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ROMANS 12:3-13

[PRAYER] Father, I'm grateful you didn't leave us alone. When Jesus left the earth He sent the Holy Spirit, but He also gave us the church, a place where we can build friendships, enjoy ministry, have needs met. As we're part of a church, we're part of something big that you're doing. Today as we look at and understand more about your word and about what the church is from your word, I pray that you would teach us and give us a vision about being a part of your church. So Lord, we come to you now with anticipation as we open your word, knowing that you speak to us through it. We ask that you would use your word in a powerful way in our hearts this morning. We need you, we acknowledge you as our Savior and Lord. We want you to empower us in our individual walk and corporately as we serve you. In Jesus' name, amen.

My vision for you today is this: If you have been an outsider looking in that you would have a different perspective of the church, that you would view yourself as an insider looking at ministry inside and looking out in a more strategic way. So over the next two sessions as we're together, I'm going to be sharing more about what the Bible has to say about church membership.

Today we're going to look at eight critical questions about church membership. In order to do that, I want to read a passage from God's word. So I want to ask you to stand in honor of God's word with me as I read this passage from Romans 12 to you.

Verse 3 starts this way – For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

You may be seated. Well that is a mouthful of things that are involved in what the church is all about. I'm glad I'm a member of this church. I'm a pastor here, but I'm also a member. So it's

this place where I develop the friendships in my life, where I get to use my spiritual gift. It's a place where I'm corrected by people who care about me and say, "Hey, you're doing something that needs to change." It's a place that I can experience being part of something big that God is doing. There's something supernatural about coming to this building, coming into this room and sitting in these churches, and wondering who God is going to bring today and then what might God say to me today. So I always come to church on Sundays with this sense of anticipation of what is God going to do in my heart today?

Today I want to talk about this thing that God created He calls the church. I want you to understand the church and understand how to maximize it in your own lives.

The word 'church' occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament. It comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which means the called out ones. Which means we're different from the rest of the world. We're called out of the world. We are in the world, but we're living as the church, which means that we're different. We see life differently. We live life differently. We act differently. We are connected to God and what God is doing in this world and we have special benefits as a result of being part of His church.

Basically it goes this way. In the Old Testament, God had a plan for reaching the world. He shares that plan through Abraham and Abraham's family. He says to Abraham, "*Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.*" So He worked through a family in the Old Testament. God continues and will continue to work through the Jewish people in the end times, as we read in God's word. It's through the Jewish nation that Jesus, the Messiah, came and, of course, then we are all blessed.

But in the New Testament we have a change, or maybe I should say a fulfillment of what's going on. Jesus introduced that to us and helped us understand that change and what it looks like. Because in the Old Testament we have the law and now we have grace. But grace doesn't abolish the law, it just takes it to the next level. So we can understand God's grace in some powerful ways. The law is fulfilled in the New Testament. So Christ was talking about how these things are going to change, and one of the statements He says is, "*I will build my church upon his rock.*" He says to Peter, "*I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overpower it.*"

This is going to lead us to our first question. The question that I want you to look at is this: Is the church important? Well if we look at Jesus' words and He's starting to talk to Peter and explain how powerful the church is, He says *the gates of hell will not prevail against it*. What He's saying is my vehicle for change in the world today is the church. You want to know that.

There will be people who try to destroy it. Through history, right from the very beginning people were trying to destroy the church, but even today we have the persecuted church. People all over the world today are suffering because they're Christians because there are people who don't like Christians or want to stamp them out. Even in our own culture we see a changing tendency to putting down Christians and hindering their work and looking down on them. But here it's saying the church is powerful.

So as we're looking at the questions, the very first question I want to ask is, is the church important? The answer to that question is this: Yes. Yes, it's God's vehicle for change in our world.

Each one of the answers to the questions I want to lead us to a principle. In this case the principle is we need to value God's church. There are some people today who love God, but don't love the church. They say, "I really love God, but I don't really like the church." I can understand why. There's a lot of imperfect people in the church. There's a lot of churches who have done things that are in the name of God that have been unhelpful, ungodly, hurtful, damaging to people. All the churches are imperfect. If you find the perfect church, don't go there because you will make it imperfect by your presence there. They are imperfect because they are made up of sinning people. Yet God's church is valuable. It's a place where we grow and we wrestle with our sin and we're confronted by that and we work on things in humility. It's a valuable place for all of us. We need to value God's church. It's God's entity for change in the world today. He wants to do something in us and through us, and part of that is the church.

