

Belonging

WHY CHURCH MATTERS

Wk 1



INTRODUCTION

Any believer who attends Temple Bible Church on a regular basis is considered a member of Temple Bible Church.

TBC Constitution, Article III, Section 1

Here at Temple Bible Church (TBC for short), we love the church. Not just our local congregation, which we absolutely do, but the very idea of the church. It is a good idea. It is God's idea. And it is a lot more central in his eternal plan in Christ than many people realize.

In this four-session study, we are going to look briefly at God's intent for the church and how we fit in. We do not have the time in this brief series to cover this topic comprehensively, so we will spend our time on how God intends for us to live out being his people in the local church. Our short visit to this topic will likely bring us in conflict with prevailing cultural views, but Christianity faithfully lived out has always put Christians at odds with the surrounding world. Any version

of Christianity that does not put one at odds with the values of the world probably needs to be looked at carefully to see if it is indeed still Christian at all.

The study title and the accompanying sermon series is ***Belonging: Why Church Matters***. As the title implies, our focus will be on the nature of belonging to the church and to one another as the people of God. This places the emphasis on the *US* of scripture more than the *ME* of culture. This will be a new lens to look through for some. But we are convinced it is the biblical one and extremely important in helping us live up to what God desires of his people. Also as part of this series, we will speak to what it means to be a member of Temple Bible Church specifically.

It used to be commonly said that “TBC does not have church membership”. If you have been here a while, you may have heard that or even said it yourself. For a season, it was a commonly used way to describe a particular aspect of what belonging at TBC looked like. The problem was that it often both failed to convey an accurate picture of how we truly viewed membership and was actually contradictory to the language in our constitution.

At TBC, we do have church membership. In fact, we have an entire section of our constitution dedicated to describing it. Membership here, however, looks a little different than it does in some other places. We have members, but we do not maintain an authoritative and comprehensive list of who the members are. As our constitution states,

Any believer who attends Temple Bible Church on a regular basis is considered a part of the Temple Bible Church family, a member of Temple Bible Church.

And further:

We do not base our fellowship or scope of ministry on a written roll.

So we do have members, but at TBC membership is more functional than formal. Membership is about belonging to one another and living out what it means to be God’s family together. Additionally, we have expectations of our members, some of which are listed in the complete statement on membership from the constitution that can be found in the appendix of this study. Another way to express our expectations comes from our Core Values. We expect members to be continually striving to better personally *Surrender* to Christ, growing in the practice and experience of loving one another in biblical *Community*, and participating in the *Mission* of Christ both locally and around the globe.

It is our prayer that through our time on these topics, we will grow as a church to be a better witness to the grace of God and example to those around us of what it means to be his people in this world. As you go through this study, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to your home group leader, a staff member, or one of the elders.

MADE FOR MORE

Living with a bigger purpose

1

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Eph 3:10 (NIV)

Intro Video

Check out the introduction video from Pastor Tim at:

www.templebiblechurch.org/studyfall25/

Overview

In this session, we will look at the central role of the church in God's eternal plan to demonstrate his glory through the redemption and reconciliation of his people and how we fit in. We will also discuss what it means for us to truly belong and be members of one another as we live out his designs for us as his people as part of the local church.

Warming Up

- How significant has involvement in a local church been for you in your life? Elaborate.
- What do you think unbelievers in the culture around us would list as the defining characteristics of the church? In other words, what words do you think would come to their mind when they hear the word *church*?
- Was there anything in this week's sermon that you have questions about or thought was particularly interesting?

Wk 1 Reading

There is a saying, “Don’t miss the forest for the trees”. It warns us not to get so focused on lesser details that we miss the bigger picture or more important things. This has always been a helpful saying for me. This is also one of the reasons I love the book of Ephesians. It is a big picture book. In it, Paul lays out the big picture of God’s eternal plan to head up all things in heaven and earth in Christ. This letter gives us insight into his plan from its inception in eternity past through its final fulfillment in the ages to come. It also peels back the curtain on the spiritual realities at play in this grand drama to give us a glimpse of what is going on in both the earthly and heavenly realms. Along the way, Paul describes the role the church plays. It is not a minor secondary role, but rather the church is a central character. It is the direct result of Christ’s work and the agent through whom God’s grace and multifaceted wisdom are put on display.

Paul explains that the church comes into being as a result of the redemptive and reconciling work of the Cross. It is created by God. When people are redeemed *by* Christ, they are simultaneously

united with him and with other believers *in* Christ. The Bible uses several word pictures to describe this result including a body, a building, and a family, but the point of all of them are the same. We begin as separate and estranged from Christ and one another, but as a result of the Cross, we are united into a single unit, a single body. We become members of this body and members of one another. Another name for this body is the *church*.

The church is created by God by joining parties together who would otherwise be at odds. Paul tells us it is through this union, lived out before the watching world, that we demonstrate the many faceted wisdom of God to the heavenly realms. Jesus himself, on the night before his crucifixion, explained that the reality of our relationship with him and the truth of his own claims about himself would be demonstrated by the way we lived this out. All throughout the world, local churches proclaim the reality of God’s work in reconciling people to himself by demonstrating the effects that work also has between people. The church provides a physical testimony to this and to the love and unity found in the Godhead.

This is our first calling. Everything else that the church does flows out of this.

This is the unique nature of the church. A supernatural union between Christ and believers and between believers themselves that manifests the character and wisdom of God in the world. This is who the church is, who we are. This is the forest. Before we ever look at the trees, the specifics of what we are to be doing, we must grasp this big picture. It is this big picture that gives meaning and context to the details of what we do.

