

August 15, 2021 by Steve Brandon



Membership Matters

1 Corinthians 12

- 1. God's Gifts Glorify God (verses 1-3).**
- 2. God's Gifts are For Our Common Good (verses 4-7).**
- 3. God's Gifts are For All Believers (verses 7-11).**
- 4. We are like a Body (verses 12-31).**

I want to take you back to a year and a half ago, at the beginning of 2020. Beginning in early January, I began a sermon series on Church Membership. I set forth a vision for Rock Valley Bible Church, how we would be transitioning from an informal church membership, to a formal church membership. In other words, rather than simply coming to church and getting more and more involved as the Lord leads, we want to be a bit more proactive to define what it means that you are a part of Rock Valley Bible Church.

For those of you who were here in those days, you may remember that I used the illustration of two dating couples having the "DTR" discussion, Define the Relationship. "Where's is our relationship going?" "What is our level of commitment?" "How much time do we intend to spend with one another?" "What sort of things should we be talking about?" That's what a DTR discussion is about.

Now, we aren't dating couples who are thinking and talking about marriage. We are church members, thinking about our relationship with one another. thinking about our relationship with the leaders of the church. But a DTR discussion is what we want to have at Rock Valley Bible Church, to put some formality and structure into our church. to set expectations for what we expect of one another. to be more intentional about what we are doing at church. That's what we are aiming for at Rock Valley Bible Church.

So, 18 months ago, I preached four sermons on the topic of Church Membership.

I began with a message entitled, "Church Membership in History," in which I put forth a short, historical survey, demonstrating how church members down through the centuries have chosen to practice church membership in different ways.

I then preached a message entitled, "Church Membership in the Bible," in which I showed from the New Testament how the Bible shows the importance of defining the makeup of the church. That is, in the New Testament, churches were defined. They were made up of identifiable people. Church membership is a means to make this distinction clear.

I then preached a message entitled, "Church Membership in Practice," in which I put forth a picture of what church membership should look like. It looks like a group of people that meets together as a unified group, on a regular basis, and shows their genuine love for one another often.

Finally, I preached a message entitled, "Church Membership at Rock Valley Bible Church," where I talked about our church. our history, our vision, our values, our mission. And I also put forth a plan for us to transition from an informal church membership to a formal church membership.

If you were here at the time, I passed out a "membership" form. in which you could express your commitment to be a part of the body life at Rock Valley Bible Church. likewise, on the form, there was a place for the elders of the church to express our commitment to shepherd and serve you. On the back of the form, there was a place for you to write out your testimony of how you came to faith in Christ, and how you want to serve in the body. There was also a question about baptism.

The plan was to give you some time to think about the forms, and to fill them out. And then, over the next few months, I would talk with you and interview you about the form and church membership. All was in place to make this transition from informal membership to formal membership. and then COVID hit. and everything changed. To implement a formal membership at church, when our church was so divided and so distant, just didn't seem to make sense.

But now as we are coming out of COVID, the time seems right for us pick up this initiative. and define our relationships with one another. and draw together as a body, that we might go forth together in mission. Our greatest need right now for us as a church, is to build the community that we lost through COVID. We need this as a church. You need this. You need the encouragement that being a part of a functioning body brings. I need this. I need the encouragement that comes when we are functioning well as a church.

This morning, I would like for us to look at 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, because, 1 Corinthians 12 helps us to see the core of what church membership is about. It's about each member of the church doing his/her part in the body, to build up the church. So, I invite you to open in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12. My plan this morning is twofold: (1) to walk quickly through this text, and then (2) apply it to us regarding church membership at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Now, the book of 1 Corinthians is written to a church in Corinth. which was not a great church. In fact, they were a church filled with problems. There were factions in the church (chapters 1-4). There was immorality and idolatry in the church (chapters 5-7). There a lack of love in the church (chapters 8-11). There was pride in the church (chapters 12-14). There was doubt in the church (chapter 15).