So what is this thing called the church and how can we become a member of it? Let's look at the term 'member' for a moment, at least in this passage as it's described in Romans 12. He uses the term 'member' here to describe how the body functions together. In Romans 12:4-5 it says – *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to the other.*

Now membership is not something that's foreign to us. All you have to do is pull out your wallet or keychain and you're probably a member of many things. You're a member of AAA or you're a member of Amazon Prime, or you're a member of whatever kind of organization that you're a member of. Your wallet tells us that if we were to open it up and check all the cards that you have. There's lots of things you can be a member of today. Some people view the church as just another club that you can get benefits from. Just like all the things you're a member of, you become members so you can get benefits from them.

But I want you to understand a key theological point here about the church. If we understand what the church is about and we get this picture of the church, then it'll help us understand a little bit more than to think that church is just like Costco or we get some benefits by being a member.

In the scriptures we understand that the church is an organization. When I say an organization, I mean that it's organized. It's a system. We organize with the government, we report to the government, we have meetings, we have a calendar, we plan, we organize. All of those things are part of being an organization as a church. We are an organization, but we're much more than that because the church is an organism. If you're looking at the passage, it's talking about a body. A body that is functioning, it's alive, it has a personality. It's moving and interacting. Jesus is the head of the body or this organism and then you have all the people, all of us. So when you become part of a church, you're becoming part of this organism, this thing that's living and moving around.

So I want to ask a second question this morning and that second question is, what does it mean to be a member of a church? I want to suggest that it means you become connected to an organism that is alive and growing. I want to suggest a principle we can derive from that is that connecting to the church is part of your calling. God designed us to be together. Some people think that membership in a church is optional. I want to suggest it's part of who we are. God designed us to be part of the church, He designed it for us.

If you're a leader in the church, sometimes you think in terms of "oh we've got to help this church grow." I want you to know we don't grow this church. God is the one who grows this church. In fact that's what it says in Acts 2 in the early church. This is from Acts 2. Notice how the church grew. *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* It's God who grows the church. Our job is to be a healthy church because healthy organisms grow. So we want to do what God has for us to be, the healthy organism.

Let's look back at that passage again, just for a moment, because I want to ask some questions about how the church is organized. I want to read the verse again. *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ (notice where Christ is positioned here) we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us.*

Now look at that and imagine you're in the early church and you're trying to organize the church. How are we going to make decisions in the life of the church? It's interesting there are lots of forms of church government today. But the Bible does not give us a prescription for church government. He doesn't tell us that you should have this kind of government. So we have a number of different kinds of governments in church. I think we have the freedom in Christ to do that.

For example, there's the Presbyterian form of government. Presbyterian comes from the Greek word *presbytery*. It's a word from the Bible. Presbytery which means elders, describing the way that they make decisions in the Presbytery church. There's a group of elders who are responsible to do what they see best in leading the church and making decisions for the whole church. That's what a Presbyterian form of government is all about.

There's another form of government called Episcopal. That's another Greek word that comes from the Bible, *episkopos*, which means bishop. Now in Episcopal form of government you have individuals who make decisions for the life of the church and you have the bishop above them. So the person making the decisions is doing so the best way that they can in conjunction with God's will and their understanding of what God wants. But they're helping make decisions for the life of the church and leading the church that way.

Then there's the Baptist form of government. Baptist form of government recognizes that every believer has a spiritual gift, so they use that to define government of the church. So that's why if you go to a Baptist church you'll see that they vote on things as a body of the church. So the church will vote on the budget for the year. The membership will do that. They'll vote on a pastor coming into the fellowship. So it's the church membership that's doing the voting. In the

best way that they can under the power of the Holy Spirit, just like in the other forms of government, they're trying to make decisions for the life of the church.

I want to suggest that in any form of government, it can go well, as long as the Holy Spirit is leading and directing and moving people forward. In any form of government that you have, sin can corrupt that. Sin can cause people to do wrong things and then you end up having a church that's going in the wrong direction. It's not determined by a church government. It's determined by the responses of those people to God's leadership in the midst of that. And God can use any form of church government to bring about what He wants to do in the life of a church.

