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*“Meaningful Membership – Embody God’s Love”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26; EPHESIANS 4:11-16

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## AT A GLANCE

Unpack with us the biblical vision for church membership—not as a social club or casual association, but as active participation in the body of Christ. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, we see that God has arranged each believer to play a meaningful part in the local church, where growth, care, and unity happen. Baptism and gospel clarity are essential entrance points, and membership is marked by mutual love, service, and accountability. Meaningful membership is not entitlement—it’s embodiment of God’s love within the Church for His glory.

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## THE CHURCH IS A BODY, NOT A CLUB

The Church is not a club you join—it’s a body you belong to. Not a place to attend, but a people to whom you’re connected. As we continue in our Core Values series we’re examining what the bible says about you, the Church, and membership.

The Church is a body with many members united in purpose and growing toward maturity in Christ. That kind of growth doesn’t happen by accident. It happens when every part is showing up, serving, supporting, and submitting, to, for, and with one another. That’s meaningful membership.

Not just attending, but embodying. Not just being fed, but building. Because the bible says that when each part is working together properly, the body builds itself up in love. If biblical elders *proclaim* God’s love, and transformed families *reflect* God’s love, meaningful membership *embodies* God’s love.

Let’s go to the Word and let it saturate our heart and ask: Am I living as a functioning, faithful, fruitful member of Christ’s Body?

## THE BODY IS ONE, WITH MANY MEMBERS

**For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 1 Corinthians 12:12-18**

First, a clarification about the body of Christ. Paul told the Colossians, *“And [Christ] is the head of the body, the church.” Colossians 1:18* When Paul writes in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12, as well as

Romans 12, he refers to the universal Church, however, what becomes clear is how essential the local body is to practically carry this out.

For instance, I have no authority as an elder of Wildwood to make decisions for FBC Silvis. Wildwood Church has vetted me and has agreed to let me preach and lead. Nor am I responsible for shepherding the good people of that church.

Consider also the implications for you. You're placed in the body to serve the church and follow its elders. How and where do you practically do that in the universal body? Paul desired that the universal body would mature and be unified, but this is carried out in the local body.

## WE'RE BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY

Second, we are **baptized into one body**. We believe the biblical model of baptism is that people are converted by the Holy Spirit, believe the gospel, repent of sin, and are baptized.

After Peter preached the gospel in Acts 2, and many people believed it, they asked what they must do. Peter responded with, "*Repent and be baptized.*" *Acts 2:38*

Jesus told us in His final instructions to, "*Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.*" *Matthew 28:19*

Can you be saved and not be baptized? I think the thief on the cross represents the answer to that question. However, why would you want to be? Why would you look at the example and the mandate of Jesus – who was baptized and told us to baptize – and say, "No"?

While we acknowledge there may be some who are part of the universal body of Christ who are not baptized, as a matter of practice, striving to be faithful to the Lord, we view believer's baptism as a prerequisite for membership in the local church.

Not because we want to withhold from anyone. But because they go hand in hand. See, membership in the church takes place when the body, or it's designated agents, in our case the elders, hear your testimony and can attest that what you believe is the true gospel.

If you have not been baptized as a believer, that is the next right step. And in being baptized as a profession of faith, you are declaring publicly that you have been joined to Christ, the head of the church, and thereby joined with His body, both universal, and local.

## MEMBERSHIP IS EMBODIMENT, NOT ENTITLEMENT

Speaking of body, this brings us to my third observation. Church membership is body membership, not social membership. When people think about church membership, they sometimes get tripped up by the country-club or wholesale club mentality.

Unlike the church, membership in these organizations brings entitlement with no responsibility. As a member of Costco or Sam's Club, I am entitled to enter their store during normal operating hours and purchase their 100-roll pack of toilet paper if I want to.

If I don't, I have no obligation to. I pay my dues which entitle me to participate as I see fit. But biblical membership, or as we call it *meaningful membership*, is not entitlement, it is embodiment.

We get this concept of membership in both Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12, as well as Romans 12. We are **members of the body**. What is implied with that concept?

Let me ask you, what do you expect of the members of your body? Would you consider membership in your body to be about cooperation or consumption? Are you ok with members of your body simply coming along for the ride?

Most people get frustrated when a member of their body stops working. I was not pleased when, as a 19-year-old West Point cadet in summer training – doing land navigation and obstacle courses, my appendix just decided it no longer wanted to cooperate with the rest of my body, doing whatever it is appendixes do.

After returning from land navigation with sweat-drenched uniforms three days straight and after jumping onto a horizontal telephone pole 12 feet off the ground on my belly, I decided it was time that my appendix and I come to terms with our relationship. Actually, it was the medic who finally pressed down and said, “Does it hurt here?” Yeah, that hurts bud! Like a 10!

