commission to the church, he said, "Go and baptize them." My only point for here is for us to recognize that baptism is a way that we remember the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as it is shown in the lives of those who have been converted. Communion is a time where we remember the death and resurrection of Christ. And so the ordinances which remember Christ, those become the things by which we remember him and as church members – here's the point – as church members, we gather together to honor that. We recognize that there is a responsibility there that we gladly fulfill. Church members should honor Christ's command and be present whenever at all possible when his ordinances are being observed. That's what we do as a church. We meet together and we remember the Lord who died for us and we do so gladly, joyfully and recognize that this is what Christ has, in part, saved us to do so that we could meet together.

Now, secondly. We not only meet together but secondly we receive biblical instruction. We receive biblical instruction. Christ calls the church to uphold and transmit the truth. A church exists to propagate the truth from one generation to another. That involves serious Bible teaching. Turn to 1 Timothy 3, if you would. Notice in this passage how Paul identifies this as the purpose of the church. He says in 1 Timothy 3:14, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God," stop right there. What is it? A church should be continually asking themselves, "What is it that we are supposed to do? Where did we come from?" We came from a fountain of blood flowing from the veins of our Lord Jesus Christ. That has a defining impact on us. "What has he said in his word that we should do?" Well, contrary to the minimization of biblical teaching and biblical doctrine that is endemic to the world around us and particularly in what passes for evangelical Christianity in America today, look at what it says in verse 15. "I want you to know how to conduct yourself in the church, the church is the pillar and support of the truth." The church exists to propagate the truth, to proclaim the truth, to teach the truth so that people would understand and respond to it and obey it.

Look over at 1 Timothy 4:13 where Paul said, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching." One of the ways that you can recognize a true church is to go in and you don't have to be there too long before you say, "Is this book, are the 66 books of the Bible, central to what that church does or not?" If you don't need to open your Bible when you are in a church week after week after week, there is one thing you can say about it no matter what the sign says out front, that is not a church of Christ because the church of Jesus Christ teaches the word of Jesus Christ and that is found only in the written word of Christ in the 66 books of the Bible. And the fact that the man on the street finds Bible teaching irrelevant and not pertinent to his life is not a reason to abandon the Bible. It's a reason to call that man on the street to repentance and

to bring the gospel to bear upon his conscience. You don't stop doing what you're supposed to do at a church because someone who has no claim on Christ says, "That doesn't interest me." That's foolishness. That is like stepping on your own air hose in order to do what? I don't know what. To get the approval of people who are under the judgment of God? Why would you do that? Our purpose is not the approval of man. Our church exists, I'd preach for an audience of one and there should be a sense in which you live your Christian life for an audience of one as your primary sense of obligation, the supreme affection of your life comes down to the Lord who gave birth to you. As you do that, flowing out of that is going to be a commitment to the church. But we get our marching orders from Christ. We have never taken a survey of what people in our community want. We never will. We don't need to know what the people in the community want, what we need to know is what does Christ want. Christ says, "You give attention to the public reading of Scripture and to teaching." That's why the church should gather together. It's really not complicated, is it? It's really not difficult. It's not like there's anything conceptually impossible to understand in Christ's call to the church. What's difficult, the reason that this gets confused is because people in leadership want a big, big audience to preach to. That's why they gather together. Well, we reject that. We would rather have an audience of one and be pleased and let him spread the human audience as he sees fit.

Let me show you one other passage in this regard. 2 Timothy 4 and I just want you to see, beloved, for me personally life in Truth Community has been the highlight of my life. Our time together, the things that we do and share together, the relationships that we have here together and I've had a really good life. The Lord has just given me good things but to be with my wife and children here in this place with all of you has been the highlight of my life. It's the joy of my life. It is wonderful. Yet what I want you to see from the passage that we're about to see in 2 Timothy 4 is that there is a seriousness that underlies the work of the church, that we live out these things in the presence of Christ and while it is joyful, it is not a superficial joy. It's a sober joy that comes out of the seriousness of the call of what we do. 2 Timothy 4:1, notice how Paul puts this, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom," this is a charge of great solemnity and Paul calls God and the Lord Jesus Christ as witnesses to what he is laying upon Timothy and thus by extension what he lays upon the church. What is that charge? Verse 2, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

It's like he foresaw the church in America in the 21st century in verse 3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires." Is that not a direct rebuke of the seeker-sensitive model of ministry? What do they do except to say, "We will find out what you want and we will give it to you." All they are doing is saying, "Our model of ministry is 2 Timothy 4:3. We will accumulate people according to their desires and give it to them." Well, that's not the right place to be doing ministry. You're supposed to do ministry out of 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction."

