

Church Membership

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[0 : 00] All right. I think we're ready.

Father, I pray your blessing today as we bring in wisdom to your people.! And so this is not a purely academic study.! It's not intended to be a find the answer from the answer book.

Lord, we want your spirit to move. And bring us into wisdom today. And Lord, I know certainly I need you to bring me wisdom. But I pray, Lord, for those gathered here and those listening back. That you would bring wisdom and knowledge and understanding. So we know how we should live in these days. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. So, we are going to take a week to consider the topic of church membership.

And the reason we're doing that is because, well, simply this. We are intending to implement a formal church membership here at the Upper Room.

[1 : 10] And it may come as a surprise to you to know, when I say that I have never actually been a formal member of a church, ever. Even though I have been very much an active part of a church for a very long time, that church didn't have formal membership.

It had informal membership. So, sort of, if you happen to come regularly, then you're probably a member. And that was basically it. And I'm not saying that's definitely wrong.

What I am saying is that both Ray and I have become convinced that here, the Lord would have us to implement something a little bit more clear, formal, established.

And so, I thought since we had a week, I thought I would just share with you my thoughts on this and what the Lord has shown me as I've been studying it this week. You know, it's funny because Ray and I, I think it's true to say that we both independently arrived at the conclusion that this would be right for us.

And so, anyway, so let's talk about it. So, I'm not going with PowerPoint, but it might work. It also just completely might not work.

[2 : 20] How do I? Ah, there we go. So, that's a broad outline of what we want to talk about today. What is the church? When we say church, what do we mean?

Obviously, we need that foundational understanding. Talk a little bit about the difference between the global and the local church, which is key and important. Talk a bit about the activities.

What is it that the church is meant to be doing? And then, well, okay, so why are we introducing church membership? And then, finally, so what? And every sermon should have a so what, right? So what? What does that mean for me? How do I live differently? That's what we'll consider at the end. So, first of all, what is the church? And it's a, obviously, an English word.

And the history of the English word church is not at all clear, actually. But certainly, what is clear today is that it is a Christian word.

[3 : 21] It refers to the Christian faith. Specifically, you don't talk about, you know, Jewish churches or Buddhist churches. They don't exist. But, unfortunately, what it has primarily come to mean for the majority of people is the building, the church building.

Ooh, look at that lovely church. But really, this is a secondary meaning. It should be considered a secondary meaning because, primarily, church is referring to the body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace.

That is to say, it is a group of Christians. And, so, in the, I couldn't resist doing this.

So, in the New Testament, which is written in Greek, you'll see this lovely word, ekklesia. And that is the word that is nearly always translated to church.

And whenever you see the word church, it is that Greek word. So what? Well, the so what is that this is a word that is not a Christian word. It has no Christian connotation whatsoever.

[4 : 36] Actually, the word refers to a gathering of citizens that are called together to discuss either a political or social issue. Sometimes it will be all of them.

Sometimes it will be a representative group. And so that's why, when you read through the New Testament in Greek, which we all do, right, you'll see, when you get to Acts 19, that the assembly of, or the mob in Ephesus that was protesting Paul and what was happening at the Temple of Artemis is described as an ekklesia.

Which is to say, a group who've been called together to address this hot topic of the day. So it was an ekklesia of people. And what I also found somewhat provocative was, you know, we hear, you hear a lot of conversation in the church about Israel and the church.

And it amused me no end to discover that the Septuagint talks a lot about the ekklesia of Israel. I was like, you know, because it just means the assembly of God's people. That's what it means. So it's not especially a Christian word.

It just means a group of people. But that's the key thing. People. Okay. Fab. So let us now turn our attention to how that word is used. And whenever you're doing a word study in the Bible, one of the things that's really profitable is to say, well, where's the first place you see the word?

[5 : 59] Where is the first place that the word church, or in fact, ekklesia, occurs in the New Testament Greek? And the answer is in Matthew chapter 16, which is on the screen.