In Calvary Chapels, we handle church government a little bit different. Maybe you'd say we take a little bit of all of those things. But I'd like to suggest it a little bit differently. We follow a model that we see in the Bible of leadership. Examples like Moses, Joshua, David, Paul, and others who are leaders. There seems to be a way that God puts all of that into action to make leadership takes place. He calls a person. So there's a calling of some leader in the Bible. And then God often takes that leader through some kind of a wilderness experience of some kind. That's what we see. Then God brings him to a vision. He gives him a vision of what could be or what He wants them to do. There's that vision point. And then God brings alongside of that leader other people who are supportive of that vision. This vision is what I want to partner with. And then He gives them a place to do that or opens up the door for them to be a part of something.

Now we try to use that same kind of a model of leadership in the Calvary Chapel movement. The pastors ultimately are making decisions for the life of the church, but when we go to our leadership meetings as pastors and they're teaching us, there's a heavy emphasis on what we call servant leadership. That idea of servant leadership is like an inverted pyramid. This is how we view ourselves as pastors. It's not a like a pyramid with pastor at the top and everybody flowing down to the congregation. It's inverted. The pastor is at the bottom and his job is to empower the membership of the church, equip them to do the work of ministry so that God is glorified, we're reaching out, and so on. So it's an inverted pyramid in the leadership of a Calvary Chapel.

So the question is, how is the church led? I would suggest in this church, Calvary Chapel, servant leadership brings vision from all to empower ministry. God has blessed you with initiative to empower the church. So the church is led on a number of different levels. I would suggest it's like a three-legged stool. Christ is the head of the church (if you look at leadership from a biblical perspective of God's church), the pastor is one of those leaders leading the church, and then you also have all of the membership because they have gifts that can be used for that membership in order to help the church function in a healthy way.

We believe that this passage in Romans 12 is strategic for us because it gives us this sense that there's a working together of the membership. There's a working together of the people to be the church that God has called us to be. Each member by definition means they have some initiative they can bring to the church. Maybe they have the gift of serving, or in the passage it says prophesying, or mercy. That means they have a certain way of initiating. When all of those come together, it forms the church to be that special place.

So first of all, God's church is His creation and it's an organism. The church has these members. But let's ask this question about membership: What does it mean to be a member of the church? What does it look like according to God's word? I think as we look at verse 10 of chapter 12 we get an answer to that in this very important verse. In Romans 12 in the passage we're reading here, it uses these words – *Be devoted to one another in love.*

I want you to understand the word *devoted*. It's only used this one place in the whole Bible, this Greek word. It's made up of two Greek words – *phileo*, which means brotherly love, and *storge*, which is family love. Those two kinds of love brought together here describe the kind of commitment we are to share with each other. There's this family commitment that we make to each other and that we enjoy. This idea of devotion implies you're committed. Be committed to those people in that fellowship. It's only used here in the Bible, but I think what it does is it gives within this word a whole culture of belief and action and activity that describe really what it means to be committed to a family.

Just let me show you another verse. I've given you two translations of this verse, one from the NIV, the other from the ESV. But I just want you to see how the church is this family type of commitment. *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* Or in the ESV – *to the household of faith.* The idea here is that God uses the church to be this family where we commit ourselves to each other and we enjoy what God wants to do in our lives. So this commitment is inside of us. It's something that we give.

As you know, many times the people that you are connected to within God's church are a closer relationship than you might even have with someone in your own physical family. God does that. That's what the church is all about. The beautiful thing is that there are a lot of families that are damaged or people experience pain in their family of origin. God has designed the church to be a family that catches all of that and brings it together in this beautiful way so that we enjoy more of what God has for us than we might otherwise. The church is a family and we need to (notice it says) devote yourself or commit yourself to it. That's the word that's used in that passage.

So let's ask a question. What is church membership? What is it? I would suggest the passage indicates that it's an internal commitment in your heart to a local body of believers. It's an internal commitment in your heart to a local body of believers. I would suggest the principle is that each person must connect to a local church. There's this sense of I want to be a part of what God is doing here. What is church membership? It implies devotion, commitment; it's where I'm investing.

