Becoming a Member

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[0:00] Now if you'd like to have your Bibles open at 1 Corinthians in chapter 12 on page 1153, verse 27 says, Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

When I was about 17 years old, I remember taking out a membership at a local kickboxing club, like all young guys, I wanted to prove my worth and my masculinity by being able to defend myself and protect myself.
But after six weeks or so, it was a sure surprise to discover that I really didn't like pain. And I was at that moment that I realised that if I were going to establish myself as a man, it certainly wasn't going to be through kickboxing.
Funnily enough, you can imagine my reaction when I discovered that as soon as I gave up my membership at the local kickboxing club, my two brothers decided to become members of it.
And sadly, it wasn't before too long that both of them exceeded me in my commitment, in my talent and in my so-called bravery. In fact, it was to become a really sore point for me because both of them took great joy in continually mocking and teasing me about giving up so quickly.
[1:25] If you know anything about Brotherly Banta, you can imagine the pain I felt when Neil, my older brother, told me, Andrew, I'm now a black belt in kickboxing.

And if that wasn't hard enough to deal with last night, I got a text from my younger brother Daniel who told me he retained his British title belt after an amateur kickboxing fight in Manchester.
And to make it that little bit more painful, he said, and Andrew, I bet the guy in the first round in one minute and 35 seconds. So friends, kickboxing is a very painful thing to me still.
And I use that illustration really by way of introducing our theme of membership. Today we're going to continue in our series on membership and we're going to look at the topic of being a member.
Our hope in this series is really to help us unpack what we believe biblical membership is, why we believe it to be important for the 21st century church, and why we believe it to be a solidly biblical conviction.
[2:37] Now membership is something that I'm sure all of us are familiar with. We deal with it on a day-to-day basis. Many of you here are members of a gym club, a bowling club or a golf club.

Maybe even some of you are members of that misled political party, the SNP. I'm always joking. But no, membership is something that all of us know about on a day-to-day basis.
And today I want us to look at what membership is in the local church. You see, the moment anyone comes to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, they become a member of what theologians would call, just to use a fancy term, the invisible church of Jesus Christ.
That is, they become united with all the believers past, present and future. And in becoming a member of the invisible church of Jesus Christ, people who live under Christ's reign and rule also recognise in God's word that it is a fundamental part to put yourself under the leadership and guidance of a visible local church, like here at St. Columba's.
If you're not a believer in Christ yet, you might be sitting here and thinking, wow, wait a minute, membership. This is my time to tune out this sermon. Well, I would really encourage you not to tune out, because hopefully this morning you will see in considering this topic the claims that Jesus Christ has on the lives of his people, that you will see the loyalty to him involves and how being in a relationship with Jesus means that you become part of the community of disciples and enjoy fellowship with Jesus and his family, the church.
[4:28] Now, I'd like us to look at this biblical concept of church membership by asking two very simple questions. What is it and what does it mean and why is it important to become a member?

Under our heading, what does it mean we'll look at the principles and marks of membership? And under why is it important we'll look at the privileges and benefits of membership?

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So let's begin by looking at question one. What does it mean to become a member of the local church? And to do this, what we need to do is to look at the biblical principles laid out in Scripture. And today this sermon is a more topical sermon in the sense that we're not going to be looking at one text, verse by verse. We're going to look at various passages in the New Testament to see why biblical membership is fundamental to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.
It's worthwhile pointing out that to be a member of a local church, there is only one requirement. And that is that you confess Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior.
[5:36] In other words, you have a credible profession of faith. I've often heard it said from people, well, where exactly does it say in the Bible that you have to become a member of a local church?

Surely a personal profession of faith is enough. In one sense, when I hear that question, I want to say, yeah, you're right. A profession of faith is more than enough because it's only a profession of faith.
It's only believing in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior that will give us that hope of heaven and eternal life. It is only making him the King of our lives that will give us that hope.
Being a member of a church, whatever church it may be, is not a guarantee that you will have eternal glory, that you'll share with Christ in heaven.
What is fundamental is that you have a personal, living and active relationship with him. I want to show us from the Bible. Now I want us together to journey and see from the Bible where we get this from.
[6:44] So I wonder if you turn your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 13. This is in page 1212. Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 17.

