What it means to be a church member

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[0:00] Let me pray and we'll carry on in that way. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we pray now as we come to look at your word together and to think about what it means to be a member of a church.

We pray, please, Lord, that you might help us. Help us to think carefully and truly and rightly. I pray that our time together might be just really good for us as we think about our church here and as we think about what it means to belong together.
So bless us and watch over us and help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So over the next three Sunday evenings, we're going to do what I'm hoping is going to be an important little mini series in different offices in church.
So we're going to think about what it means to be a member, what it means to be an elder and what it means to be a deacon. Now, no, I don't need one as well. The point of doing this now is that obviously we are a church which has merged two churches together and lots of new people have also joined along the way.
And we're going through lots of important transitions, aren't we? We submitted our paperwork to the FIEC, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, and our membership is pretty much double what it was last year.
[1:19] And so that means thinking about what these things mean is really important for us so that we're all on the same page. But also, even though we've come from lots of different church cultures and lots of different church backgrounds, actually, we also need to acknowledge we're not inventing church.

We come to something that has been going on for 2,000 years or so, and we are not inventing it for ourselves. And as you turn to the New Testament to think about church, you realize that the building blocks of church life are members, those who belong, elders, those who lead and shepherd and guide, and deacons, those who serve in the life of the church.
And so it's really important for us that we get these right as we start, especially as our plan is over this next academic year. So before the summer at some point, we are going to appoint elders and deacons in the place of the joint leadership team as we move forwards.
So we're going to start with church members. Now, lots of what I'm going to say to you this evening comes from a book by Jonathan Lehman called Church Membership.
And I've got a copy on my desk, which I intended to wave at you, but you can imagine it's a blue book. It says church members on the front. There you go. It's upstairs in my office. I really recommend the book. It's very thorough.
[2:37] It's really well written. It's easy to read. And the way that book starts, which is how we're going to start this evening and I think is important, is not so much with the definition of membership, but as a definition of the church.

So to know what it means to be a member of the church, we need to know what is the church itself. What is the church? Now, maybe just to try and keep your interest.
What is the church not? Let me tell you, the church is not a voluntary association. We are not a knitting club. Not simply because I hate knitting and can't really do it, but also because actually what's involved in joining a knitting club is very different to what's involved in joining a church.
This is not a voluntary association of people who've just decided to get together. It's not a basketball club, as we're hearing about this morning, or a residence association. Rather, in the church, the New Testament, in the New Testament, sorry, the church is something that Jesus is creating through the preaching of the gospel.

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So Jesus builds the church as the gospel is proclaimed. And if you like, the church is a present expression, like an expression in this time and in this place of what is still to come, his future eternal kingdom.
[3:51] So just back up with me for a moment. The gospel of the Lord Jesus brings sinners like us into his eternal kingdom. Right. We are included in Christ's eternal heavenly kingdom, not by our works, but by his, not by our righteousness, but by his righteousness, his death in place of our death, his resurrection as our resurrection.

And at the moment of conversion is not just that our sins are forgiven and we personally receive salvation. But also at that moment of conversion, we get included in, we become citizens of Christ's eternal heavenly kingdom.
But we are not immediately transferred to glory. Instead, we live in the in-between. We live in the in-between of the now of forgiveness and the not yet of perfection.
None of us are yet perfect. We live in the in-between. We are members of the local time bound, geography bound expression of God's eternal kingdom, but not the final glorious kingdom itself.
The illustration that Jonathan Newman uses in his book over and over again is that of an embassy. So an embassy is a little bit of another country in an in a in a host country, isn't it?
[5:08] So the job of that embassy is not so much to make citizens of the other country, but it's to help citizens of that other country while they're living in the country in which that embassy exists.

So they are there, if you like, to recognize the citizens, to provide them with representation, to act as an outpost of that other country in a different place.
And that's just leaving, which is a really helpful little illustration of what church is. Church is an embassy of glory in time and geography today. It is an outpost of what is yet to come.
It is there not so much to make citizens of heaven, but to recognize who they are as they join citizenship of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ is to provide for them representation, support, encouragement as they live outside of their and away from their eternal home.
So that is the church. The church is an embassy of glory in a particular time and place. Another way to think about it is to think about how authority works in the world.
[6:11] You know, don't you, that there is only one person who has ultimate authority, one person who is able to decide what happens and to insist on it, insist on his own will and punish all disobedience to his will.