How does one become a member? In all of those other memberships we talked about, you become a member by paying fees or dues. That is not true about the church. You don't become a member by paying a fee. You become a member when two things take place in your life – one, you're a Christian. Christ is living in your heart. The church is made up of people who are Christians. Only Christians can be members of a church. Anybody can attend. There may be people who are here who are attending today who are not Christians. We welcome you here, we're glad you're here. We hope though that you would become committed to Jesus Christ and

you would become a Christian. That would be our goal for you because that would give you then the first qualification you need in order to be a member of God's church.

Thus you have on your communication card two options to choose. Are you a regular attender or are you a member? You have the opportunity every week to make that decision. You can say today I'm a member or am I just an attender. It's our goal to help you move in that place, the second one, determine in your heart that you're committing yourself to this fellowship. That's what it means to be a member.

Other things follow, like attending church or getting baptized or getting involved in a small group or giving or serving. One of the things that we teach kids in a family is this: You are a part of a family. That means it's not just all about you. You're contributing. The same thing is true in a church that we are all living in community, sharing and exchanging our lives with each other. We're getting involved in each other's lives.

So now let's ask some very important questions to hone this down a little bit so we understand what we're talking about. Can I be a Christian without joining other believers in a local church? The answer to that question is yes, you can. But you're missing something very valuable. So if we're looking at the scripture for answers, which is what we're trying to do this morning, the answer is yes, you can be a Christian and not part of a church. But you're missing something very valuable. Why is that? Well it's because Christianity isn't a game of solitaire. It's a team sport.

I like the story of the little boy who said to his mom, "I'm going out to play baseball." The mom says, "Oh you are? You got your baseball and your bat there. Who are you going to play with?"

"I'm just going to play by myself."

"Okay." So she was eager to watch him go out in the backyard and play baseball.

Well he takes the baseball out in the backyard, he throws it up in the air, and he swings and misses. He says, "Strike one." So he throws it up in the air again and he swings and he misses. Strike two. So he throws it up in the air again and he swings and he misses. Strike three. He says, "I sure am a good pitcher."

I would suggest that there are some people who want to play, but don't want to be part of a team. Can you do that? Sure. I think as Christians we are out serving the Lord, but God has designed His church for us for a very important reason – so we can be encouraged in our faith. In fact that's what Hebrews 10 says to us. *And let us consider how to spur one another on toward love and good works, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.* So even in the early church there were some in the habit of not coming to church is what he's saying. What the writer to the Hebrews is telling us is that this isn't a game of solitaire. It's something that we do together. As we're together God does something very important in our lives.

Which brings us to an administrative question that I want to give you that I think will further clarify this idea about church and church membership. When I become a member, do I get on a

church list? That's a really important question, at least if you're trying to lead a church. The answer to the question is no. At least not in a Calvary Chapel. The reason for that is because there is no list. Just think about it. There is no list that we can develop that can accurately reflect all of the current commitment of people in the life of the church. Some people are drifting away, some people are coming, and so having an accurate list is really not possible.

It's a problem in another form of government where you're trying to vote on something for example and you have to have a pure membership. So there's certain people who are in the membership and certain people who are not. Then you end up with a challenge sometimes. Because then you have people voting on things who really aren't committed, but they show up for the membership meeting and they vote on certain things.

I think it is important for us to recognize that there is a list in the Bible. That list is called the Lamb's book of life. That's the only list that's important that we're a part of. That Lamb's book of life is the list that has your name in it if you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. That's the list that we need to be concerned about.

Today I want to encourage you to do one of two things – either recognize that you are a member of Calvary Chapel Living Hope or become a member of Calvary Chapel Living Hope by saying, “Yes, this is where I want to commit myself. This is the local body I want to be a part of.” Thus we have this communication card that's a tool for communication, but it does have that box on the upper right hand side that reminds you every week about that commitment and whether you are a member or not.

You don't earn the privilege of church membership. You can't pay for it, you can't buy it. It is a gift given to you because of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It's His gift to us, the church, and we become a part of it. Membership is in our hearts. It's something that we do because God has designed it.

I would suggest if you're away from the church for a while, even if it's on a Sunday, you say, “Where can I go and fellowship somewhere? I want to be connected to God's church.” If you're away from the church for a while, you're saying, “I've got to find a church. I want to be connected.” God has designed us that way in order to move forward.

