

Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 30th July 2023 10 am

The body

Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture and prayer

Hymn MP 7 All creatures of our God and King

Scripture Deuteronomy 10:12-22 (page 190)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Children's talk the game happy families

Chorus MP 11 All hail Kings Jesus

Notices Picnic lunch next Sunday, Summer Outreach

Prayer and share time

Reading 1 Peter 2:4-10 (page 1218)

Romans 12:4-13 (Page 1139)

Hymn MP 463 May the mind of Christ my saviour

Sermon *Do you belong?*

Hymn Ancient of Days (on screen)

Closing Prayer

Prayer and Exordium

■ Andre Anderson author of 'church matters' commenting on membership says: If you attend a rally of a political party, you will be surrounded by members of the party: signed-up members..

But when you attend a service at an evangelical church it is likely that a fair proportion of the people, though regular in their attendance every Sunday, will not be signed-up members. There will be some non-Christians present; we are happy to see them in church and long for their conversion. There will be children as well. But in many congregations as with ours, there are those who attend the services regularly who, though professing to be Christians, are not members of the church. It is a strange thing that many who claim to be Christians, and show all the signs of being genuine believers, are not members of any local church. For some reason they have never joined. Why does such a state of affairs exist?

What are some of the reasons?

1. For some their background church denomination never had 'membership'
2. Or is it that your family are Christians but were never church members.
3. Maybe you have had a bad experience at a church and therefore to avoid possible pain don't want to commit again. How long is that going to go on, one may ask?
4. Maybe you don't want to sign up to something in fear of being controlled.
5. Or maybe you just don't like committing to things – as many don't today. You realise that there are commitments and responsibilities that go along with church membership and to avoid those responsibilities you choose to sit like spectators on the sidelines when you ought to be down on the field where the action is. Not wanting to be too involved is characteristic of the world in which we live. Ours is an age that emphasises rights rather than duties; an age that is happy to take all the benefits but avoid responsibilities. Christians are in danger of being affected by the spirit of our age. But if we are fully committed to Christ, this always involves commitment to his church - and that includes a local church.
6. Being unwilling to commit is one big reason why so few find Christ today.
7. Maybe you are not a member because you look around the room and can hardly tell who the members are, those who are members seem to do no more than anyone else, even less, so what's the point?
8. Or maybe you just don't see membership as important – which I want to show today is essentially poor church theology.

So today and next week we will look at the body of Christ, the church. This has been on my mind anyway as a need, but this issue is brought to the surface as we as a church consider how best to take the bread and the wine.

Few who are genuine Christians would deny that they are part of the body of Christ. Yet there are sadly a disturbing number of Christians who do not see even attending church as important, they see no reason or obligation to join with others. They say “you can be a Christian without joining a church”.??

Most realise the church is important, but they say that membership per se is not biblical, there is nothing in Scripture that speaks of a list of members, a church register, and no mention of being ‘a member’. (except the NRSV !)

Yet 'Join the church' is exactly what the whole of the NT says without using those actual words! It is clear that our Lord assumed that his followers would be members of local churches (see Mt 18:15-17). The apostles gathered their converts together in local churches. A glance through the Book of Acts will show that this was their invariable practice. The letters in our NT show that the early believers were addressed, encouraged and warned not just as individuals but as members of churches.

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, we see Christ as still concerned with the local churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. The ascended Lord knows believers, notes our works, commends our good and condemns our sin, all as part of the church.

Peter spoke of the scattered believers as a **Holy nation**. This nation was once the nation of Israel, with one place of worship, one temple, one lampstand from which seven lamps shone. Those churches just referred to in Revelation in today’s Turkey were spoken of as seven individual lampstands. The scattered people of God in local churches which Paul then described as **the Israel of God**. Yes there is the worldwide redeemed of the Lord, all true believer from around the world and across the centuries. This now manifests itself in the local body of Christ made up of local believers. It is hard to not see this in the NT.

■ Daily bread sheet “The only body Jesus has on Earth....”

Are you part of the body of Christ? If so then you are to live this out within the local church.

If you are not, or not sure, you may well ask ‘how do I enter the body of Christ?’ It is the work of Christ by his Spirit. Paul says the church was made up of those who **were all baptised by one Spirit into one body**. x2 1Co 12:13

✚ Just as we are born into a family - so we are born again into a family.

