

Life in the Body: What Does Church Membership Mean?

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[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our church in hearing God's word.

The word of God is the unfolding of wondrous things about our God.! And today we're going to look at a passage that unfolds one of the mysteries that God instituted in the Garden of Eden. So I'd like us to turn to Ephesians 5 and I'm going to give you a quick overview of the first 21 verses so that we see how the ending of this chapter actually fits the series on the church.

If you would track with me in your Bible as I walk through these verses. In verse 1 we begin, imitate God by walking in love.

And that love which requires of us to give up ourselves, that cross-carrying love, which means that I do not do the things that I want, but rather what will serve others and thereby honor God.

Those are found in verses 1 and 2. It will require me to forsake all immoral and impure thoughts and actions. It will require me to watch over my tongue so that I am thankful for the flat tire or for the interruption to my plans.

[1 : 48] I will be careful who I listen to, whether online or in person, and whether their words accord with the truth of the ages.

That's found in verses 3 to 7. And I will be a light in the darkness, like the fireflies at night, pinpointing out goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Found in verses 8 and 9. I will continue in learning what is pleasing to God and not hold my ideas as though I am the sole holder of truth.

Verse 10. I will not participate in laughing at off-colored jokes, potty humor, or listen to sordid stories of co-workers' night escapades.

Instead, I will expose what might be the motives that they should examine. In verses 11 to 13.

Therefore, I will be careful how I live out my faith, for I know that my days are limited, and the world is desperately broken.

[3 : 06] Verses 15 and 16. I will not let any substance or habit master me, but instead I will let God's spirit fill my heart and mind with singing and speaking in thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 17 to 20. And I will interact with others in a submissive spirit. That is the summary of the first 21 verses.

Now follow along as I read the rest of the chapter, starting in verse 22. Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, he himself being the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, and that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.

[4 : 42] So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nonetheless nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of his body.

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and to the church. If I did not know better, I would think that Paul seems to be changing topics, starting in verse 21, the first, or 22, the

first 21 verses seem to be a discourse on how we should conduct ourselves.

And now he's talking about marriage and marriage relationships. But God's inspiration to Paul in talking about marriage has something to do with those first 21 verses.

And so let's pray as we examine the end of this chapter and see how they fit together with both the first verses and also with the topic of studying the church.

[6 : 13] Let's pray together. Oh God, we thank you that you are a good God in giving us the word of God that is sharper than a double-edged sword.

It pierces to the very marrow. And we pray, Lord, that today you would do that both in convicting us of what we should be doing and what we are as the church and as we are the body of Christ and what it means that we commit ourselves to that.

And I pray that your word would be powerful and your spirit in doing so would draw us to yourself in great power. We would see the wonder of your mystery in these verses.

We ask this in Jesus' great name. Amen. So the ending of this section, and I think the whole chapter is really verse 32.

Paul writes that there is a mystery in this section and it pertains to Christ and the church. Now, if you are a fan of mysteries, well-ordered mysteries, work on the basis of having some clues given but leaving out some sort of information and thereby creating a gap and makes suspense and a need to find out the ending.

[7 : 46] And if you are a reader, you may know Father Brown Mysteries by G.K. Chesterton or the clever Lord Peter Whimsey series by Dorothy Sayers or perhaps the most well-known mystery series, Sherlock Holmes, all include the incremental revealing of clues that keeps you turning pages so that you want to know the solution.

So Paul drops these clues in these 10 verses by making the comparison of marriage to God's relationship with the church.

And so my intent today is not to go over the marriage relationship issues any more than they are needed to fill out the thread of what Paul wants us to understand about Christ's relationship to the church and therefore our relationship to the church.

And so as good detectives, let's look at the clues and I'll bring those to you as we go through this passage. Clue number one, verse 22, there is a wifely duty that is the mirror of how the church is to respond to Christ and that is to be subject to.

Submission to Christ means submission to what he brings to us. And this not only has individual component as we individually learn how to submit to the circumstances he brings to us, but it also has a corporate dimension to submission.

[9 : 38] As wives learn to submit to the crazy ideas of their husband, so we corporately learn to submit to the outrageous ideas that our Savior calls us to do.

Go the second mile. Turn the other cheek. Forgive 70 times 7. Don't think first about getting rich, but work for the bank account of heaven.