Paul had planted the church. (When we get to Acts 18 in our exposition of Acts, we will read all about it). And having planted the church, Paul had a good knowledge about the church and those in it. Throughout the letter, Paul is addressing the various problems at the church, giving direction to the church, in what to believe and how to obey the Lord.

Chapter 12 begins with these words, ...

1 Corinthians 12:1

Now concerning spiritual gifts.

This is a common phrase of Paul. On several occasions in the book, he used these words. "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote" (1 Corinthians 7:1). "Now concerning food offered to idols" (1 Corinthians 8:1). This phrase, "now concerning" introduces a subject. It introduces a subject that those in Corinth had asked about. They had written to him some questions. Paul is answering them.

Here in chapter 12, Paul expounds on spiritual gifts, that is, spiritual talents and abilities that God gives to those who believe in him. Those in Corinth were confused about the subject, and they were not acting appropriately. So, Paul seeks to put things right. He says this, ...

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

Paul begins by simply saying that ...

1. God's Gifts Glorify God (verses 1-3).

It seems simple to us. Of course, when God give gifts to us, they will glorify himself. The one filled with the Holy Spirit will not curse Jesus! The one praising Jesus, must come from God.

It seems simple enough. But it's an indication of the confusion of those in Corinth. It's because they had a pagan background. It's because they had a past dealing with idols, which could lead them astray. Not so with God's gifts. They glorify God. They also are for our good.

2. God's Gifts are For Our Common Good (verses 4-7).

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

At this point, Paul begins to share how God works in the life of every church. He gives a variety of gifts to a variety of people, so that they can serve the body in a variety of ways. But these gifts aren't haphazard or random. They all come from the same source: the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They all come with an aim. They are all "for the common good" (verse 7). That is, God brings people with their gifts to the body, not for the good of the people, themselves. but for the good of the whole. That is, "the common good." That is, for the good of the body.

3. God's Gifts are For All Believers (verses 7-11).

1 Corinthians 12:7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

That is, each and every believer is given a portion of the Holy Spirit. Nobody is left Christmas morning without a gift. Initially, this happens at salvation when someone trusts in Christ, they are sealed in the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13). And as the Holy Spirit works in our lives, he empowers us with spiritual abilities. Beginning in verse 8, Paul give a bunch of examples of what this looks like.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

In these verses, we see all sorts of spiritual abilities. We see the ability to know how to apply the ways of God to life. this is the gift of wisdom. We see the ability to know the ways of God, this is the gift of knowledge. We see the ability to believe in the power of God, this is the gift of faith. We see the ability to heal others in distress, this is the gift of healing. We see the ability to do the unexplainable, this is the gift of miracles. We see the ability to preach and proclaim God's ways. This is the gift of prophesy. We see the ability to discern the true from the false, this is the gift of discernment. We see the ability to speak in other languages and to interpret what is said, this is the gift of tongues.

Now, some of these things, I have never seen. I'm not even sure that the Holy Spirit is working in some of these ways in our day. Much of what is passed on as miracles are shams. Much of what is claimed to be tongues is simply gibberish. But these things were in effect during the days of Paul at the church in Corinth.

I have no doubt that this list is far from exhaustive. There are many other ways that God gifts his people to accomplish his work today, that aren't even on this list. For instance, God gives people the special ability to bring encouragement to others (like Barnabas, Acts 4:36). God gives people the unique ability to mediate relationships, these are called peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). God gives people the ability to be bold for Christ! and stand firm and face persecution square in the face. God gives people the ability to weep with those who weep. this is called compassion.

But the point is this: All of us, who have trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, have been given spiritual gifts and abilities from the Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:11

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

And the Lord is doing this intentionally and with design: that we all might function rightly as a church, with each of us serving in the area of our gifts, to build up the body of Christ.

Let's review: (1) God's Gifts Glorify God (verses 1-3); (2) God's Gifts are For Our Common Good (verses 4-7); (3) God's Gifts are For All Believers (verses 7-11). Now, beginning in verse 12, and carrying on through the end of the chapter, Paul gives an illustration of the human body. He says, ...