Or you can turn to it. And it says this. So you may remember the context of this. This is Jesus Christ is responding to Peter's profession.

The first occurrence of the word church.

And we can observe this. Firstly, there is one church. And it belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't say, I'm going to build my churches.

He said, I'm going to build my church. So that's the first thing to observe. The second thing to observe is that it is built upon this rock. And there's two possibilities for what Jesus means by this rock.

[7 : 20] It is possible that Jesus is referring to Peter. Peter as the foremost apostle. Or it could be a reference to the rock is what Peter has just said.

This profession of faith. The faith that you have stated. The statement, you are the Christ, is the foundation of the church. And actually, my view is that both of those perspectives are true.

I'll show you another scripture from Ephesians 2, which I found quite helpful. So this is where Paul now is speaking to the saints who are in Ephesus.

And where he also alludes to this idea of the church built on a foundation. So he says this, So then you are not strangers and foreigners, but you are citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together, into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

[8 : 37] So you see again that concept of church built on foundation. And the people of God are collectively referred to as, a couple of things actually, they're referred to as God's household.

God's household. Amazing. We're God's household. And actually we are. We are his sons and daughters by adoption, which Ephesians also talks about. We are God's household.

And then also, we are, the church is, referred to as a building. Growing into a holy temple, but one that has its foundation on the apostles and the prophets.

So who, obviously Peter, being one of those apostles, it is fair and right to say it's founded on Peter. But actually I think we should understand that term more as follows.

The apostles and the prophets, the apostles wrote the New Testament. The prophets wrote the Old Testament. It's a reference to how the scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, are foundational to the church, and the faith that they present.

[9 : 43] Who is God? How does one relate to him? How does one be saved? Who is the Christ? So all these things are the faith that the Bible presents. And I hope that helps to explain why I think both the foundation of the church can be considered as both Peter the apostle, the rock, because he's an apostle, and also the faith that he professes.

So, anyway, what I really wanted to get from that, which I hope I haven't masked too much, is that there is a single people of God. A household, a building, founded on the word of God, and literally, it is the ecclesia, or the assembly, the calling together, the group of people who are gods, the global

church, with a capital C.

But then, of course, we have the church many times in the plural as well. And we'll see many places in the New Testament, in fact, I think more times, you will see church referring to small local, or large, but local fellowships, as in a local body of believers, as opposed to the whole church over the entire globe.

And so, examples would be Revelation 2 and 3 is seven letters to what? Seven churches. Or you could look at 1 Corinthians 6, 19, where Paul is wrapping up his letter and he says, the churches of Asia greet you, Aquila and Prisca greet you harshly in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Or you could read that another way, the assemblies of God's people in Asia and the assembly that's in Aquila and Prisca's house. So do you see, it's very clearly a plural term as well, referring to local fellowships.

[11:35] So, the church is global and the church is discrete, self-contained fellowships as well. Great.

That's the church. What's the purpose of the church then? Moving on. And this could take a while. So I'm going to be somewhat brief, I think.

If one wanted to stand here and discuss all of the purposes of the church, that would take a little while. So let me instead just show you a few bits that the Lord showed me this week.

So, I've told you that the Bible presents the church, God's people, as a building. The Bible also presents, uses another model to present the church and that is that of a body, a body with Christ as the head.

And a key chapter to read on that would be 1 Corinthians chapter 12 which I considered reading but it's, well, we'll take a few excerpts as we go. But what Paul does is he develops the image and he shows how if the body, if the church is a body then the members of the church are sort of like the various parts of the body each of which has a different function but they function together to fulfill the purpose of the church.

[12:57] Really, really great image I thought. One verse, not on the screen, is 1 Corinthians 12, 27. So verse 27 of that chapter says very simply this, now you are Christ's body and individually parts of it.