All outrageous ideas. But our Master, the Lord of the church, draws us into that.

And submission means being willing to yield to the God-given authority of another because he placed them in your life. Remember verse 1?

Be imitators of God as beloved children. Jesus Christ was submissive to the will of the Father. And so we, together, purpose to listen to, to live with, to invest in, and submit to the body to which we commit ourselves.

[10 : 56] This is where the first part of the chapter comes in. If my brother or sister is mastered by some habit and makes me aware of it, do I say, oh, I'll pray for you.

Or, do I self-sacrificially ask, are there ways I can get involved in your life so I can help you overcome that?

How do you get involved if your fellow church member's little kid is out in the parking lot and running in between cars? What do you say to your friend who is part of the body but has no respect for her husband?

Do I submit myself to Christ's rule of my day-to-day interactions with brothers and sisters by being a light of goodness and righteousness and truth?

Those words ought to remind you of something in the Old Testament. Do you remember Psalm 45? Psalm 45 tells us, you are the most excellent of men.

[12 : 05] And then, shortly thereafter, he tells us to gird on our sword for the cause of truth, righteousness, and humility.

Same, same phrases that we have in that. And so, what are we called to? As righteous men and righteous women, we're going to fight a battle and we're going to do it in submission to the one who has fought the battle for us.

Included in this first clue, verse 23, is the reason we do those things is because the body's head is directing the affairs of the church and he does it with the final salvation of his church in mind.

In verse 24, we see that this love Christ has for us is for the purpose of sanctifying us and fitting us to be with him forever.

Implied in that for the corporate body is, again, that of submission to him because we know that he has our best interests at heart.

[13 : 20] And so, clue number one really is all about submitting to Christ. Clue number two comes by another analogy.

Look down at verse 28. Here we have a story about husbands who are to love their wives as they love their own body.

No one hates his own flesh. Instead, we nourish and care for it. And likewise, Christ's commitment to the church is that of nourishment and care.

We, as members of his local body, receive that through the way a body works. Toe stubbing hurts. The body responds by dancing on the other foot and rubbing the offended part in attempt to bring relief.

Or, if the body gets hungry, we feed it. Hopefully, it will not be junk food, but rather something nutritious and tasty. And so, the body, in response to the headship of Christ, when there are people who hurt, we get to know one another so that we can immediately look for ways that we can bring comfort and relief.

[14 : 44] When someone needs meals because of extreme circumstances, we supply them. Dolores Braskowski would periodically send a meal to us as a family just because she wanted to, and she knew that Christian school teachers don't get paid a lot, and so she thought that would help.

Christ cares for his body, and the body responds by caring for one another. So, clue number two is really caring for one another.

Submission to Christ means caring for one another. Two great commandments in play already in these first two clues. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Then clue number three comes in a reference to the Genesis story of creation of man and woman, and here the mystery becomes greater.

Now we enter into a territory that explodes with implications, but I will refrain from most of them and focus on this. Notice that the reference is about cleaving together.

[16 : 05] in the perfect garden. Is there not an implication that God's desire for his bride to receive his seed, his Holy Spirit, to bring about new life, and while his implanting the Holy Spirit is not only individual in the change it makes in us personally, but also in the corporate body, so that we, as his bride, are in the process of creating new life corporately?

What is the church's function to create new life? Is it just to listen to the preaching of God's word? Is it to pray for lost souls? Is it simply to raise godly children? children? Is it to meet the needs of the lost by loving them enough to talk to them about more than the fishing trip they took or their recent vacation?

The answer is yes to all of those things and more. So the question we need to be asking is how is this body doing with the advancement of the good news that gives opportunity for the implantation of the Holy Spirit?

Do you love your neighbor? Do you know your neighbor? Do they know what makes you tick? Or are you just the nice guy next door?

[17 : 51] Do you know that there has been implanted new life? And do you ask questions of them that get inside their thinking?

What made that trip so special? Why do you think that? Not why do you think that? But why do you think that? What's making you think?

What does gardening do for you? What made you become a doctor? You get the point. And do your children hear the word of God and see it lived out as you ask for forgiveness when you yell at them? The point is how do we influence others toward wanting new life? So Paul is using this word mystery more than a dozen times in his letters to the churches.

He uses it as a spiritual truth that was previously hidden. But now it comes to light through the finished work of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

[19 : 06] And so we have these clues and we've investigated them just a bit. But what spiritual truth should we walk away with?