So what do we do as members of Truth Community? In response to the Scriptures, in response to a holy command from Scripture, we preach the word and we gather together to receive that and to honor it and to defend it and to uphold it. That's why we gather together. We exist for that purpose and we're glad that we can. With that, there comes an application, you could say. Perspective members of a church should understand in a basic sense what their church teaches and agree to support it in the life of the church. We strive for a unified voice consistent with Christ who died for us and so if a person comes to a church and says, "I don't agree with that. I don't agree with that. I don't agree with that." The answer to that is not to create division by calling people off in the back row. We've had that happen here in days gone by and those people are no longer with us. But call people in the back row and say, "I don't agree with that, do you?" and start to sow seeds of division and doubt. If you don't agree with the teaching of a church, fine. Find a church that you do agree with. Don't divide one over it. There should be a unified voice coming from a church that is consistent with the truth of God and when a church identifies and is public about what it teaches, then it is incumbent upon a member to say, "I agree with that and I'll support it. Might disagree with a detail here or there but I'm not going to make it an issue, a division. I'm not going to stir people up against the teaching of the elders on that. I see that differently and, you know, I can support the teaching of the church." What we can't do, what can't be tolerated is somebody in the name of truth creating a division that undermines the very purpose for which the church exists. So we receive biblical instruction and we do so in a unified way. The church's obligation is to make known what it teaches and the response of people who come is to say, "I understand that. I receive that. I affirm that. I live for that. I defend that. Therefore I want to be a part of a church that upholds what I believe." So we exist to receive and promote biblical instruction in the spirit of unity.

Now thirdly as we come around the corner. Point 3: we minister to one another. There has been a vertical dimension to what we've said so far in terms of meeting together to honor Christ, to honor the death of Christ; the vertical dimension of proclaiming the word of Christ and receiving that. Now we come into a horizontal dimension of the ministry of the church. The membership of the church is not only vertically oriented, by the command and design of Christ, there is a horizontal dimension. There is a horizontal commitment to others in the church as well. So as Christ gave himself for the body of the church, we give ourselves to the body in numerous ways and let me give you five quick aspects of that from the book of Romans. In one sense, the whole New Testament would answer this point but we're just going to look at five quick things from the book of Romans, five subpoints of how we minister to one another in the body of Christ. Romans 12.

How do we minister to one another? First of all, we use our spiritual gifts in the body. We use our spiritual gifts in the body. Look at verse 4 where the Apostle Paul said, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." So we belong to Christ but there is a mutual commitment, there is a mutual life that we share in the context of a local church in the principle of spiritual life. We share in

this. We're a part of one another and, of course, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the illustration of a body: an ear, an eye, serving different parts, all part of one body. Well, that's what we're addressing here. Romans 12:6 now, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy," and the proclamation of God's word, "according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." There are a variety of ways, Scripture says, that the body of Christ ministers to one another. All of them important. All of us gifted in different measure to serve in different ways, to fit together as puzzle pieces, putting together one unified picture of a body of serving one another. So I know for a fact that people who become members of Truth Community are somehow gifted to contribute to the life of the body because God gifts every Christian in a way so that somehow they contribute to the greater good. We server each other with our spiritual gifts. That's one way that we minister to one another.

Now, Paul goes on, secondly: we share in each other's joys and sorrows. Look briefly at verse 15 of Romans 12 and I chose passages just out of this last section of Romans for the sake of continuity and to help it all fit together. Verse 15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." So part of our life together is sharing in the ups and downs, the sorrows and the happinesses of life. We share in life together and when you're sorrowing, I sorrow with you. When I'm rejoicing, you're rejoicing with me. We share in this together because we are united by the common life of Christ that dwells in each of our hearts and we realize as we go through life together that sometimes you're going to be happy and I'm going to be sad and vice versa and we share in that together. Well look, the only way that that becomes meaningful is if you are committed to the same body of Christians over time. To come in and out of a particular congregation, to be one place one week and another place another week and never settle down into a church home makes it impossible for a man or a woman to obey this command of Christ, to share in those joys together.