And that authority belongs only to Jesus Christ. He alone is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules from heaven while all enemies are brought under his feet.
And in his world, that King institutes other authorities, authorities which themselves are not ultimate. He alone has ultimate authority, but which have a delegated authority under him.
Now, let's think about a couple of those. Let's think about the state or the government, national powers. Now you're going to need your handout. Romans chapter 13. Here we see that God gives authority to states or to governments.
He says, Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
[7:19] That doesn't mean that they are all godly, right? We've been thinking already about corruption. So they are not godly, but they are established by God. They are there by his sovereign purpose.

Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.
Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid. For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of the possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.
This is why you pay taxes. The authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue.
[8:23] If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor. Now, we don't have time to go into all the detail of that. We'll get to that in our series in Romans eventually. But this is the power that the nation states have over citizens.

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They are given by God delegated authority to rule and reign, and they are given a sword by which to administer justice. Now, that authority has boundaries, doesn't it?
They are not given ultimate authority over all things. And sometimes nation states cross over and abuse the boundaries that they're given. But still, God raises up kings and those in authority and calls us to pray for them and submit to them in the way that they are instituted by God with a sword to rule.
But then also, alongside that, you also have not just the nation state, but you have the church. Now, the church is not the state. It's not given the power of the sword. Instead, it's given the power of the keys.
So, Matthew 16, verses 16 to 19. Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This is Peter's declaration of who Jesus is.
[9:28] You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, the rock of your confession, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
Now, Peter is told that the church is going to be built on this confession that Jesus is the Christ. And Peter has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which gives him the power of binding and loosing.
Now, that sounds a bit mysterious, doesn't it? So, what exactly is that? Well, if you turn on a few pages in Matthew, you get to Matthew 18, and you see those keys in use. We see in verse 15, if your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you.
If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.
[10:38] And if they refuse to listen to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

It seems, doesn't it, that the church is given the authority to recognize who is and who isn't a part of God's eternal kingdom.
Now, obviously, they don't always get that right. They sometimes make mistakes and get it wrong. But Jesus is determined that his future kingdom will be visible in the present day in the church.
Now, again, the church doesn't have ultimate authority over all things. They don't have the power of the sword. They don't have the power of the state. The church can't draft you into an army. They can't take away your liberty and send you to prison.
But the church does have the authority to decide whether or not to recognize you as a citizen of heaven. The authority and therefore the responsibility to care for you spiritually and disciple you and discipline you and call you back to faith in Christ.
[11:43] They hold the keys. Now, how does it exercise the authority of the keys? I mean, we know how the sword is exercised, don't we? We know about the authority of the state taking you to prison or pursuing you for not paying your taxes.

But how about the church? How does it exercise this responsibility to recognize those who belong to Jesus? How does it do that? Well, as you read the New Testament, you see two ways, don't you? One, baptism, right?
The church is instructed to baptize people who have faith in Jesus Christ. Now, it's interesting, isn't it? We talk about baptism as being the public declaration of the candidate.
So we say this is them publicly declaring faith in Jesus. Now, it is that, right? But it's a lot more than that. In the New Testament, it is also the declaration of the church on behalf of God that this individual getting baptized on the basis of their profession of faith is a part of God's eternal kingdom.
So we're saying, as we baptize someone, they're saying, I believe in Jesus. And we say, because you've declared your faith in Jesus, we baptize you because we recognize that you are part of God's eternal kingdom.
[12:52] So you might think of the end of Acts 10 when Peter sees that the Gentiles become Christians, that they've received the spirit. And he says, well, who can stand in the way of these people being baptized?

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These people are obviously part of God's kingdom. We must recognize them as such. How are we going to recognize them as such? We're going to baptize them. That's what we're going to do. That's the first way. The other way is the Lord's Supper.
So the church are given a meal to share, and they're to share it with believers, where access is given to members to feed on and delight in the Lord Jesus.
And at the supper, there's to be a distinction between those who belong to Christ and those who don't. 1 Corinthians 11 is the next cross-reference on your handout.
1 Corinthians 11. This is the bit just before the bit that we normally read. In the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent, I believe it. [13:57] No doubt, there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. For when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers.