4. We are like a Body (verses 12-31).

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

This is the summary of the rest of the chapter. A body has many members. It has hands and feet. It has ears and eyes. It has mouths with tongues, and fingers with dexterity. It has muscles to help us move. It has nerves to help us sense our world around us. Yet, each of us is only one body! Many members, but one body!

So, likewise the church, We are all different, that's for sure. some of us are tall, others are short. some of us are strong, others are weak. some of us are gifted to work with our heads, others of us are gifted to work with our hands. some of us have speaking gifts. others have serving gifts. Yet, we as a church are one body!

Then Paul gives the illustration that needs little explanation:

1 Corinthians 12:14-20

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

All of this is the point of church membership. God calls each individual believer to be a part of a greater whole, where they can use their gifts to the building up of the local church.

Nobody can say, "Because I don't have speaking gifts, I don't belong to the body." Nobody can say, "Because I'm not very bold in being a witness, I don't belong to the body." Nobody can say, "Because I'm not a leader, I don't belong to the body." Nobody can say, "Because I'm not so compassionate, I don't belong to the body." You cannot say these things.

God calls each believer to play a crucial role in the life of a local church. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God, through his Spirit, has gifted you in a unique way. and God is calling you to use your gifts to be a part of his body. And if you are here at Rock Valley Bible Church, and this is your church family, then God is calling you to use your gifts here for the benefit of us all.

And with our transition from an informal membership at Rock Valley Bible Church to a formal membership, we are simply seeking to provide more intentionality in this process. God has been highly intentional in bringing you here. We, as leaders of the church, are simply trying to identify that. and clarify our roles together at the church. Becoming a formal member at Rock Valley Bible Church is your opportunity to say, "I am here! This is where God has placed me! This is where I will use my gifts for the greater good of all!"

We need church membership. We need to come together like this. especially coming out of COVID, where some in our church have scattered. we need to take inventory. Who is in? Who is out? Who wants to be shepherded by the elders? Who wants guidance in where and how to serve?

We need this. You need this. I need this. We need the clarity that a formal church membership brings. In verse 21, Paul speaks of the need.

1 Corinthians 12:21-26

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that

there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

We need each other, not only to give benefit to others in our service, but to receive help in our need. I love the way that verse 27 puts it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

On the one hand, we are one body. That is, we are all one group! We are all together. This happens on Sunday mornings, as we gather together for worship. as we pray together and are taught together! It's all an express of our unity. Yet, verse 27 expresses the reality of how we are "individual members" of the body. That is, we are all playing our part. We are all fulfilling our role.

Fulfilling our roles can't be done in our big setting. This needs a smaller group. This needs a smaller circle of people where you can interact with others, encouraging and being an encouragement. In a smaller group, you can express your gifts. where you can serve others in what you say or in what you do for them. In the grandest scheme of things, we desire that each of you be involved in three things: a big group, a small group, and a place of service.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, this is where the rubber meets the road. This is why I have entitled my message, "Membership Matters." The first part of my message is to convince you that membership in a local church does indeed "matter." The second part of my message is really practical telling you of the "matters" of how we are practicing membership at Rock Valley Bible Church.

A year and a half ago, I presented to you a membership form. It was entitled, "An Expression of Commitment." It's a single piece of paper (I have more on the back), which allows you the opportunity to express your commitment to be an active, engaged member of Rock Valley Bible Church. it also allows the elders of the church to express our commitment to shepherd and care for your spiritual needs.

On the back of the sheet, it gives a space for you to write out your testimony of saving faith. That is, "How God saved you." On the bottom of the sheet, it has a place for you to indicate the ways in which you are serving (or want to serve). Finally, there is a question about baptism, the Lord commands us to be baptized. and this question gives us opportunity to press upon you all the importance of baptism.

Now, this document is nothing more than a way in which we work to formally define our relationships with one another. It's an opportunity for us, as elders, to know who in this body, and who we are responsible to shepherd to care for. In Hebrews 13:17, we are told that spiritual leaders will give an account to the Lord for how we have shepherded those under our care.