We don't have a problem with this in our church as you'll see at the end for those of you that are visiting. Usually the problem that we have in people sharing together is that they won't stop. So we're borrowing this facility, this beautiful facility from the Creation Museum. So many of you are here to visit here today and there's a time limit and our problem usually is that we have to come alongside people and say, "It's time to go. It's time to go," because they are so busy sharing in life together, sharing things together. In other places, it's not that way. Some of you have told me that you've come from churches where as soon as the Amen was gone, people were in the parking lot. How are we sharing together in life together if we come together, hear a message and we split right away to get onto whatever else is next in the day? No, we share in each other's joys and sorrows and the only way that that's meaningful is if you are committed to a body of Christians over time. You stay through hard times as well as the good times. In the life of a church, there will be ups and downs just like there are in your life but there is a deeper commitment than just saying, "I'm just going to ride the top of the wave. I'm not going to go when things get low or when the wave comes into shore and it's not any fun anymore."

You know, that's not commitment. "I'll be committed as long as I'm committed." Well, let's just say, "Okay, you're not committed then." No, the commitment of membership is an enduring commitment that gives us the opportunity to meaningfully share in life together: to bury parents together; to go through heartaches with children together; to go through financial crises and work out the implications of that; to rejoice when loved ones come to Christ and we see them baptized. All of that, sharing together, ministering together, that's part of the life of the body of Christ. That's how it is supposed to be. Not a group of 150 people coming together in isolated silos moving about. No, we share this together. We love each other through the good and the bad. That's what Paul is saying when he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

As you go on and read in Romans, you see that there is a third aspect of ministering to one another. We said that not only are you using your spiritual gifts in the body, sharing in the joys and the sorrows in the body, thirdly: we share in the financial support of the body. Look at Romans 15:27. Paul makes this very interesting point in the middle of verse 27. He's talking about gathering a collection for the saints in Jerusalem and he says in verse 26 that in a couple of regions in Macedonia and Achaia they made a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Now watch what he says here in verse 27, "Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them." Then he says this and he gives us a principle that helps us understand the righteous responsibility that we all share in the financial life of a church. He says, "For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." There is a biblical principle that those who share in the spiritual benefit of a ministry should contribute to the financial health of that ministry that it makes those spiritual things possible. We don't simply eat from the table and not give back, we do both as a recognition of the fact that there's a mutuality that takes place.

Now, one of the things that we've done, again, being mindful of the fact that some of you, some of us, have come from churches where there was such a heavy hand was played with financial matters on you. We've made it a point of our church not to do that. We don't pass a plate during the service. We just have a little box outside where people can give because we want to make it obvious that we are trying to emphasize the fact that we are here to minister spiritual things, not to receive financial things from those that are there. What makes that work is the generosity that marks the people of our church who fulfill their responsibility, who gladly do that as we've been so abundantly blessed in our church, who do that when they're not prompted to do so in the middle of the service. That's what makes that work. On behalf of our elders and our leadership, I just want to thank you for the generosity that has put our church in a position of such prosperity that we are able to sustain that. We don't have to prompt you visibly every week with plates passing because people have embraced that responsibility and do so voluntarily outside. All of that simply to say that that financial support is a responsibility of membership and I'm grateful to be amongst a people where we can make those things happen and sustain the needs of our church without having to wave that heavy hand. We're never going to wave that heavy hand. We'll just live within our means. So to the extent that that philosophy of ministry appeals to you, your support is what helps make that happen.

Thank you from the elders and God bless you for that. Membership shares in the financial support of the body.

Fourthly, what else do we do? We pray for those in the body. Look down in Romans 15:30, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit," see how he puts Christ at the center of it again? Christ is at the center of everything that we're talking about here today, isn't he? Christ gave himself for the church and so when you're talking about the life of the church, Christ just comes into the conversation spontaneously. It's as if Christ is making himself known as we talk about this and asserting his divine prerogatives, his rights over us by creation and by redemption and say, "This is what I want." Well, that's what happens when you read his word, Christ makes himself known. He declares what he wants from his people. This is a blessed thing to see and so Christ, speaking through his word, says in verse 30, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Paul is saying, "Please pray for me." Verse 31, "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Turn over also to the book of Ephesians 6 just for a cross-reference here, to kind of expand that. You see Paul asking for prayer. Well, this is to mark the life in the church that somehow in the way that we go through life together, somehow in one way or another and we're not going to regulate this, but somehow in one way or another we are carrying each other in our prayers throughout the week, that the people of Truth Community have a place somewhere in your prayer life, that you're praying for those with whom you share a spiritual life together. This is part of our privilege to know that we're not walking through life alone, that we can rest on, depend upon the fact that not only is Christ interceding for us in heaven but our brothers and sisters in Christ here on earth that we know and that we share the joys and sorrows of life with are praying for us too. That's the way it's supposed to be. That's how you cultivate unity in a body. It's hard to be divided against people that you're on your knees praying for and so in Ephesians 6:18 Paul says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for," what? "All the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Paul says, "Pray for one another. Make it a priority. This is what members of the body of Christ do. They share their spiritual gifts with each other. They share in the joys and sorrows of life. They share financially. They share in prayer together."