As a result, one person remains hungry, another gets drunk. Now, briefly, the background seems to be that in the Corinthian church, when they're meeting on a Sunday, those who are rich, who don't have to go to work, get there early, eat all the food, drink all the wine, and they get drunk.
The poor people who turn up later because they've been working all day, they get there and there's none left. So there's a distinction in the church between the rich, who are there early and they're drunk, and the poor, who get there late and don't have anything.
That division in the church is a wrong division. That is not the division that should be visible in the supper. There should be a division that's visible in the supper. What does it say?
Verse 19, there should be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. It should be that the supper is for those who have faith in Christ, and it is them sharing together in the Lord's Supper, which shows that distinction.
[15:05] And it's interesting because the distinction in their church is between the rich and the poor, because they're not running the supper properly, it's actually not the Lord's Supper that they're sharing. You notice that?

So actually, you're just going, it's a private supper. Really interesting, isn't it? If you don't do the Lord's Supper properly, it's not really the Lord's Supper. The benefit of the Lord's Supper comes in doing it in the manner in which it's instituted and given to us by God.
You can't just eat and drink it in any way we fancy or any way we please. And actually, the thing that makes the supper the supper is that we give it to people who belong to Jesus Christ, because that's who it's for, to show the distinction.
Now, what does all that mean? It means, doesn't it, that the supper and baptism and membership of the church is visible in those actions.
Baptism and Lord's Supper make visible who belongs to church. Now, let me skip down in my notes a little bit. Here's the church then.
[16:08] We are the embassy of glory. We're given a job. We're given the authority of recognizing the genuine believer and then discipling and caring for them. Baptizing new believers and feeding believers on the word of the cross in the supper.

Any questions or comments at that stage? And then we'll come and think about what is a member. Maybe I'll give you a second to talk to the person next to you to say, how is that different or the same as you might have defined church before we talked about it?
What is surprising them? Maybe what's missing? Have a talk with the person next to you and then we'll get back together. Go for it for a couple of seconds. Okay.
Any comments or questions, feedback that's come from your group? What was surprising about that? What's missing perhaps?
Seth? I have a question. You said it's important that we do, if we don't do the word of supper the right way, then it's not a single word of supper, right? Yeah. All I was talking about, what is the right way?
[17:22] Yeah. Okay. So what is the right way? So I think, what is the right way to celebrate the supper? So I think in the context of just the things I was saying, so I'd want to say more than this, but in the context of what I was saying, the right way to do the supper is in a way that publicly recognizes those who belong to Jesus and those who don't.

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So I think if you stand up publicly and say, listen, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what you believe, you can just join in with this, that it ceases to become the Lord's Supper. I think when you stand up and say, listen, this is for those who have faith in Jesus Christ, not because we're trying to withhold something that will be beneficial for somebody who's not a Christian, but because the benefits of the supper become through faith in Christ.
And I think when we do that and we show that distinction, that is when the supper becomes the supper. So it's possible to eat bread and wine and think about Jesus, right? And that might also be good for you in a way, but it's not the supper as it's defined by the New Testament.
Okay. Nick was giving the same information to me. Okay. And was admonishing at the fact on verse 27 of the one who is in the death.
If what you said is true and we believe it to be true, then I think we have a responsibility to those who are visiting and who will understand that we clarify what on verse 27.
[18:42] Yeah. In the context of what I was saying. Yes. They drink it unwillingly. Yes. So, I mean, we might think it's quite a light thing to celebrate the supper in an inappropriate way, but it seems like it's a really serious thing, right?