For me, it's a scary verse. Because, when I read this verse, what comes to mind is all of my failures. I know the many ways that I have failed to do this well. The phone calls I haven't made. The notes I haven't written. The comfort that I haven't given. The people I haven't visited. The people who haven't been in my home. In some regards, I feel like I have taken on too much responsibility, caring for (and feeling responsible) for those who never wanted to be a member of our church in the first place. This document will be a help to all of us elders. To know who wants our spiritual care. And who wants us to help.

Furthermore, we, as elders have been thinking of how we will have systematic, regular interactions with you all. We are considering establishing an intentional yearly visit with each of you, to check in with you, to encourage you, to hear your concerns, to pray for you and for your family. This document gives us a scope of who has expressed their commitment to be a member of this body.

Now, I'm thankful that most of you have filled out this document. Further, I have had an opportunity to speak with most of you about this document. But, with my Sabbatical last summer, and with COVID, we haven't yet formally put our church membership into practice. But, we, as elders believe that this is the time to make this push. It will help us as a church, to regain the momentum that COVID took from us. Over the next few weeks, I will be contacting each of you who signed this form, just to confirm that you still want to be committed to serve others in this church.

Now, there are some who have signed this form, expressing their desire to be a formal member of our church, but who have left during the days of COVID for one reason or another. And we have been in this awkward time, not knowing if they plan to come back to the church. But now that things are stabilizing once again, I will be contacting each of those families as well, to see if they plan on coming back. We simply need to define who is here. and who is committed to being a formal member of this body.

Now, there are some of you who are newer to the church. You have begun coming recently. For you, I plan on having a few meetings, where we can talk about Rock Valley Bible Church. where we can talk our history and our mission and our values. where we can talk about our beliefs and practices. where we can talk through issues of membership. If this is you, let's talk. so that we can arrange a time that works for all who are interested.

One of the questions that I have been asked recently is this: "How can I serve?" I put together a half-sheet document entitled, "Opportunities to connect and serve." It's only a first draft, and so, I'm sure that I missed some things. In fact, I know that I missed some things. It's merely a start of a document that I want to constantly keep current. (back table?) On the front of the paper, I have listed some of the ways that you can "connect and serve."

You can connect and serve in our public gatherings: (1) Prayer meeting; (2) Worship service; (3) Fellowship after service. These are our three main meetings, where we can pray together, worship together and encourage one another. If you are a youth, you can come to our youth group meetings.

Further, we have our official "small group" ministry, which meets in homes. This provides a smaller, more intimate setting where you can share about your life in a way that you can't in our public settings. It's a place where you can encourage and be encouraged. Now, I know that for some of you, the format of the small groups are difficult. The times and the places don't quite work into your schedule. If you can't

come to one of our official small groups, I would encourage you to be finding some sort of small group of people in the church to connect with, where you can find encouragement, where you can be an encouragement.

Behind the scenes are a whole slew of other ministries where you can serve. You can be a greeter. You can serve in the nursery or in children's church. You can help with the technical aspects of our ministry: video and audio. You can help out in the music ministry (if you are a gifted musician). You can help with building maintenance or cleaning. You can help outside with mowing or landscaping.

Beyond this, there are many other ways that life in the church is less programmed, but just as important. These are the informal ways that you can reach out to people that can make a big difference in the lives of people. Regarding new people at church (or people you don't know), remember their names (write them down after you meet them). Greet them (by name if possible) if they return. If appropriate and natural, get contact info, and follow up later in the week.

Do life together with people of the church throughout the week. Have people over for meals. Set up play dates with kids. Help one another with mundane tasks. Use the skills you have to help others in need. Bring a meal to someone. Babysit or exchange babysitting. Work out together (walk, run, bike, class, gym, etc.). Join some class or group together. Perhaps include nonbelievers from outside our church along with someone from church. Pay attention to notice needs in the lives of people. Offer your help. Be willing to ask for and accept help.

Pray for one another. Send a text to say you're praying. Text a verse or link to something biblically helpful. Read a book together with someone. Bear one another's burdens. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

This is just a start of the ways that you can serve others. Many times, this is super easy! It simply takes a heart of love and care for others.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 15, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