So I think at least part of the purpose of the church then, if we're going to say what is the purpose of the church, at least part of it then is to live as Christ's body. We are to be as Christ's.

Now I will show you three things to develop that further. So John 14, 12 is this one. Jesus speaking in John 14, 12 said, Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in me the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do, because I am going to the Father.

What's that? So Jesus is saying that as awesome and amazing as the works that Jesus did were, the church is going to do the same and even greater works.

And I think that's best understood as greater in number, but Jesus simply says greater, because, you know, remember, Jesus was only ministering on earth for three and a half years, right?

[14:13] That was all he had, whereas the church has ministered now for 2,000 years. So, but, what that shows us is Jesus expected his people, his ecclesia, his church, to do the same works as he did and to continue his ministry.

Similarly, we read through Acts here at the fellowship, and that's how the book of Acts begins. Luke begins just like this, the first account I composed Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

So, when Luke opened his second work, Acts, he says there that his first account, namely the book of Luke, is about what Jesus began to do and teach.

And you think, huh? It finished with Jesus ascending into heaven. That was the end of his ministry. Ah, no, because Luke understood that the ministry of Jesus Christ continues today.

How? Well, first through the apostles and then subsequently through the church. Through the church, the church is continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ. And then one more is this one from 2 Corinthians 5, 20, where Paul says, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.

[15:34] As though God were making an appeal through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. An ambassador, for the children who aren't here, is someone who represents another country, for example, we know this.

So the church then has the purpose of representing Christ to the world, representing Christ to the world, which is somewhat hard to ponder when you think of what the church has become, but that is at least what God intended, and that is what the apostles saw as their role.

And Paul applies it here to the ministry of reconciliation, because Jesus came to a lost world to say, basically, repent, be reconciled to God.

If you wanted to summarize Jesus' ministry down to one word, it would be repent. That's it. Return to God. And as an interesting aside, one could think of the word Christian as meaning ambassador for Christ.

The word Christian means a follower of Christ. It means someone who was identified with him, you know, in the same way that the Herodians are identified with Herod, and that's what Ian means.

[17:02] But we are Christians, we are identified with Christ, we are his ambassadors. We've chosen to, and we continue to choose to be his follower. So, one, yes, one last thing I wanted to say on why the church then and the purpose was this one.

So, this is the Great Commission at the end of the book of Matthew. So, this is just shortly before Jesus Christ ascends into heaven. Matthew 28, verse 18, he says, And Jesus came up and spoke to them, the apostles, saying, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you, and behold, I am with you to the end of the age.

So, what did Jesus expect his people to do? That. This. So, if you put these things together, what is the purpose of the church?

I think it is this. Oh, look, that was kind of me. I even made a little thing. The purpose of the church is to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ, that is, following his example, being obedient to what he has commanded his people to do, that is part of the role.

[18:23] So, to continue his ministry. Secondly, to represent him on earth, so people should look to Christians and the church and say, ah, so that is what Christ is like, that is what God is like, that should happen.

And then thirdly, to preach the gospel, to teach and build up one another in the doctrine of Christ. Okay, fine. So, but I think that applies really at a global level, so high level, what is the purpose of God's church over the entire globe?

It's that. But what if we were to consider the local fellowship then? like this one, what is it that God would have of them?

And as we ponder that, I was inclined to ask myself this question. What does it mean to live as a Christian?

What does it mean? What does it mean to you? If we wanted to think, how should a Christian live? And you might say, well, it would mean praying, it would mean not swearing and using bad language, it would mean being nice, it would mean believing the right things, of course it would, it would mean believing the right things about God and Jesus and sin and judgment, and maybe it would mean working really hard and diligently, but is it that?

[19:51] Is it just those sort of isolated, individualistic aspects? aspects? Is that what Paul had in mind? Is that what we see when we read the epistles, the letters that are in the Bible written to Christians?

Well, what I want to show you is that the way that the Bible depicts life as a Christian has many, many things prescribed for us that can only be done in the context of a local community.