So he says, this is why some of you are sick and this is why some of you are dying because of the way that they are sharing the Lord's Supper in such a bad way. It seems to be as well that the importance of discerning the body.
I think that means discerning the people who belong to Christ. Yeah. And so whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ.
And so if any of those of those of those

Should we move on? Let's talk about what is a church member then. I mean, just let me say, I haven't, in that, what is a church, I haven't said everything that a church is, right? So there is lots of things that church does and should do that I haven't included.
But in the context of what is a church member, being an embassy of glory and having the authority to recognize believers are really important in our definition of church. So what then is a church member?
One of the things, again, that Lehman says in his book, which is really helpful, is that given what a church is, a Christian doesn't so much join a church as they do submit to a church.
It's not because they surrender their conscience and in all things to a local church. It's really unhelpful and wrong, isn't it? If that's what we're doing. We don't all have to vote for the same political party.
[22:44] We don't all have to wear the same clothes. We don't all have to support Liverpool football team, you know, or Arsenal or something like that. We don't have to do that. Praise the Lord.

Rather, the point is that becoming a member of a local church is its heart submitting to an authority that God has instituted in this world. That's what belonging to a church involves.
And in that sense, like I was saying before, it's impossible to be a Christian without being a member of a church. Not because being a member of a church saves you. Jesus alone can save you. But rather, submitting to a church is really submitting to the authority that Jesus has instituted in this world for our good, this side of glory.
Now, of course, that's exactly what you find going on in the New Testament, isn't it? Believers in Acts devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread and to one another. It's not so much that, you know, they kind of are bound to do that by being whipped into doing it, but rather that's what they want to do.
It's how it works. It's how it works. They're described as being together, of having everything in common. Belonging to Jesus is membership in his new community. And we find the Lord adds to their number.
[24:05] He grows the community. So that faith in Jesus brings people into the community. And a community then work together, don't they? In Acts 6, to provide for those who are in need to prioritize the preaching of the word and prayer.

In Acts 8, when the church is scattered through persecution, they regather in different locations, sharing the gospel, and becoming churches in different places. So here's the first thing.
A church member is an individual who has submitted to the fellowship of other Christians in a local church. Secondly, though, a church member is an individual who is part of that local church, exercises authority themselves.
Right. This is a little bit complicated, maybe. So let me give you an illustration that I've robbed from Jonathan Neiman in his book. He describes a time when, as a US citizen, he was living in Brussels, presumably for something to do with politics, right?
Why else would you live in Brussels? Anyway, his American passport expired. So he goes into the US embassy in Brussels and the US embassy recognizes him as a citizen of the United States and they renew his passport.
[25:20] That's what they're there to do. That's their responsibility. He says that the difference between that and a local church is that when you become a member of the local church, you also, in one sense, join this staff of the embassy that is also involved in recognizing other citizens, right?

You necessarily, so that as a church member, you become a sharer in the keys, right? You also exercise this power of recognition of others.
It seems, doesn't it, that it will be guided by the elders. We'll think about that more next week. But the keys are given to the whole church in Matthew 18 and not just to the leaders. So the leaders of the church can't recognize the members on their own.
We can't appoint the leaders on our own. We can't decide the budget on our own. We are sharing all those things together. So membership is submission, yes, but that submission also brings with it a share in the authority of the local church.
As an individual Christian, God calls you to exercise the gift that he has given you of membership in his kingdom in the church, in the embassy. Perhaps it's worth saying here that this I think is a really important answer to how the church is intended to protect itself against the overreach of leaders in their exercise of authority.

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[26:42] There are such things as bullying pastors or elders. But really the authority of elders in the church, and again we'll think about this some more next week, is the authority of advice or counsel.

They don't hold the right to enforce membership or excommunication. The church collectively are given that power. So if you're in a church where a small group of men behind closed doors decide who's in and who's out, that doesn't seem to be a New Testament model of local church.
Likewise, if you belong to a church where the individual themselves decides whether they are in or out by just writing their name on a list, or I'm volunteering to join in this or that, then that too seems to be different to the model outlined in Matthew 18, where the individual submits to the decision of the church and then themselves belong to that decision-making body.
Now, of course, that means that joining the church and submitting and joining as the staff of the church effectively, you must first be a believer in Jesus Christ and a member of his heavenly kingdom.
Church isn't making Christians, it's recognizing Christians and church members are those who have faith in Jesus, a faith which necessarily comes with a desire to belong to his people and meet with them.
[28:03] Repentance and faith becomes an ongoing mark of the life of a believer, doesn't it? So as church members, we are to recognize other believers and we recognize other believers by recognizing ongoing repentance, not perfection.