Now if this happens to you, if you end up saying, “Yes, I'm committed,” then your vocabulary will change. If you're talking to me, you're not going to say these words: “Hey, I like your church.” Because no longer will it be “your church” (pointing at me). It will be your church. Let me clarify something here. This is my church. It's my church, not because I'm a pastor. It's because I'm a member here. I've chosen to be a member here. I get to use my spiritual gift here. That's great. This is my church because I've chosen to put my membership here in this church. It's not because I started this church. In fact I didn't even start this church. God started this church; I just had the privilege of pushing the button. God designed it. He started it. This church will go on after I'm gone. It's His church. It's an entity. It's something that growing. It's an organism.

This is our church. So as you talk about it, I hope you speak about it that way, that this is our church if you're a member here. I'm a member and I'm privileged to be a member of Calvary Chapel Living Hope in Robbinsville, New Jersey.

Now the church is unique. It develops its own personality. Every church is different. It has its own personality. It's one of a kind. Now this church is unique in the fact that we love to eat. Not just that. We also love to sing. We're committed to children and passing the faith onto the next generation. We love to do outreach and reach out beyond our walls. We're committed to young people. We get together in small groups through the course of the week. All of those things form our identity of who we are and our personality.

But I got to tell you, we are not the only church in this area. There are some other really good churches. GraceWay Church is a really good church. I admire what they're doing over there. I heard recently they have eighty-five various ministries. We have a little more than eighty-five people. But they have eighty-five ministries at GraceWay. What a great church over there. They are serving the Lord and God is doing amazing things through that church to serve God. Princeton Alliance Church. I really love that church and the things they're doing and ministering to the community. As is the 217 church. The Faith Baptist Church where there's a Christian school.

Good things are happening in these churches. Each one of these churches is unique. They have their own personality. We're not in competition. We're all serving the Lord together. I rejoice with those pastors and I meet with them. I just got a notice this week. We're meeting again in a couple weeks to meet with the leadership, the pastors of the churches. I rejoice with those other churches and what God is doing in their midst and how He's working through them. Good things are happening.

But this church is unique. You know why it's unique? Because it has me in it and because it has you in it and you in it and you in it and you in it. If you're not yet part of this church, when you become a part of it you're embracing a personality. That's what we are. We're a personality of God's presence in this world. When you become part of this membership of this church then you change the personality. So our personality takes on this representation of the people that God has brought here.

There is no implied church membership. Children are not members because their parents are. They're only members because they make a decision to accept Christ and then they commit themselves. So we're training children to experience God's worship here. We're training them to participate in the life of the church, whether they're children or young people, that's what we want for them. If your wife or your husband is part of this church, you're not a member just because they are. You have to make that commitment in your own heart. It's something that you express in your life.

I like the story that we tell in marriage counseling about the husband who's being encouraged to say "I love you" to his wife. He says, "Look, I told it to her once. If I change my mind, I'll tell her again." But the idea here is we need to be communicating that message regularly. We keep saying that.

Some people believe that if they live in the U.S. then they're Christians. Or because they live in the south. Some people in the south are religious, or something like that. It's about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and it's about some relationship you have with a local body of believers.

When I become a member, do I get on a church list? No. A church list would never accurately reflect the state of people's commitment. The principle is membership in your heart.

Next question. How old do you have to be to be part of God's church? Very important question.

I remember when I was a boy, my father was traveling around to different churches and he was teaching in those churches. We happened to be there on a night they were having communion. So they asked for all of the people who wanted to be served communion to stand up. The implication was if you're a member of this church, stand up. So my dad's on my platform, my brother and I were there (I was probably ten years old and he was likely eight years old, something like that). We had been participating in the Lord's Table at this point. So we looked at my dad and he gave us a little nod, so we stood up. We didn't get served communion in that situation. So it was uncomfortable, I think, for the whole church. Because we stood up they didn't know what to do and pretty soon someone came around and served us communion. It was just an awkward place for everybody to know what to do.

When we serve communion we also want to be careful how we handle children in our communion environment. That's why I say each time that leaders or the ushers are not going to serve the children unless they're with their parents and the parents can help make that decision for them.

How old does a child have to be or a person have to be before they can be a member of a church? As old as you need to understand salvation. Because when you're saved, then you are eligible to become a member. So there is a very important principle for us here at this church in particular, because we value children so much, that we need to embrace our younger believers as members of the church. We don't want them to believe that Christianity is for them some day or the Bible is irrelevant for you until you get to be an adult. We want them right now to know they are part of God's church and can serve Him and can be part of what God wants to do in their lives.