And I think in a church, in a local church, there's an expectation that we will live together and we will serve one another and we will bring mutual benefit to one another and we have mutual duties together to do, or to put it in another way, we relate together in a way such that everybody is blessed.

If we take the phrase one another and then we say, okay, Bible, search for that phrase in the New Testament, 62 results you will find.

And we're going to go through them, no we're not, but what I will show you is this slide, I thought, well let's just look at what happens in the book of Romans, you can just about read that right, kind of, maybe, I can, but I'm a metre away.

[21:09] So I'll send this out afterwards. So if we say, what do we get from the book of Romans if we search for the phrase one another, we will see all of these.

words, we are parts of one another, we are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honour, we are to seek to be of the same mind towards one another, we are to love one another, we are to not judge one another, to be building up one another, same mind once again, to accept one another and then this one, admonish one another.

Admonish means to correct and warn one another. So if we see someone going astray, if we see someone not living in a way that corresponds with Jesus' teaching, we are to admonish.

That's what the word means. So in the community of a local church, we are parts of one another, we are that, we can think of ourselves as one body, individually parts of one another, we read at the top there.

So I hope that shows you there are many, many things that the scriptures call us to do as God's people that can only be done together and I think that we can and should expect that these things are happening in our church.

[22 : 37] In this church, I would like, we would expect to see these kind of things happening more and more, hopefully, Lord willing, and he is willing. So we show love to one another and that means that we don't think lovely thoughts.

It means that we are showing love by doing things and doing acts purely for the benefit of another. It means we're seeking to find common ground and to agree as much as possible and it means that we are admonishing, we're seeking to lovingly support the community.

But I think another aspect that came across for me as I looked at this was that there's a call to commitment. An effective community requires a level of mutual commitment to one another.

What does it mean to be devoted to one another in brotherly love if it doesn't mean to have a sense of commitment to be a part of that fellowship and that community? So I think that there's a calling then to find a local fellowship and to commit to that fellowship.

Now I do want to zoom in on one of the verses that we've considered. I think I have. Romans 12 is a very useful passage actually and again if you're going to read two chapters to back this up it would be 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

[24 : 02] But Romans 12 Paul says be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Give preference to one another in honour not lagging behind in diligence fervent in spirit serving the Lord rejoicing in hope persevering in tribulation devoted to prayer contributing to the needs of the saints practicing hospitality.

And if it's permissible to call it an obligation then this is it. There is an obligation to be contributing to one another's needs to be practicing hospitality.

And by the way the saints is a reference to God's people. It's a term that means holy ones literally is what it means. It doesn't refer to a select group of super holy ones.

It means God's people who are saved. That is what it means. So it means contributing to the needs of the people in the church. So in our commitment to one another in the context of a local fellowship God intends us to care for one another to pray for one another.

And I should say care in a physical sense and in a spiritual sense as well. To watch out for one another. To hold one another accountable. If you're taking notes Galatians 6 1 is important for that.

[25 : 24] We can edify one another. Edify means to build one another up. It means to help them to grow. Romans 15 2 is a key one for that. To bear with one another.

To have patience. To pray for one another. And again to admonish one another. And as I was making this list and I was thinking about this I thought man when was the last time I sat down before the Lord just purely to pray for the Christians that God has brought into my life.

And to pray for that. And I thought I'm not good enough at doing that because there is an obligation here I think. There's a duty that we have in our commitment to one another.

When did I last ask the Lord to help me to be a blessing or to speak into their lives or to meet their needs? I was challenged.

Because I think sometimes if a church has become more about doing the tasks than it has about fulfilling and doing these things, we've gone pretty far off track.

[26 : 35] Because there are tasks to do. We did have to put all these things up and there are things we have to do. And Ray and I of course are working through a whole bunch of practical things which we have to do to get the church established.