Then one final point with all of that said and I've hinted at this already. What do we do as members of the body as we minister to one another? Lastly, this is the fifth of those five subpoints: we consciously preserve the unity of the body. We are jealous to guard the unity of the body together. We don't simply delegate that to leadership. We don't pass over things because we want to avoid conflict. We are mindful of the need to protect the

unity. Look at chapter 16, verse 17, where Paul says, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ," there it is again, Christ making himself know, saying, "This is what I want for my church." He just injects his name as we look at these things and says, "This is what I'm calling my church to be." This is not the teachings of man. This is what Christ says to us through his word. He says, "Those men who cause dissensions are slaves not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." Christ says, "Watch out for men like that. Watch out for those who start to set one part against another part and realize they're slaves of their appetite." Even as they come proclaiming themselves to be Christians, even as they come with those and this is particularly something to watch out for, those who say, "I have an elevated knowledge of Scripture, an elevated knowledge of Christ and saying what you need to do is you need to start turning away from what you've been taught." In the name of a superior knowledge of Christ, they work against the purposes of Christ by dividing his body. Beloved, one of the things that we do as a body, one of the things that church membership does is we consciously preserve the unity of the body. We're not ignorant of Satan and his schemes. We realize that those things are a threat over time to the health of a church and together, collectively, we stand together and we say, "We're going to guard ourselves against such things because the Bible says to protect the unity, guard against dissension."

Here's the thing, beloved, here is how we tie it all together. This is the unifying thought in all of it: we have such a reverence for Christ, we have such a gratitude for the Lord Jesus Christ in procuring our redemption at the cost of his own shed blood that we want to further his purposes, that we want to be loyal to him. Because he's been so good to us, we want to respond with loyalty to him. The unifying thought in all of what we've talked about here today is that this is one of the ways in church membership that we manifest our loyalty and our obedience back to the one who bought us. We meet together, we gather together in his name. We receive instruction from his word in his name. We minister to one another, together in his name. In his name. It's not for the name of Truth Community Church or any of its leadership, it is for the name. The name. The name of Christ. The glory of the one who rescued my soul from eternal destruction. The glory of the one whom I will one day see face-to-face. The glory of the one whom we still proclaim as the only Savior of sinners. For the name. For the name. For the name of Christ to whom the church belongs. Do you see, beloved? That's our motivation in church membership. That's why we gather together and make commitments around doctrine and other life participation. For the name. For the name. Because in his name this is what he's called us to. We realize the superficiality. We look around and we see the superficiality in the church, small c, around us and we separate ourselves from that and we say, "That is not the kind of commitment that Christ has called us to or of whom he has preeminently worthy." The name is why we do this. The name is why we commit ourselves to a church. The name is why we commit ourselves to one another. The name of our Lord Jesus is why we are committed to the church. Because it was for the church that Christ loved and gave himself at Calvary. For the name.

Bow with me in prayer.

For those of you that have never trusted Christ for your salvation, don't get left behind. I invite you today to turn from sin and to receive this one, this Christ, this great name, who died and rose again to gather a people who would live for him. Come out of the world, won't you? And come to Christ and identify with him and his people. He calls you to come to the name.

Father, as we continue to grow and mature as a body of believers, I pray that you would just help us live out what we have seen from your word today. Lord Jesus, it's with fear and trembling that we close this service. You make yourself known. We are mindful that we preach because of a solemn charge made in the presence of God and in the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the word in season and out of season. It is such a joy to know you and we are so grateful for our salvation but we realize that the reception of so great a salvation puts upon us a responsibility of loyalty and fidelity to you that we will one day give an account for and so help us to be faithful as we meet together, as we receive instruction from your word and as we minister to one another. Father, I pray that you would so work these things out in the minds and hearts of your people that come together here week by week that there would be a glad sense of response that says, "I want to be a part of Truth Community Church. I want to belong to a church that stands for what this church stands for." Father, may the coming day when we make that affirmation public together in weeks to come, may that be a grand time which gives glory and honor to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to whom and through whom we pray. Amen.

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