What should we learn? the resolution of the mystery that Paul reveals in verse 32 is that all the time he's talking about marriage relationships, he's really telling a story about Christ and his church. And while you and I know that marriage relationships are often today in today's world on the rocks, marriage relationships, yet he's not appealing to today's marriage relationships, but to the original design of marriage relationships.

And what did he commend in the garden? Man and wife live together, perfect harmony, never sin. There was no sin at all. And in that relationship, they clave together so that they could produce new life. The mystery revealed is that Christ is the culmination of all things, and that the stories Paul writes are details of events that for the listeners of Paul's day had recently happened with the Messiah's coming.

[20 : 37] Colossians 1.26 says, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

So the creation of man and woman and the marriage that is pictured there in Genesis is a picture of Christ and his church, and Paul is giving us the solution to the mystery.

And while Paul indicates what is certainly true of the universal church, he is writing to the Ephesians, a local body of believers. The Ephesian church would read this together and realize that Jesus Christ is telling them what it is to belong to a group of believers with him as its head.

God So I would like to spend a few minutes unpacking what that means practically when you stand in front of a body of believers and say that you want to belong to the church.

[21 : 51] That pledge is your commitment to this local body. Earlier, in the book of Ephesians, chapter 4 and verses 1 to 3, Paul writes, to work for the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

And so that means that we're going to agree on everything. I think not. I don't even agree with my wife on everything.

So if in the marriage covenant we don't always agree, what does it mean for the church? Well, because we agree on one thing, that Jesus Christ is our life and hope and he alone is what we want to share with the world, where we differ on things that are choices, we submit to one another's ideas in love and peace with a goal to understand one another.

Secondly, we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. In Hebrews 10, 23 to 25. So when the doors of the church are open, I'm going to plan on being there unless providentially hindered.

And I'm committing myself to revolve around my life will revolve around this group of people and what has been deemed as important by the elders.

[23 : 19] And that means worship, Sunday school, prayer meeting, Bible studies, men and women fellowships, youth activities, food distribution, etc.

And that also means that if you see there's a hole in what you'd like the church to be involved with, you can talk to the elders about getting something going to fill that hole. What are ways in which your particular gifts and abilities can help amplify the work of the church in creating new life? Think of that and talk to us. Ephesians 6.18 reminds us that we will not neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

And here is where we can all use help. Praying for others systematically and carefully is not my forte and nor do I think it is for many. I will pray for people as I think of them but otherwise out of mind, out of prayer.

prayer. And if you have ideas on how we can all get better at this, let's talk about it. Let's figure it out. What are ways that we can encourage one another to pray more systematically for one another, for Hazleton and surrounding areas, for our country, and for the world?

[24 : 48] We need to be praying in all of those ways. we need to be and then we will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Romans 2.15 says, being aware of one another's struggles and joys requires both a willingness to ask questions and also to get relationally involved with one another.

That is part of being a body, and we will be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor. Now, all of that sounds an awful lot to me like a marriage covenant to have and to hold from this day forward for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

So, in that holy moment of giving our testimony and pledging our old-fashioned word troth, which means a loyal pledge of faithfulness, we enter into a commitment to our brothers and sisters that is helping them toward the cross-like living of giving up themselves for the sake of Christ.

Can I tell you what it was like for us to move to Hazleton 42 years ago? Chucko Dixon came to Williamsport with a step van and helped us load all our earthly goods onto it, including strapping the piano and upright on the back step of the van.

And he drove from Williamsport all the way up to the heights here and to a house that we were renting from Bobby Rizzo, Bobby Rizzo's dad, actually.

[26 : 55] And when we got there, there were 15 to 20 people waiting for us to get there, to unload the truck and provide us with our first meal.

Normally, moving an upright piano is difficult. Not when you have 15 men. Three years later, when we moved to our present house and knew that it would be an adventure of renovating a Civil War-era home that had not been lived in for 15 years except by rats and snakes and mice and squirrels, we again received the blessing upon blessing of people coming to help build stairs, to roof the house, and to increase the footprint of our home to include another bathroom and enlarge a bedroom.

It was done by the church. Some of those people are still here today. And they're committed to making the life of the church as vibrant as they are able to within their means.

why? In a culture that doesn't even want to respond to RSVPs too soon in case something else comes up that is better, we who love Christ are committed to one another in the same way Christ is committed to us.