2a

That new birth comes as a consequence of Christ’s finished work on the Cross. Once Jesus has born away the guilt of your sin, in other words the dirty vessel of our life is made clean, then it is fit for the Spirit of the Holiness, the Lord to dwell within.

If you have His Spirit in you - then take heart your sin has been dealt with, be encouraged, one is the sign of the other.

But if you do not have His Spirit in you, if you cannot talk of this, if you do not know this, then be assured your sin remains, and God’s wrath remains on you. You are in a dangerous place. If that is you, then flee to the Saviour while you can. The Lord commands you to repent, that is turn away from your own way - and turn to Christ. Do that and you will be saved. Give up your way for His way, give up all you have – for something much better.

■ Christ won’t wrap you in his perfect cloak until you have stripped off your dirty rags.

If you have then He has rescued you, redeemed you out of the empty way of life, a life without God, without hope - far from God in this world - and reconciled you to God your maker.

Once saved you now belong to a community. Once you were wanderers in this world, but now you are the people of God, you are brought into a new heavenly community. It is this new community who will be with Jesus in the eternal new world to be made. Are you in this new community?

This new worldwide community expresses itself locally - as the local church.

The church is described in various ways in the Bible. It is a ...

A **vineyard** - Ps 80:8f, Is 5:1f,7 Mk 12:1-12, the true vine John 15:1-8

A **building** - This idea is found in the OT Ex 25:8, Ps 132:13 Is12:6. God showed in the tabernacle and then the temple that he dwelt with his people. However, the reality is that he would dwell in his people. Eph 2 says we are **members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**” Eph 2:19-22 In the reading earlier Peter says believers are being built together to be a **Spiritual house**.

Heb 3:6 says: **Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house,**

2b

The church is seen as a **flock**. Israel was God's flock Ps 95:7. We are the sheep of his pasture, Ps 23. John 10. Jesus is the good shepherd of His flock.

The church is described as a **family** - 1Pe 4:17 Israel is called God's son Ex 4:32 and Hosea 11:1. God is our father and Christ our brother. We are to consider each other as brothers and sisters. Titus 2. We are a:

A **Royal priesthood**,

A **chosen people**

A **holy nation**

A **people belonging to God**

And in our passage here in Romans 12 we are described as a **body**, 4 **Just as each of us has one body with many members, ... 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.**

There are passages in the Bible that are difficult to understand, this is not one of them. The simile is easy, it is hard to misunderstand being a members of a body, so it is hard to misunderstand the members of Christ's body especially when Paul adds the explanation. Let's not be blind to the obvious. Note that:

✚ In each of the above you are either 'in or out' - part of it - or not part of it.

So Christians belonging to others is not an option, just if you want to - but something to be recognised, and therefore an obligation to be obeyed.

I heard a Christian speak of the church he's being going to for years as 'them' - no not them but 'us'!

✚ **Membership means that: you recognise yourself as part of the body - and others recognise that you are part of the body to.**

"4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, ... 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others

So to speak of church 'membership' we don't mean a club member as you have with a **sports club** or your **gym** membership. but recognising that we are 'members' of Christ's body. That is what 'membership' is!

Here in our Bibles we are told **each member belongs to all the others**, .. 'belongs'

The word translated **belongs** is allélón (Strong's no.G240). ἀλλήλων and occurs 100 times in the NT and means: *of another. of each other*

NAS: members one of another. **KJV:** every one, members one of another

Most commonly translation **individually**, or **every one, members one of another.**

Here are some other places where allelon appears - In John 13:34 we are told that we should **love one another**. Also John 13:34,35 John 15:12,17

Cast your eyes down here in Rom 12:10 **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;**

Romans 12:16 **Live in harmony with one another.**

Romans 13:8 **the continuing debt to love one another;**

So one way is to say **members of one another**

Another phrase Paul uses is "**One of you**". Of Epaphras, he says **who is one of you** Col 4:12 in other words of the church at Colossae, and says **He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you (the church) everything that is happening here.** Col 4:9

Just as he said to the believers in Corinth **Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.** 1 Co 12:27

So what does this mean in practice?

The body can only function properly when it does things together. Then the head is pleased.

■ How often we are not pleased when an arm or a leg fails to do what we want it to do, miss kick the ball, catch your nail, bump your elbow.

