

5.11.25

Why Should I Belong to a Church?

Romans 12:4-13

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I had a conversation with a guy at the gym last month who knows me and has a friend who attends BBC. When his BBC friend invited him to attend worship on Easter Sunday he declined. The week after he received that invitation, we struck up a conversation at the gym. He was wearing a cross around his neck, but he doesn't have an interest in or see the need to belong to a church. In a sense, this sermon is a response to him and anyone who doesn't think a person needs to belong to a church.

For someone like me, who has no memory of not being a part of a church, it's hard for me to understand why anyone would want to miss all the benefits and blessings that come with being a part of a church. There are many of us who could say that some of the most meaningful relationships and friendships we've had and have, and many of the most memorable experiences we've shared, have been because we've been part of a church.

Last fall we did a series on the Church where we looked at different descriptions and images of the Church that are present in the New Testament. We didn't do a message in that series on **why someone should be a part of the church in the first place.** The word "**church,**" is the English translation of a Greek word (ekklēsia) meaning **'assembly' or 'gathering.'** **The church is the body of Christ with Jesus as the head, and God's Spirit dwells in our midst.** In the New Testament, 'church' refers to **a group of people, either all the Christians in a city (Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1) or those gathered for worship in a particular house (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19) or all Christians in all the churches, or the whole church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22). It never signifies a building or a 'denomination.'** We don't go to church; **we are the church.** The church is the people of God, the people who belong to God.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says about the church in **Romans 12:4-13.** **4** For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, **5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.** **6 We have gifts** that differ according to the grace given to

us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.** 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, **serve the Lord.** 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 **Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.**

Today we're going to explore some of the spiritual, relational, and practical reasons why being part of a local church is helpful for anyone and vital for every believer. Have you ever heard someone say, *"I love Jesus, but I don't need the church"*? Or *"I can worship God just fine on my own"*? While it's true we can connect with God anywhere, the New Testament paints a much bigger, richer picture of what it means to follow Jesus. It's not just a personal walk—it's a **shared journey**. Today, we're looking at **Romans 12:4–13** to explore ***why belonging to a church isn't optional—it's essential***. Paul makes it clear in Romans 12 that being a follower of Christ, means being a part of a church because you can't do most of the things he describes without being in relationship with and in community with other people. How can you ***"love one another with mutual affection,"*** or ***"outdo one another in showing honor,"*** by yourself?

### **1. You're Part of a Body (Romans 12:4–5)**

*"For just as each of us has one body with many members... so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*

Paul begins with a powerful image: the body. You wouldn't say, *"I'm a hand, and I don't need the rest of the body."* That would be ridiculous—and dangerous. A hand can't function apart from the body. The image of the church being like a body is one Paul uses in both Romans and 1 Corinthians 12. Likewise, **you and I were never meant to live out our faith in isolation. We need each other to be whole. We belong to each other.** Belonging to a church means:

**You have a place.** You're not just attending; you're connected. You're learning people's names, you're building and deepening relationships, you're sharing life together. We're helping one another in a host of ways.

**You're needed.** Every part has a purpose. This week people from our church helped lead a worship service, a Sunday School hour, provided a breakfast, hosted a memorial service, worked on the church property and at the parsonage, met in meetings about future events, gathered for Bible study and small group discussions, supported Mission ventures by Habitat for Humanity, Great Awakenings Coffee House, and Trinity Christian Academy. And that's just one week! It's amazing how many people volunteer, serve, and participate on a weekly basis.

**You belong.** Not loosely, but deeply, like organs in a body. We all contribute to the whole and when we're absent or away that absence is felt by many people. We have people who are with us online and have been for years and they sometimes wonder if there are ways they can contribute or if they belong, and my answer is, of course you do and we're grateful that you're part of BBC, and I'll say more about that later.

Ask yourself: Am I trying to follow Jesus without being part of His body? Hopefully because you're here or watching this service, the answer to that question is, "No." We're enriched and so are other people when we live with the understanding, *"I'm part of a body. I'm needed, I have a place, and I belong,"*

## **2. You Have Gifts to Use (Romans 12:6–8)**

*"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us..."*

Each believer has been given spiritual gifts—grace-empowered abilities—not for personal gain, but for building up the body and to glorify God. You may have the gift of encouragement, teaching, giving, serving, or leadership. But here's the key: **gifts are meant to be used *with* others, *for* others.** You can't fully live out your calling in isolation. Belonging to a church is important because the church is a **training ground and a mission field** for your gifts. Imagine a talented musician or a gifted vocalist who never joins a band, a group, or an orchestra. Their potential would be wasted. The same goes for believers who never connect to a church and fail to use their spiritual gifts,

wisdom, and experience. We all have different gifts and passions and it's through all of us doing what we can do best that others are blessed, the church is built up, and people can see our good works and praise God in heaven.