Yeah. I've put one quote from Jonathan Newman's book on your thing and it's here. It says this, if I were to write a standards guide for those conducting membership interviews, I would go straight to Matthew's Beatitudes.
It might read something like this, look for the ones who are poor in spirit, who mourn for their sin, who aren't entitled, always insisting on their own way, but are meek, who are sick to death of sin and all its nonsense and so hunger and thirst for righteousness like it is water.
When you find people like that, make sure they know who Jesus is, make sure Jesus is the one who fills their impoverished spirit, who has forgiven their sins, who receives their life and worship and whose righteousness they depend on and pursue.
When you find such people, tell them to join. Notice it's not a person's moral perfection that qualifies him or her for church membership. It's just the opposite. It's his or her recognition of a lack of moral perfection coupled with a hunger for it.
[29:17] It's not the people who never sin, it's the people who fight sin. A church's judicial work is to affirm not the righteousness, but the unrighteous who thirst for righteousness, the righteousness only God in Christ can give.

Here's one more way to say it. What makes people acceptable to a church is not their own moral purity, but Christ's. Not what they have done to save themselves, but what God has done to save them.
That's what it means to be a member of a local church. It is somebody who is repenting and turning from their sin. It's not someone who's morally perfect and churches are to recognize those people as members.
Right, let's just put this together. This is where we're up to. A church is someone who submits to a local church and who then, as a member of that church, goes on to exercise authority with others in the local church.
That means a member is someone who has faith in Jesus and is displaying ongoing repentance for their sin. Now, as we finish, I just want us to think about what the life of a church member will look like.
[30:20] And I'm going to pull these directly from Neiman's book because, one, I think they're excellent, and two, it means if you disagree with them, you disagree with him and not me, and you can pick it up with him when you see him.

So here are, he says, eight ways that a church member submits to the membership of a local church. Let me talk about them briefly and then you can discuss them with the person sat next to you and then we'll pray together as we close.
Firstly, he says that church members submit publicly. That is, membership of the local church should be formal and official, not informal and unofficial. Now, he talks about what that might look like in a persecuted church context where it would be particularly dangerous to admit that you are a

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member of a local church.
But under normal circumstances and certainly in our circumstances, there should be a means of being publicly recognized as belonging to church and therefore being a part of what's going on. There should be a way of you saying, this is my church. And that is our membership system. Our membership system is not perfect, right? And we don't administer it perfectly.
[31:29] We make lots of, you know, administrative gaffes all the time and that kind of thing, don't we? And we don't always run members meetings brilliantly. That's not what we're saying. We're not saying our system is perfect.

But what we're saying is there needs to be a system, a system of publicly recognizing who belongs to the church and who doesn't. And that's not to be unfriendly to outsiders. In a way, it's actually to be friendly to outsiders.
It's to say to people who come, listen, we want you to, you're our guests. Come and be our guest. Listen, you know, appreciate what's going on. We're not going to put on you the burden of pretending that you believe something you don't believe.
We're not going to put on you the burden of running something or contributing to something that you don't yet agree with. We want you to be our guests because those who belong to the church are publicly recognized. Secondly, submitting physically, geographically.
That is that members of a local church basically agree to live in a place that makes it possible for them to attend. So, membership of a particular local church is a commitment to attend that particular local church.
[32:35] And so, there's not a command that you should live within a certain distance of the place in which your church gathers. But still, the point of a local church is that it meets in a place and a time.

And that that is one of the things that we submit to as a member of the church. We submit to being there at the gatherings of the church which means that we recognize that one of the most helpful ways that we can submit to a local church is by submitting to the place that that church meets and by, as far as we are able, living in a place which enables us to be there regularly and be part of that community.
Now, I think that varies depending on where exactly you are in the world, doesn't it? And how easy it is to get around. But, I do think there's something really important about recognizing that we belong to this church which meets in this place.
We are West Kilburn Baptist Church. We're not London Baptist Church. We're not, you know, I don't know, whatever else, Birmingham Baptist Church or something. Actually, we belong to this particular place. Socially, it doesn't mean that your entire social life is swallowed up by church but rather that in submitting to a local church you say, these are the people who I commit to praying for and getting to know, sharing my life with.
You know, one of the things that is helpfully drawn out in the book which I think is useful for us to know is that there is a difference between being a fellow member and just a Christian friend.
[34:03] Right? So, I have Christian friends who are not in this church who I deeply value and I really appreciate their friendship but if you're a member of this church, I am responsible for you and with you in a way that I am not with my Christian friends who are outside of this church because we've covenanted together to belong to one another and to recognise one another as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and that should affect how we live.