But if the day comes when those things have become more of a priority than this stuff, that's what we've gone wrong. And hey, I need your admonishment.

So, a general view of what all members of the church should be doing. I wanted to talk a little bit about roles and offices though because I think this is important when we're talking about the church.

And I hope I'm a little bit behind the way I want it to be. But anyway, the Bible does teach and require that local churches have clearly defined leadership in place.

So, for example, if you look in this passage here from the book of Titus, Paul, writing to a gentleman by the name of Titus, said to him this, for this reason I left you in Crete, what's that?

[27 : 39] So that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, and then goes on to give some criteria. But notice that Paul gave Titus this specific duty and requirement, and this is what he called set in order.

Set in order what remains. What is that? It is to establish leadership. That is what the elders are. They are the established spiritual leaders and guides in those fellowships.

And Paul is saying they need to be installed. And actually, if you step back from this, you actually have, I was going to say four, four ranks isn't quite the white word, but if you look, you've got Paul giving instructions to Titus to install elders who will have authority over the local church.

So you have this, there is intended to be leadership structure in place, and all of that leadership is of course subservient to Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church.

But see that leadership in the local fellowship is not simply a biblical thing that we can do, it's actually required for a church to be set in order. And I think it follows then that local fellowships obedient to Christ will install clear leadership, modelled on the principles of scripture.

[29 : 01] And also, there are other roles that the church should establish. I think I will just skip over this a little bit.

I encourage you to read through 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 to see, it talks about spiritual gifts, and what I would summarise this down to is it's valuable and useful for us to know that, again, every member of a church is uniquely capable, uniquely gifted by God's Holy Spirit and skilled to do certain things.

And one of our joys as Christians is to find out what are those things? What is God calling us to do? You could give a whole sermon on this, you could probably do a whole series on this, I'm not going to because it's already 20 to 12 and I'm going to skip down to something that I didn't really want to get into too much but I think is critical and that is the subject of church discipline.

Because I can't touch on this word admonish and not talk about this a little bit because I think this is one of the reasons why you do really need formal membership.

Because churches are called to discipline one another. That's what the word admonish means.

Correct and warn if going astray. There are great positive things that the church does together.

[30 : 32] Really wonderful things that we do for the purposes of mutual growth and blessing. but then you have admonishment. That's the negative bit.

Well it's not though is it? Because I don't think anybody here sitting in this room is thinking I'm pretty much perfect. I don't need any more development or growth. trust. Because and actually admonishment, discipline, It's so constructive.

And I think it's good for us to see it as corrective, as formative, as to make us better than we were before. familiar verse to many who memorize scripture all scripture is inspired by god and is beneficial for teaching for rebuke for correction and for training in righteousness ah so look if i if ray and i have a role to stand here and to teach and preach the bible hey guess what well that should be beneficial to you guys for all of us for teaching rebuke correction and training in righteousness if we are accurately declaring to you the word of god then these things will happen uh hebrews 12 hey it's all about chapter 12 today hebrews 12 speaks about how god disciplines his children and um and and what he's saying paul is saying there in hebrews the writer to hebrews is saying is if god isn't disciplining you that you're not children you aren't you i think he says that you're illegitimate wow yeah what son is there whom his father does not discipline says the writer so how does this work i want to there's two more scriptures i want to show you on that the first one is matthew 18 15 to 17 so this is this is a this is a really fundamental one on how does admonishment work says this jesus speaking now if your brother sins go and show him his fault in private if he listens to you you have gained your brother but if he doesn't listen to you take one or two more with you so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed and if he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church that is to say the local church we aren't telling the entire global church right tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church he is to be to