Back to the concept of membership in the body, we are embodied as members of the local church. We are put into the body and if we’re put into the body, arranged by God, He must have a purpose for us in that body.

We believe that every Christian should join themselves to a local body and use their gifts to serve the Lord. We may not know how local churches received new people in the first century, but we do know that they knew who was part of them, they actively worked together, and were shepherded and led by elders who knew them and they knew their elders.

So, while the exact process is unclear from scripture, the essence of our membership process, called *Partner With Wildwood*, is helping you understand what Wildwood is about so you can make an informed decision, and helping us get to know about you so we can make an informed decision so we can partner with one another in love.

Consider the alternative. Do you believe everyone who says they are Christian really are? Do you believe every person claiming the name of Jesus belongs to Him? The New Testament warns repeatedly about wolves in sheep’s clothing, false conversions, and people using the name of Christ for personal gain.

Let me ask you, from whom do the elders need to protect the flock of God? Are churches in danger of following outright atheists and pagans? Paul warns that the threat is wolves who will “*arise from among your own selves.*” *Acts 20:30*

So there must be some sort of gate-keeping to protect the flock. The gate, the test, the thing that we are looking for in our membership process is do you believe the true gospel? In other words, are you part of the universal body of Christ? Does what you believe about Jesus and sin and Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection line up with scripture?

If so, and if you can align with Wildwood, let’s partner together. Let’s fellowship in a meaningful way. By the way, we use the word “partner” because the term fellowship has become synonymous with a potluck meal when the Greek word *κοινωνία* means so much more than that.

So let’s get our hands on the rope and pull in the same direction – taking the Gospel across the street and around the world for the glory of Christ! That’s what meaningful membership *is*.

## MEMBERSHIP MEANS MUTUAL CARE

Now let’s talk about what membership *does*. Since you’re still in **1 Corinthians 12**, let’s finish the section, **verses 24-26**.

**But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

What does membership in the body entail? Not just work, though that is certainly there – performing your God-given function. But more than that, it is mutual care for one another. It is using your gifting to truly show God’s love for your fellow members.

## MEMBERSHIP MATURES US IN CHRIST

If we turn now to **Ephesians 4**, we see in **verses 11-12** once again Paul presents the church as a body, a body that is growing in maturity and love.

**Verses 13-14** continues **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,**<sup>14</sup> **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.**<sup>15</sup> **Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.**

Membership is bearing one another’s burdens and serving one another and it’s also growing in the faith together. You’ve heard that verse, “Iron sharpens iron.” When a person stands before the congregation saying, “I want to partner with you in membership,” he or she is inviting us to hold them accountable.

There is danger in forsaking this component of your spiritual life. We need one another to lovingly keep us on the right path in our discipleship.

Like the lone antelope is typically the one that gets plucked by the prowling lion, so too, the lone-ranger Christian often does not recognize spiritual danger until it is too late for intervention.

Those who walk in vulnerability with other Christians, when they begin to show signs of spiritual apathy or decay, are often spurred on to spiritual vitality.

And this is the point of being joined together. Paul concludes in **Ephesians 4:16** that **when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.** When members of the body function properly, and when love is at the center, the fruit of meaningful membership is that the body grows in love.

As a body, we love one another. And as a body, the Lord uses us to distribute His love and grace in practical ways – through teaching, correcting, encouraging, helping, and comforting one another.

Why would you deny the primary means God has chosen to mature you, rejoice and weep with you, protect you, nourish your faith, and love you? Isolation may seem safer, especially if you’ve been hurt in the past, but it’s not God’s design.

## MEMBERSHIP DECLARES BELONGING AND COMMITMENT

He created us for community, for connection, and for mutual support. The Church is where we learn to forgive, to heal, and to grow together. Pain is inevitable in relationships, but it doesn’t have to ruin them. Instead, it can be the catalyst for deeper understanding, compassion, and grace.

If you’ve been hurt by church people, know that you’re not alone. Many of us carry scars from past experiences, and it’s tempting to let those wounds keep us from fully engaging with the Church. But consider this: just as you’ve been hurt, you’ve likely hurt others—intentionally or unintentionally.

When you commit to membership in a local church, you’re not just joining an organization—you’re entering into a partnership. You’re saying, “This is where God has placed me, and I’m ready to serve, to grow, and to love alongside these people.” Membership is a declaration of belonging and a commitment to contribute.

It's about knowing where and how you can use your gifts to glorify God and build up His Church.  
It's putting your hands on the rope and pulling with all your might.

We invite you to partner with us, to step into the fullness of what God has for you, and to experience the joy of belonging to His body. Together, let's embody His love, build His Church, and make His name known. Will you join us?