We believe this is important. This is why we are spending so much space here in the start of our study with this topic. If we fail to understand this big picture concept of the nature and role of the church in God's plan, we might make the error of looking at the church like it is just another human organization. We might make the mistake of thinking it is here to primarily

provide value to us or to our family personally. We might believe we can just join it like we do a gym or the booster club at our kid's school. We might think our commitment and involvement only has to go as far as it aligns with our personal needs, desires, or values. And we would be wrong.

In this week's study and discussion, we will look more at the nature of the church and belonging. Like anytime we read scripture, we must work hard at separating cultural views and values from biblical ones. The culture will tell us to consider ourselves first. The Bible will tell us we are now part of a new family so closely united that we are literally members of one another and we are not to consider ourselves first. Surrendering our will to Christ's in order to live this out will be one of the hardest things we do, but it is what we are called to.

Quotes from TBC Home Group Leaders:

"The church is the hub of our lives. It is our primary source of community, and it serves as a place for us to develop our views on the culture."

"The church is very significant in my life. It is very encouraging to me to be around other believers. They keep me focused on Christ and not myself."

"The church has had a profound impact throughout my life. More specifically, the church has functioned as our family for many years since we do not have any family close by."

Study & Discussion

- 1) Look up the following passages. Note the different metaphors given for the nature of the church.

Rom 12:4-5

Eph 1:22-23

Eph 2:13-22

1 Tim 3:15

1 Pet 2:9

- What qualities are being emphasized through the use of each of these metaphors?
- What does it mean to be “members of one another”? What are some practical ramifications that this might have?
- What are the differences between belonging to a family and belonging to an organization? Focus especially on how you join and how you leave.
- The New Testament makes no distinction between what is true of the universal church and what is true of the local church. In light of all of the above and your group discussion, how would you describe what it means to belong to a local church? How has that compared to your experience?

- 2) Look up the following passages. In each one, try to identify the trait or attribute that is put in display by the church and what it testifies to or results in.

John 13:34-35

John 17:20-23

I Cor 1:24-31

Eph 1:11-14

Eph 3:8-10

- Throughout the New Testament we see a high calling for the people of God to imitate their heavenly Father by manifesting holiness, love, and unity in the midst of their communities. The very nature of our existence lived out as a body testifies both to the character and wisdom of God.
 - a. What are some ways we as a body or as individual members of it, give a good picture of the people of God?
 - b. What are some ways or circumstances where we perhaps do not?
- Being part of the church is a fundamental aspect of being a believer. In your opinion, what do you think this should look like today? What role should our culture's consumer mindset play in our relationship with the church?

For Deeper Reflection

- 1) In what ways has the uniting of parties that would not normally have any reason to be together, and might even be hostile to one another, played out in your experience in the church? If you do not have that experience, why do you think that is?
- 2) In what way does your commitment to the family of believers in the local church impact your priorities and resources?
- 3) If being part of a local church is talked about in terms of being part of a body or being part of a family, what types of circumstances do you believe justify breaking those bonds?

APPENDIX

TBC CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE III: Membership

Section 1 — Definition

We believe that all Christians are members of the Body of Christ and members of one another. As such, we share a common purpose (Article I) based on common beliefs (Article II). Any believer who attends Temple Bible Church on a regular basis is considered a part of the Temple Bible Church family, a member of Temple Bible Church.

Section 2 — Function

It is the goal of Temple Bible Church to faithfully represent locally what Scripture says is true of His church universally. Membership is not legalistic. It does not convey any special privileges or stature to a believer. It is an acknowledgment that Christ exhorts us to carry out the "one anothers" of Scripture. Membership is not exclusive. We do not base our fellowship or scope of ministry based on a written roll. It does recognize that we are called out from the world, separated unto Him to live holy lives.

Membership is a positive affirmation of the unique relationship we have with fellow believers that God gives us when we become His children. It is a recognition that the Church, His Body, is not a loose collection of individual Christians, but an assembly of mutually dependent brothers and sisters in Christ designed to display His character to the world by our mutual love for one another, submission to one another, and service with one another. It is our expectation that members of the Temple Bible Church family would:

- A. Have as their highest goal to glorify God in everything that they think or do;
- B. Apply all of their heart, soul, and mind to knowing God and making Him known;
- C. Engage regularly in personal Bible reading and prayer, establishing family devotions when possible;
- D. Be honest and faithful in all endeavors, exemplary in conduct, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts;

- E. Bring up such children, as may be entrusted to our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;
- F. Walk together in Christian love, exercise Christian care, concern and watchfulness over one another; be thoughtful, considerate, slow to take offense, and quick to forgive and seek forgiveness;
- G. Endeavor to provide for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of one another;
- H. Hold one another accountable to the mandates of Scripture and exercise discipline in accordance to the Word of God;
- I. Assist in the work of the church and aid in the establishment of the church as a witness to the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ;
- J. Persevere — by example, by word, and by prayer — in fulfilling the mission of Temple Bible Church;
- K. Contribute to the financial support of Temple Bible Church and its undertakings;
- L. Submit to the leadership of the elders;
- M. To carry out the work of the ministry in such a way as to include but not be limited to fellow Temple Bible Church members.

Section 3 — Leadership

In order to model the above expectations, and to help preserve the unity of Temple Bible Church, we require all elders, deacons, pastoral and administrative staff, teachers, and small group leaders to uphold the doctrinal statement (Article II), submit to the leadership of the elders, and be in agreement with the mission and purpose of Temple Bible Church (Article I).

Temple Bible Church

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