you as a gentile and a tax collector which or to put that in other words he is to be considered outside the church not part of the church but there is a process to follow someone is in sin you deal with it as locally as you can hey i've noticed this i think we should talk about that because i don't think it's in step with what the scriptures teach i don't think it's in step with the profession of faith no you're wrong you're wrong you're wrong okay well then next step is to seek the prayers and the support of two or three to say no we agree we think this is wrong so you see there's a process to follow and this isn't for only the leadership of a fellowship to do right this this is what admonishment one another looks like um the other one i wanted to show you is first corinthians five verses one to three and again we could read this whole chapter we will not we will read a couple of bits from it in first corinthians five this is paul as a leader in the church is rebuking a fellowship for failing to deal with sin he says it's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and sexual immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the gentiles i.e you guys are worse than those outside the church namely that someone has his someone has his father's wife and you have become so arrogant and have not mourned instead so that the one who has done this deed will be removed from your midst for i on my part though absent in the body but present in spirit have already judged him who has so committed this as if i were present wow so much for judge not right paul has judged

so we have to we have to consider these things together um later in the chapter this i know it's small i'll read it to you uh paul says in the same chapter i wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people i did not at all mean with the sexually immoral people of this world or with the greedy or swindlers or with idolaters for then you'd have to leave the world but actually i wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person or a greedy person or an idolater or is verbally abusive or habitually drunk or a swindler not even to eat with such a person for what business of mine is it to judge outsiders do you not judge those who are within the church but those who are outside god judges remove the evil person from among yourselves okay so do you see what he's saying here he if there is a case where you have somebody who professes to be a brother so-called brother right but who is known to be in sin and paul lists a whole bunch verbally abusive idolater greedy habitually drunk swindler don't even eat with that person wow but paul says actually but but that is not to say that we shouldn't associate with those kind of people outside of the church because then we'd have to leave the world um says paul so what paul is saying is there is an expectation of standards of behavior of uh eschewing of sin in the church that if that is not happening the church should be admonishing one another um and again in this case it is a leader doing the admonishment saying this is what you should be doing you're pleased to know that's all i have to say about that so then okay but why membership then why what is this so what what i'm hoping i've done is to lay a foundation and a background as to help see why i'm convinced that formalizing local church membership is really essential in that passage in first corinthians 5 there is a clear delineation between those in the church and those who are outside and again he's not talking about the global church he's not talking paul isn't talking about kicking people out of the global church no no person has got the authority to do that that's between god and that person no human has that authority he's talking about exclusion from a local fellowship he's saying in and out how do you know who is in and who is out how do you know who are the members of a fellowship so so we believe that god is starting a new fellowship right here and that means that we need to have leadership we need to have offices we need to have overseers and or elders there needs to be a lead pastor and critically there will be many other roles and duties and uh things that need to be done every member of the fellowship to perform and using you know according to the gifts and the abilities that god has granted um how's that going to happen without clarity on who has committed to the church um if you look at this passage as well in hebrews 13 this is written to the leaders uh i beg pardon this is written about leaders to the church obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account so that they may do this with joy not groaning for that would be unhelpful to you and here two things happen i think one is that there's this commandment to the members of the church to obey the leadership god has installed um but secondly there's this statement that the leaders are going to give an account for the souls in their care when immediately you think well hang on who are they who are the souls to whom i will give an account to god well i think that is the members how do we know who they are how do we know who is committed how do we know who has said yes i will do those one another's i will pray for the leadership i will give and serve and bless here and that is all that i mean that's all that we mean when we say we need to