Let's ask another question, the eighth question. This is an interesting one. Is baptism required to be a member of a church? It is a very important question. Remember we're looking at God's word for our answers to these kinds of questions, and I'm going to suggest the answer to that question is no. But it is part of our commitment to Jesus. It's a very important part of our commitment to Jesus and we are commanded to get baptized. In some churches they do require membership by baptism. If you haven't been baptized then you need to get baptized. In some cases in some Baptist churches, if you haven't been baptized in a Baptist church then you need to get baptized into their church.

I only say that because I was baptized twice as a child. I was baptized at six years old because I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and so then I came to the place where my parents

helped me decide that I wanted to get baptized. It was a very meaningful experience for me. Yet when we moved to Oklahoma City and my father wanted us to go to this Baptist church (so we're joining the church, going through membership), I could become a member, but I was not baptized in a Baptist church as my father and mother had been years earlier. And so the church required I be baptized again. So my father came to me and said to me, "Scott, this is one of those things where you don't really have to be baptized again, but I'm going to ask you to get baptized again so that we can fit into the culture here of this particular church. We're going to submit to their leadership and what they're doing here because we want to be a part of what's going on in this church." So I got baptized again. I'm really holy now.

Look, I want to say baptism is a really important part of your life. If you've never been baptized, you should get baptized. If you're a Christian, it's an outward statement of what's going on inside your heart. So I believe baptism is extremely important. If you were baptized as a baby, that's different. That's more like a dedication of you.

If you haven't been baptized as a believer, then you ought to get baptized. I would encourage you to talk to me, shoot me an email, say, "Hey, I want to get baptized." We'll schedule a baptism. It'll be right back there in the hot tub we bring in here and we'll baptize you right here in this room. It's a statement of your commitment to Jesus Christ. If you send me an email and say, "I want to get baptized," we'll put it on the calendar. Other people will probably join you in that commitment as well. So I would suggest the principle is, if you're not baptized yet, do it. It's important. But I don't see it in scripture as a requirement for church membership in the sense of what God is doing.

Do you want your life to count? Do you want to live a life filled with purpose and significance? Do you want to be at the heart of what God is doing in the world today? Then you become a member of a local church. You make that commitment to become a member and be part of what God wants for you.

Remember I said there's two parts to that. One is having membership in your heart and saying I want to be part of this fellowship. But the other thing is you need to have Jesus living inside of you. You need to have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

So right now I want to offer that to you. If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, that's your first step. Do that first and then become a member. Because you need that in order to become a member of God's church. So I want you to bow your heads with me. Let's bows our heads and close our eyes. I'm going to pray a prayer. If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can pray this prayer along with me and ask Jesus to come into your heart right now.

[PRAYER] Dear Lord, I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for my sins on the cross and rose for me. I repent of my sins. By faith I receive Jesus Christ into my heart as my Savior. Lord, you promised to save me and I believe right now that the Lord Jesus is my personal Savior and that all my sins are forgiven through His precious blood. I thank you, dear Lord, for saving me. In Jesus' name, amen.

I want you to know if you prayed that prayer, God heard you and He receives you as part of His family. And now you have the prerequisite necessary to commit yourself to a local church. I want to encourage you to do that. God has great things in store for this particular church, has a vision for how we can impact our community both locally and afar, and you can be a part of that if you choose to join the rest of us. I know many of you are already members and you know that and you've been marking your card as members, so I think that's a powerful thing.

Next week I'm going to share more about this subject and we're going to go a little deeper. Again, looking at the Bible, not at some creed somewhere. Looking at the Bible and what the Bible says about membership. We're going to talk about some of its blessings as we dig a little bit deeper into that.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your church. We thank you for the privilege of this particular body of believers. I do pray for Pastor Emmons at GraceWay. I pray for all the different pastors that are leading today and teaching your word. I ask that you would use those churches in a powerful way this morning as they're reaching out to their community. Lord, I ask that you'd bless this church and its unique vision, unique personality. I pray that you would bring the right people to this church. Give us welcoming arms, open hearts to the people you'll bring to this fellowship. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.