And that means that while we don't agree on everything, we do agree to love one another deeply. so what is your part? As part of the body of Christ, do you want to open a coffee shop in downtown Hazleton that has the gospel at its center?

[28 : 41] Well, let's talk. It probably is needed. Do you know of someone who needs visiting, even if you don't know them very well? Well, let's do it.

Do you know of someone in the body, or not, who is in an extreme situation and needs help? How do we give ourselves to that? And what about prayer meeting? Maybe you could offer to lead once in a while, and in that, bring your unique gifts to the church.

Who do you have over to your house to get to know them better? Or have you helped anyone fix their light fixture because it's on the blink? So you might be thinking, Kelly, are you saying that the commitment to the church is like the marriage commitment?

Yeah, I am. I think there's one major difference, and that is, it is not till death do us part.

[29 : 54] there are reasons for leaving. For example, if the church started preaching a different gospel, well, that for sure would be a good reason to find out whether you heard right or not.

And obviously, if you move to a place where the local church is no longer local, then it's time to find a new home for your soul. people. But what about when I don't agree with the preaching style, or the way prayer meeting is conducted, or I have felt snubbed by the elders or not cared for?

Well, all of those things require a conversation with someone, and hopefully you'll be able to talk to someone, to an elder, to someone about those things that have hurt you for which you have concerns.

but just as in a marriage relationship, they are not great reasons for immediately moving on. So the bottom line is this.

When you join a local church, there is a level of commitment that you are making to those who are part of the body of Christ. And that commitment says that I'm in this for the long haul, that though I will find that not all things go the way that I think they should, I am here by God's design as a thumb, or maybe a pinky toe, to do what thumbs and pinky toes are meant for.

[31 : 25] And because Christ is my head, I will do that work with a delight in serving the rest of the body. I realize that in the world that has endless options, superficial connections, and prizes personal growth and fulfillment, the idea of commitment to someone or to something, no matter what happens, seems odd and old fashioned.

I'm too old to know what this means, but F-O-M-O, FOMO, it means the fear of missing out. even makes sending an RSVP to a wedding announcement feel scary because maybe something better will come along and I might miss it.

But I'd like to challenge that thought as being one of those things that's mentioned in Colossians 2.8. It is a philosophy of empty deception that is according to the traditions of men and the elementary principles of the world rather than on Christ.

You see, you're right. There are endless options available to us today, but not all options see Christ as the head of my existence.

[32 : 50] personal growth is important as long as that growth is tied to what I was made for and that is loving Christ more every day.

If you've not formally committed yourself to being a part of this body, I'd encourage you to do so. The benefits and responsibilities of being a part tell the world that this is the spiritual home for my soul and I'm committed to the building up of this body as it builds me up in Christ.

And can I mention one more thing that might challenge your thinking? Being part of a church is not like being part of a social club. It is not fulfilling a religious duty where you can say that you're a Christian because you go to church.

It is not a casual relationship with those you go to church with. Rather, it is a dynamic, connection with the head of the church due to his implanting of his spirit into your heart.

And that change creates a new life inside your heart that desires one main thing. And that's to honor his commitment to you by committing yourself to him and his work through the local church.

[34 : 13] And if that is true of you, consider talking to one of the elders about joining this local group of believers. One more reminder from the first 21 verses of chapter 5.

Since Jesus Christ has loved you, so you are called to be an imitator of him by the sacrificial love indicated in these first 21 verses.

verses. Let us be careful how we walk with one another as those who are wise and make the most of this time together because the days are evil. And then let's sing a lot to ourselves and others as we give thanks for all the things that God brings to us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to live in subjection to one another.

It is a great delight to be a part of this body of believers to have you as my brothers and sisters. And I confess there have been many times when I have thought we just need to move on.

But that's all about me. That's about what I think. It is ignoring the fact that there's a head of the church that says this is the place for your soul.

[35 : 32] Let's rejoice in that and give thanks for what he has done. Let me lead us in prayer. Father, we thank you for the truth of your word.

I pray, Lord, that it would make us both desire you more and to follow you more closely. And if that means that we need to make a formal statement about our connection to you, and state that in front of others, then so be it.

I ask, Lord, that you would move in hearts today. In Jesus' name, amen. moment.