It says this, Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy.
Not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you. Let's recognize a few things from this text. Namely, this text presupposes membership in a local congregation.
What we have here in this text is an assumption that believers are to belong to a local church. The phrase, Obey your leaders and submit to them.
Really the original is written in the imperative mood. In other words, it is a biblical command. This is not a suggestion. This is not a take it or leave it option.
[7:50] This is not just a best course of advice statement in the Bible. In the book of Proverbs, sometimes it gives us proverbs that we can read, learn from, and we can weigh up how best to apply it to our lives.

This here before us today is a command. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. I know these words, Obey and submit, might cause you some discomfort initially.
In our day and age, these words really do conjure up negative feelings. Just a week ago, Derek mentioned the word submission. He said it reminded him of when his brother would be wrestling with him and put his arm up his back.
He'd say submit, submit, submit. I hope together we will see that Obey and submit in the Bible are actually not negative words, but positive words.
These words are gospel saturated. They're Christ motivated. Notice that it says in verse 17 as well, Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
[9:03] In other words, in the economy of the gospel, these words are for our joy, for our good, for our advantage. This text does really beg the question, who are our leaders?

And who are the leaders who are to exercise authority over us? And to answer this question, we really need to look at the pattern laid out in the New Testament church.
The leaders to whom we are called to submit to are men who have been appointed and ordained by God to shepherd and lead the flock. If you'd been here over the last month or so, we've been going through a series on church leadership.
A couple of weeks ago, Mez McConnell from Nidra Community Church was here and he was preaching on leadership. And he took us to the book of Titus and he told us how Paul sent this letter to him to tell him, appoint leaders, appoint elders over the church, over the people who'd gathered there for their good and for their joy.
You see how God has organized and designed the structure of the church? In God's great salvation plan, God has made the church in such a way that we have people who are over us and we are under their loving care and attention.

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[10:24] God knows that if we are to live effective lives as Christian disciples, then we need men who are mature, who are wise and who are godly to watch over us.

We need men who will indeed, as verse 17 says, keep watch over our souls and who will have to one day give an account for doing this. One of the things that struck me as I was studying this is that in the original, to keep watch over our souls literally means to remain sleepless.
What I thought that is that God in His provision for us, not only gave us Jesus Christ, His perfect Son, who lived that perfect life and died that sacrificial death and was raised in the resurrection.
He also made provision for us in that He gave us the church and He appointed leaders over us who will keep watch over our souls.
Doesn't that just communicate God's deep care and concern for us, His people? And you might be saying, but why does God, why do I need somebody to watch over my soul?
[11:40] Why do I need somebody to care for me? The Bible makes it exceedingly clear that as we live life in this messy and broken world that we are in a battle, this is a warfare that is going on, a battle between our sinful nature and the things of this world and also a war with Satan.

The Bible says, be on guard, for Satan goes around prowling like a roaring lion, seeking those he wants to devour, destroy and kill.
And so the reason why God in His great provision has given us the local church and its leaders is in order that we may survive life in this broken and sin-sick world.
Now you might say, well that's fine Andrew, that's just one verse in the whole of the New Testament that you're arguing for church membership from. Well let's spend a few moments looking at some other biblical passages that highlight the importance of becoming a member in the local church.
And the second way I want to do this is to look at some of the metaphors used in the New Testament that highlight that as a body we are to be members in the church. And we read earlier in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul using this very illustration that as a church we are like a body.
[13:02] He says in verse 12, like a body has many parts, for example limbs and eyes and arms, where we to as believers in Christ are members of the body of Christ.

And then in verse 27 he says, now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.
Elsewhere Paul says, he describes his church as a flock.
He says we are many sheep who make up a flock. In Acts 20 verse 28 he says, the elders keep watch over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers.
In other words he wants us to picture this idea of the church being a gathered assembly of sheep together. Another metaphor that she used in the New Testament to describe the church is the idea of a building made up of many bricks.
Peter uses this in his letter. He says, you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. In each of these illustrations it is clear that individuals make up a local congregation.
[14:13] Think about it for a moment. One brick doesn't make up a building. One sheep doesn't make up a flock. One limb doesn't make up a body. In fact all these illustrations and metaphors are predicated on the very fact that it is a number who make up a congregation.

Maybe I am pushing this metaphor a wee bit too far in saying this, but I think this metaphor really highlights one of the most important marks of membership, namely commitment.
Because bricks are always cemented together. And sheep, they don't hop about from flock to flock. They live under the care of their shepherd.
And a body, all the parts of a body are not informally connected but they are all intricately connected to one another. One of the things I think these metaphors in the Bible highlight to us is that we are to be members of the body of Christ cemented together, committed.
And at an age where low level commitment is made to be everything. It is a virtue if you are not committed to so many things. In a sense it is counter cultural to become a member of a local church, to commit yourself to Christ and His people and His kingdom.
[15:50] When I gave up kickboxing after six weeks it was in a sense a reflection of what was happening in the culture around me. And if going gets tough we give up because we are not really committed. And the Bible urges us not to give up, but to stay committed in a place where we will cultivate a godly life.