Each part needs to be there and work together, be together - and work together

For example in:

In worship

In passage describing worship 1Co 14:23 **So if the whole church comes together**

We should not be absent when it is time to be together.

Imagine a man who signs up to be a soldier, yet he is never on parade, he does not join in with the training and when the fighting comes he is absent.

He would be court marshalled, the truth is he would not get that far. He would long since not have been considered a true soldier.

How bizarre therefore that someone who declares themselves part of the body of Christ should fail to meet up with others: to worship together, to be there for the training which is the bible study, and the battle is as much the prayer to the Lord to work against our enemy whose power is in the heavenly places.

In decision making

A member of a church is entitled to attend church business meetings, to take part in the discussion and to share in the decisions that are made.

In Acts 6:1-4 **the twelve gathered all the disciples together** as they chose the deacons. Obviously, it must be clear who is entitled to share in the decision making - and who is not.

I know meetings can be Humdrum, mundane . . . some items on the agenda may not seem to be very spiritual. But practical arrangements are necessary if the spiritual ministries are to prosper. But we also decide on: an application for membership, the appointment of leaders, the call of a minister, the plans for outreach locally, nationally and internationally. The setting apart of Missionaries and the specific areas of Christian service. For example in Acts 13 **While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.** Ac 13:2-3. And again in Ac 15:22 **Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.**

It's when we are all together that we discern God's voice & His will for us here

Pastoral care

Then there is the pastoral care of the flock, the shepherd looks after the flock under his care, not just any sheep anywhere. Chris and I as under-shepherds are to look after those Jesus has brought together here, here.

Of course we do what we can to help anyone. It's not uncommon for those who attend, even just been here a few weeks to ask me to witness filling a form etc.

Or those who've been a bit longer to ask for a reference, I will write one gladly, and straight away. Writing a reference easy for I always tell the truth!

We try to keep a watchful eye on everyone. I am often asked to pray for this or that, and I will pray.

But a shepherd shepherds a flock - which means I need to know who is in the flock and who isn't. It is my duty to help, encourage, give advice, guidance and direction. And the best help is to help you live out your life within the body of Christ. But if that person is not a member and therefore not committed to do that then any help is limited. Is it right for us to commit to you – if you don't commit to us?

The KNBC church covenant no.3 says:

It is needful to cultivate the Christian life, and so I promise to present myself at the services of worship, realising the importance of the prayer meeting, and putting away all idle excuses and self-justification.

4a

The giving of hospitality

Ro 16:23 **Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.** We've been given much, let others enjoy your homes & food to.

Then there is discipline.

When that person can no longer be one of you! Those who are professing faith but unrepentant, whether greedy, a thief, or immoral as in 1 Cor 5, they should **be expelled from among 'you', and put out of 'the fellowship'** we read. We need to know who is in 'the fellowship' that they should be excluded from!

Finally - Our passage goes on: **6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.** The list is not exhaustive but gives examples of how we can use those gifts, gifts to be used, Paul says to the church in Corinth, for the good of others.

In other words as we have been given 'gifts' *Charisma* by God's **grace**, *charis* we too are givers. I used to be a taker, now as a Christian I am a giver. Are you? How wonderful it would be if that was the hallmark of those who come here. What can I bring? How can I serve? What can I do with the gifts He's given me? How can I bless others?

✚ **What are you bringing? What can you bring - and therefore should bring?**

You are not doing it for me, you are not doing it as a favour to us, you do not contribute something to earn a place, you do not give to get! You give because He has given to you and has changed your heart to be a giver also. So use your gifts as an expression of your love for Him. If you don't – you've not understood grace.

let us serve; let us teach; let us encourage; let us give generously; let us govern diligently; let do all things cheerfully

Some leaders force allegiance, they produce a cultic feel to their church with strong pressures and make people drive long distances to come to them.

Other leaders try to bond us together through hugs and have us stand in a big circle and hold hands, there good in some of that but it's prone to be shallow.

What glues us together is that we are all joined, connected to the **Head**, the Lord Jesus, we are united in Him, **from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.** Col 2:19

Church membership is not essential for salvation but it is essential for living the kind of life Jesus calls for, and the NT speaks of. Don't opt out of your biblical duty to join a fellowship of believers.

Make it known that you are united with Him - by being united His people. **END**

4b