### 3. You Grow Through Love (Romans 12:9–10)

*“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love.”*

The local church is where **God teaches us how to love like Jesus**. Real, messy, sacrificial love. Not the kind you can practice on a podcast or by yourself, but the kind that requires **patience, forgiveness, grace, and time**. Where else are people being taught to love in this way? Where in our culture are people going to learn how to love with patience, to practice forgiveness, to extend grace, to share their time? What will happen to our communities and our nation if this kind of love is not taught or practiced?

Spiritual growth happens best in the context of **community**—when we rub shoulders with real people who challenge and sharpen us and hold us lovingly accountable to the standard Jesus lived and taught. This can't happen unless we let people in. Are you letting people into your life enough to love and be loved? One of the privileges I have as a pastor is seeing how individuals and small groups in our church love others deeply from the heart and how life changing that is for everyone who is a part of it.

### 4. You're Called to Serve Others (Romans 12:11–13)

*“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord... Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”*

Church isn't a **spectator sport**. It's not just about what you get, but what you give. Paul says our love should move us to **action**, serving, giving, welcoming, and meeting needs. Some of our online worshippers are serving in a variety of ways including praying for people on our prayer list and sending cards to people. Linda is organizing volunteers for two different ministries, Sal helps to prepare bulk mailings, Lisa and Roy constantly reach out to check up on people who are homebound or to provide rides, Bill

and Mary Lou have a ministry of encouragement. Those are just a few examples of people serving who aren't physically present. We can all find ways to serve.

Art Radke shared after our new member session on April 30<sup>th</sup> about the importance of being present in worship, if possible, He said to me, "*You don't know who needs you to be there.*" That is so true. In a church family:

- Someone might need your smile.
- Someone might need your story.
- Someone might need your shoulder.

You matter. Your presence, your voice, your faith, your reaching out, your caring—it blesses others in ways you may never see.

Today is Mother's Day, of course, and for many of us, but not all, it was our mother's presence, voice, faith, and caring that started us and sustained us on our way with countless gifts of love. We heard earlier from **2 Timothy 1:5** about how mothers and grandmothers can influence and guide their children and grandchildren to a personal faith in Jesus. "*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.*" Paul traces Timothy's faith through his maternal line, demonstrating the vital role mothers play in passing on a living, personal faith to their children. Genuine faith, the kind required for a church composed of committed people, is often nurtured in the home, especially by mothers and grandmothers. Mothers nurture physical life and the church nurtures spiritual life. Just as a mother's love and care are essential for a child's growth, so too the church's commitment to welcoming those who have experienced new birth in Christ ensures a spiritually healthy family. Just as children are born into a family, believers are "born again" into God's family (John 3:3). Paul uses the metaphor of adoption in Romans 8:15 to show that church membership is not inherited or automatic, but requires a personal, spiritual birth. As mothers welcome and nurture children, the church, like a mother, lovingly receives and disciples those who seek a spiritual birth through Christ.

Not everyone can be a mother, or a father, in a physical sense. **But every one of us can be a spiritual parent who lives and shares our faith with others. The church is a spiritual family that mothers and disciplines believers into maturity.**

**Why Should I Belong to a Church?** Because...

- You were **created for community**.
- You've been **gifted for service**.
- You **grow in love** when you walk with others.
- And because the church isn't a building—it's a **family**, and God wants you in it.

**Final thought:** Don't just go to church. **Belong.** Be known. Be needed. Be loved. Be the body.

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What are some benefits you enjoy because you're a part of a church? List as many as you can.
2. Read Romans 12:4–5. What does it mean to belong to one another in the body of Christ? How does that challenge the idea of "private faith" without community?
3. Paul talks about spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6–8). What gifts do you recognize in yourself or others in the group? How might we encourage one another to use them within the church to glorify God and bless other people?
4. Romans 12:9 says, "Let love be genuine." What are some practical ways we can love each other sincerely in our church community? What makes genuine love hard at times?
5. Reflect on 2 Timothy 1:5. Who are the spiritual "mothers," "fathers," or "grandparents" in your life who nurtured your faith? How can you become that for someone else?

6. What does it mean for God's law to be (Jeremiah 31:33), "written on our hearts"? How does this inner transformation affect the way we live in Christian community?
7. In what ways do you see the church acting like a spiritual family? Where might we need to grow to better reflect the compassion and care described in Romans 12?