Right? So, we can't be effective church members unless we're invested in getting to know people in the church. So, that's what we submit to. Affectionately.
Number four. I guess this really is just sort of unpacking that but it is picking up on Paul's language or his body language about the church. You know, where one person hurts we all hurt.
Yeah? We rejoice with those who rejoice. We mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12 verse 10 says we're to be devoted to one another in love. Meaning that there is a sense in which church you submit to the church capturing your affection part.
Right? So, actually we are to love deeply here and to care for one another in that way. there is a sense in which it is right that our emotions ride with the church that when church is struggling and difficult that should grieve us.
[35:25] When church is going well we should rejoice in that. When people in church are suffering we should suffer with them. When they're rejoicing we should rejoice with them. Fifthly, financially here's the recognition that it is the members of the church who are primarily responsible for the

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funding of the ministry of the church through their own personal generosity.

Sharing with those in need. Allowing those to preach the gospel to get a living from the gospel and seeing the need to fund missions and other churches in need.
You know, we hope we give to the ministry and life of the local church. We might choose to give beyond that as well. We might choose to give other money elsewhere but we are primarily responsible for funding the ministry of the church here, aren't we?
And the needs here. And if we are not able to do that we need to either trim what we're doing or we need to ask one another whether we're really being as sacrificial as we should be. That applies not only to church members it applies to church leaders it applies to me it applies to everybody.
And we're responsible for the finances here. It's the family finances. Vocationally now for some this will mean perhaps stepping away from a career to some kind of paid ministry.
[36:45] For others it might mean holding back in a career to give time to the ministry of the church. For all of us it will mean that recognizing that what God is building in the local church is the most significant thing that is being put together in this world.

It's more important than whatever it is that we're building in our jobs. Now that doesn't mean that God is not honored by the way that you go about your work and that you can't glorify him in your work. That's really important.
You do do that. We're going to be thinking about that later this term. But actually it recognizes that what God is doing in the local church is really the significant thing. This is the outpost of future glory.
Ethically again not that the local church has authority over your conscience but rather that your brothers and sisters in the church have the right to call you out on your behavior and to encourage you to walk closely with the Lord.
When you join in church membership you are submitting to say listen I commit myself to living for Jesus and if you see that I am not doing that I invite you to say to me Steve you're not living for the Lord Jesus in that area of your life.
[37:53] What you did there was not right. And I mean that's good for us. I know it feels difficult but it is good for us isn't it? At the heart of church sin is not dealt with by pretending that it doesn't exist but by repentance and faith isn't it?

So when we submit like that to church and someone points out and we say oh yeah you're right I'm sorry I'm sorry that I did that please forgive me and then that person doesn't say oh of course I'm not going to forgive you they go no of course I will forgive you we have the means of forgiveness in the center of our church life in the person and work of the Lord Jesus spiritually that is that the local church is to be the place where your spiritual gifts are to be exercised for the good of others doesn't mean that every spiritual gift in the life of church is on display in a public gathering of the local church it's really important isn't it?
We don't have an administration slot in our service so that those with gifts of administration can come and display them in front of everybody on a Sunday morning no because the gifts that we use on a Sunday morning are those that are good for building us up but actually we all have different gifts don't we which we are to exercise in the life of our church for the good of the mission of the church for the building of one another up in all sorts of different ways the church is also the place where you will be taught the Bible by someone who knows you and who God has gifted to preach it again it seems to be the Lord in his wisdom suggests that the most spiritually helpful thing for you is not to be taught by the best preacher in the world which is definitely not me but you can find them on the internet whoever they are but to be taught by someone who knows you and who loves you and who will be held accountable by you and also by the Lord for what they say that's the most spiritually helpful thing for you even if they stumble over their words and even if they don't you know they don't have a stick illustrations of other people because actually that's the way that the Lord has designed the Christian life church is to be the place where your spiritual well-being will be taken seriously and cared for by others so you go what were they those eight things publicly physically geographically socially affectionately financially vocationally ethically spiritually I intended to put a question on your handout at the end of that but I did not did I I wonder whether you could talk with the person next to you about what you think about those any of those that are surprising or maybe something that you think is missing and then we'll take your questions and then we'll close go for it okay sorry to interrupt your conversations anyone got any comments or questions Nick has a question yes but the difficulty there is how do you draw the line or how do you what guidelines can we follow to ensure that we it's the right thing that we're not necessarily invading privacy as well