have um formal membership it is to say we need to have a way of formalizing that commitment formalizing what is expected what can what we can expect and what we can what we can expect and what we expect to do i still didn't put that very well did i hope you get the point it's it's about making it clear yes i'm a member yes i'm committed here these this is what i will do i will pray for this fellowship i will seek to bless the other members i will seek to be an active part of the fellowship i will commit to come here i will commit to give here i will commit and i will receive and i will receive the blessing of friendship and fellowship and being prayed for and being cared for to know that this is my home church these are my people these are the ones who are praying for me these are the people who know i'm struggling and they know how i'm struggling and they're praying into it these are the people and i know their struggles and i'm praying for them so what so what so what so what indeed this is the so what four things i landed on as a uh as conclusion points to this message today and the first one is simply this that there is a call to be obedient to the gospel because the church because church is god's people church is a collection of people who are god's households who have received the free gift of salvation the gospel which declares that while we were sinners worthy of rejection by god he instead has chosen to save us through the sacrifice of jesus christ who died while we were unworthy and we remain unworthy in and of ourselves and yet we have confidence in the eternal life is a free gift received by believing in christ's death and resurrection believing these things and knowing these things that is how we become members of the church big capital c that is how we become members of the global church the community the assembly of god's people we receive the holy spirit as assurance of salvation we receive the holy spirit as the one who empowers us to serve god and and to serve one another and and as paul said you know as an ambassador i appeal to you and i and i do urge um that we would make our salvation sure be reconciled to god because church membership is open exclusively to those who have made that clear profession of faith well secondly then um i would encourage us all to to pray for us as we consider how to implement membership because the bible says a bunch of stuff right we've looked at a bunch of stuff but it doesn't say and this is what church membership should look like and this is what your statement of faith to look like and this is uh this is your covenant statement or whatever other documents we need to have i don't know um how does one join how does one leave how does one uh there's a bunch of stuff

[43 : 14] that ray and i and sharon and ali and all of us are working through and i really earnestly seek your prayers and your wisdom as we do this please and also do pray for our um endeavors as we continue or to look at joining the fiec fellowship of independent evangelical churches um which is already a great support to us so please please be doing that thirdly um i think there's a call to pray about our commitment um you know when when this started 21 christmas 21 something like that i don't know it was it starts for me and all it started with ray coming over to our home and saying hey we're starting this thing um i'm starting a home bible study on sunday um don't know what the lord's going to do you're welcome to come or not come no pressure and at the time that was exactly what we needed exactly what we needed and to some extent that will always be true this is never going to be any this is never going to be an exclusive club that people are turned away from um but there is a call if this if if you there is a i guess there is a call to commit if the lord is leading us to do that and and certainly for me that is a calling that i've heard and he did but for all of us need to consider that prayerfully is that what the lord is calling us to do and yeah and we pray that this church will become established you know we haven't done our website yet we haven't uh got all of our health and safety things done yet and we're working on it and the day will come when we are officially open for the public so to speak um anyway i encourage you to pray into that and then finally um consider your role in the body of christ and your role in this fellowship as well how has god gifted and equipped you what role does god seem to have made you to fulfill uh when you read if you read uh first corinthians 12 then you'll you'll come across a verse that says earnestly desire the greater gifts so there is a sense in which we should be seeking and praying for um i guess seeking and praying for the best gifts the greatest gifts as in what is it that the lord is calling me to do those are the greatest gifts to do the thing that god is calling and equipped us to do that is the greatest joy that there is in life i'm convinced of that to know that you are doing the lord's will and so i want to encourage you to to pray into that and think on that there will be no shortage of things to do in this fellowship and not just the visible things either so pray into it and as we do that may the lord bless us richly thank you lord for these things lord i thank you for your words and uh while sometimes i feel like my life would be a lot easier if you had been like super clear on how churches should be structured lord we give you glory and praise because you have given us enough to know

how to biblically establish a church lord and clearly your priorities are the spiritual ones they are how are we spiritually relating to one another how are we loving and serving one another how are we building each other up and i pray lord god for our fellowship that we would be and we would be increasingly a body of people who love you and love one another that greatest commandment that we read in matthew 22 lord we want to be that and i pray that you would help us to be that and i pray that you would help us as we seek to establish this church lord lead us we confess and agree that lord jesus christ you are the head of the church and we are your body and so we pray that you would have your rightful place

i pray that the practical needs of the church would never take preeminence over the spiritual and i pray lord in all things you would be glorified in jesus name amen