I love how Paul says it in Ephesians chapter 4, he says that the church exists, that we may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God become mature,

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attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Now with all that said I want to ask a question, why then is it important to be a member of a local church? And here we are going to highlight the benefits and the privileges of what it is to be in a local church.
And I really just want to highlight three of the main benefits and privileges that it is to be a member in the local church. Namely, membership enables us to make much of Christ.
Membership helps us to live effective Christian lives. And membership means that we are cared for. So number one, membership enables us to make much of Christ.
[17:17] Become a member of a local church means that we have a place where we can gather together with brothers and sisters in Christ. A place in which we can unite in one voice, one heart, one accord and we can worship Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

The heart of church is the purpose to magnify Jesus, to glorify Him. Paul said it so well when he says to live is Christ.
The Westminster Confession short catechism, that first question says it so well doesn't it? What is our purpose? Our purpose is to glorify God. In other words, it is to make much of Him, to exalt Him in our hearts and in our lives.
And as we do this, an overflow of doing this is that the world around us, the unbelieving world around us, will see how great and how awesome our Saviour Jesus Christ is.
One of the benefits and privileges of being part of a local church is we serve in making much of Jesus Christ. We live out what we were created to be and that is worshipers of Jesus Christ.
[18:39] Another benefit and privilege is being part of a local church means that we are helped to live an effective Christian life. The New Testament is filled with commands to do this and to do that for one another.

Love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, spur one another on to love and good deeds. And so we should go on and on and on. But what is really communicating is that one of the great benefits of being part of a local church is that we get to share life together. We get to walk openly with one another.
In other words, what it says in the Bible is that we need each other. So often our culture would want to push that away that we need each other to live.
We need each other to share in and to become and to be built up into Christ. As a church, we are the redeemed worshipping the Redeemer.
I've been reading a book recently called Instruments in the Hands of a Redeemer. One of the things that I find so helpful about that is that when we are part of a local church, that we can be instruments in the lives of one another.
[19:59] Showing one another Christ when we are suffering, encouraging one another when somebody is down, loving one another when somebody feels so unloved, dejected and rejected.

And so the local church means that we can help one another to live the Christian life in this broken world. And the last benefit and privilege of membership that I really want to highlight is that being a member means that we have those who will watch over us.
We have those who will hold us accountable. We have those who will care for our souls. Those who will remain sleepless as it says in Hebrews 13 verse 17.
And when we commit to be part of a local church, what we are doing is we are saying, I want this to take an opportunity to submit myself to your leadership and to your care and to your guidance.
I want my life to be before yours and your and so that you can care for me and so that you can commit to looking after me. I can commit to serving you. I can commit to loving you. I can commit to being part of the body of Christ.
[21:18] So why become a member? Become a member because the Bible commands it. Become a member because your faith requires it.

Become a member because if you want to make much of Jesus in your life, the best place to do it is in a community of disciples.
I gave kickboxing up after six weeks when the going got tough. When we commit ourselves to be a member of the local church, we are committing ourselves to follow Jesus.
We are making up our cross and to deny ourselves daily. And to say to one another, we need each other because we want to serve Jesus Christ, who is Lord and King of our lives.

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Let's pray. Father in heaven, how we praise you and thank you for the provision that you have made in the local church.
[22:25] We praise you and thank you for how in your kindness and in your goodness, you have ordained it that we are to belong and to be part of a community of disciples.

Father, we recognize in our lives that we desperately need a savior who will save us from our sins. We desperately need one who will help us and minister to us.
We realize that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing, but we thank you that in Jesus, we can do all things through him. And Father, we thank you that in a church, we can live under the care of the elders, under the care of leadership.
That in a local church, we can take the time to make much of you, that we can come and gather to worship the risen King. We thank you Father that in a local church, we have one another to love, to encourage, to inspire, to start up.
And Father, we would pray for anyone here this morning who's perhaps thinking, who's been come to this church who's thinking about membership, that Lord, they would commit themselves to your church for your glory and for the extension and the advancement of your kingdom here in this place.
[23:49] And we pray all of this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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