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yeah so I guess what sort of guidelines can we use yes how can we not be intrusive in our encouragement to people not to sin or to calling people out and sin so there's lots of things you could say on there
Galatians 6 verses 1 and 2 are really helpful aren't they brothers and sisters if someone is caught in sin you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ it seems isn't it it's not it's not the leaders who do it necessarily it's believers don't believe so I think lots of church discipline just happens in conversation between church members doesn't it as we encourage each other we're to do it with gentleness and with a recognition that actually the temptations that we see other people kind of giving into are not temptations that we ourselves wouldn't suffer with yeah there's lots more that could be said I think that's a really really important verse in that yeah anybody else yeah simming go on just trying to think through evangelism because in a sense even if you plant the church in a really in order to reach a community you're gatherings together the main part of them is the encouragement of brothers and sisters together but there's a sense in which as a church family you're there to go out yes yeah maybe it's just it doesn't fit into church as a gathering or how does it yeah so how does evangelism fit with those eight points because evangelism wasn't one of them that I gave well you probably ought to pick that up with [43:35] Jonathan but one of the things I think is that we underestimate the evangelistic effectiveness of a healthy local church it seems that 1 corinthians 14 talks about unbelievers being present at the gatherings of the church and recognizing from the manner in which those gatherings are run that God is amongst them and at work in them and ironically that is the recognition that they're on the outside of it even though they're present in it and so that's I think the mistake of the seeker service isn't it which basically says this is our gatherings are really for people who don't know Christ actually that is not as that's not good for the believers actually not all that good for people who don't know Christ either our gatherings are for the building up of believers and are to be friendly and welcoming to those outside that they might watch and recognize that they're not a part of what's going on outside of faith in

Christ and in that way they're supporting the evangelistic ministry of every individual in the church so you know come to church come and have a look come and have a look what we do you know does that help is that what you were saying yeah yeah yes yeah yeah thanks sorry go on simile you were going to say as well pretty sure you took a breath yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah and in a way it's not just the church events that are designed with the unbeliever in mind it is actually church itself which is evangelistic so you know you're trying to reach out to a place that has no gospel witness you want to plant a local church there as a kind of beacon of light and you want to encourage them to be healthy to care for one other spiritually to grow as
Christians because that will be evangelistic yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah vocationally it's really interesting that isn't it so if you so you might have a job that involves shift work like Natasha was there you know so that you can't attend church as regularly as you'd like to but there might be some careers that for some Christians just might not be appropriate not because they're unethical but just because they take them away from the life of the local church in such a way that they could grow as Christians you know even if that job put you amongst non-Christians all day that you had technically an opportunity to witness to if you were so taken away from a healthy local church that you weren't able to live as a Christian what's the evangelistic benefit in that yeah yeah so I think you could tease out evangelism in all of them couldn't you probably yeah any other final comments or questions great well I'll take it that you're all super excited to belong to a local church it's a great thing isn't it it's a really good thing to belong to church so let me pray and we'll close and let me pray for us heavenly father thank you that we get to belong to a local church like West
Kilburn Baptist Church we thank you that for the sake of our growth in Christ and for the sake of our assurance and for the sake of our health as Christians you've put us around other people who have committed themselves to caring for us and to watching over us we want to pray please that belonging to our church would be good for us and that we'd exercise these responsibilities that you've given to us with due care and attention and that we wouldn't be sloppy about it not because we reckon that we can always get it right but because these things are important because they're important to you so Lord we thank you that you love us thank you for all you've done for us bless us as we go our separate ways in Jesus name amen amen

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