

Submitting to the Church

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[0 : 00] We've been talking about what is the purpose of church membership, and we continue with that study today.

! And today we're going to talk specifically about submitting to the church.! I'm going to use various scriptures in my sermon this morning, but if you want to turn to Ephesians chapter 5 verses 18 through 21, it's going to be one that will be hit on here pretty soon, and a good passage to get us focused on what the Lord has to share with us today. If you don't have a Bible, there's a Bible in the pew.

If you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home with you today as a gift from our congregation to you that you'd be reading the Word of God. Would you please stand with me as we read Ephesians chapter 5, beginning in verse 18 and going to verse 21.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Maybe when you were a kid, you played a game that me and my friends would play called Mercy.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

[1 : 36] Maybe when you were a kid, you played a game that me and my friends would play called Mercy. You remember the game Mercy, where you would put your hands up like this, and you would interlock fingers, and then you would move down, and then you would bend the other person's wrist, and you would put all of your strength behind it and just bend their wrist until they said, Mercy, until they submitted, until they quit, right? A fun game, maybe. You know, one that maybe worried the teachers when we were out on the playground. But in our culture, I bring that story to your attention because often when we think of the word submit, that's what comes to mind, giving up.

In fact, if you have ever watched a UFC fight, cage fighting, you know, oftentimes as they're grappling, one of them will get the other into some kind of a submission hold where the opponent then taps out.

They tap their opponent, signifying to the ref that they have conceded the match, that they've given up, because if they don't, they're either going to pass out or they're going to have something broken. And so, again, when we think of what it means to submit, when we think of submission in our culture, oftentimes what comes to mind is giving up or giving in. And so, we have seen submission as being something to associate with weakness or with weak people. The word submit is derived from a Latin term that means to let down, reduce, or yield. And if you think about it, that word submission, it's a word that sort of is self-defined. It's a sub-mission, meaning that it's a mission that is subordinate to the greater mission, the greater goal. For example, in a war, the ultimate goal is to win. Winning often means having different sub-missions that enhance the chances of accomplishing the greater goal, which is to win the great mission, which is to be victorious.

That gives us a clear understanding of what submission really means, but we can do better by going to God's Word. God's Word, as you know, was originally written in the Greek language, at least the New Testament was. And the Greek word that we translate as submission means, in the Greek, to put under or to arrange under. It was originally a military term that referred to lower-ranking soldiers, to arrange themselves underneath their higher-ranking officers. All this to say that the Bible defines submission not as weakness, not as giving up, but as something that is essential for order. Acknowledging the proper order and place of things under authority. And we know as Christians, we are commanded to follow Jesus Christ, right? And Jesus frequently acknowledged His willingness and His desire to live in submission to His Father's will, even when doing so meant that He who knew no sin would become sin on the cross to save us from ours. Matthew 26, 39 comes to example when we think about our Lord's submission to the Father. And

going a little farther, He fell on His face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. So we see submission through the life of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and we also know in reading His Word that He expects us to likewise submit ourselves to Him. Luke 14, 27, Jesus says very clearly, very boldly, very boldly, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot, not may not, cannot be My disciple. In fact, we can go on and see through Scripture many different commands from God expressing His desire that we live our lives in submission to Him, which includes our being submissive to those whom He has placed in authority over us. So the government, for example, governing authorities, Romans 13, 17, 1 Peter 2, 13 through 14, talk about the importance for us as believers to be in submission to those whom God has sovereignly put in control over us in government. We also see that there is command for the family, that God expects wives to be submissive to their husbands, that husbands as well as all the house are to be submissive to the Lord, that parents are to likewise be submissive, or children, I should say, are likewise to be submissive to their parents. We also see that the Lord has this expectation in our workplace, that He expects us to work as to the Lord, that we are to be one who is a good employee submitting to our employers. These commands are not given to suppress anyone, but to serve and to protect us. It's our sinful flesh that causes us to view submission in suppressive ways. And it's the sinful flesh that causes people who are in authority to use their authority in suppressive ways. But God is a God of order. He is not a God of chaos. And without submission, chaos is what eventually ensues. If you think about it, think about how disastrous it would be if soldiers refuse to obey the orders of their commanders. Think about how disastrous it would be if our society refused to obey the law of the land, refused even to submit to those who serve in roles where their job is to uphold the law. And we've seen a lot of that happen in our society right now. And chaos is what has resulted from that. Chaos, anarchy, those things take place. Society is crippled when people refuse to submit as they are commanded to by God's Word. So what we need to understand here as we go on is that submission is a good thing because submission is a God thing. Obviously, God is the highest authority that there is whom we submit to before and above all others. Now, there may come a time where if those who are in government, in authoritative places, they command us or require us, demand that we do things that would cause us to sin, where then we refuse to do so. We continue to submit to the Lord and we continue to submit to the Lord even if that means that ultimately we submit our lives in the end by either being arrested or killed for our faith in Jesus Christ. But I hope that we're all on the same

[9 : 39] page now when we're talking about submission. That submission does not mean weakness. Submission is a good thing that God expects, especially in His church. As we've already read in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 through 20, as we look at the Apostle Paul's instruction for the church, those believers in Ephesus. Let's look at it again. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. God expects this in His church and those who are members of it. This is the main idea for this morning's sermon. Submission to Christ involves submission to His church, which means living in submission to one another as members of His body, as members of His body. So again, being a church member means living in submission to Christ.

If you were here, well you weren't here last week, but if you saw last week's sermon, some of you were here last week, then you know that through that message we went back to God's Word to see, well what are the standards for membership? And so having understood hopefully what the standards are from last week, we know that it also involves our living in mutual submission to one another. But what does that mean? What does that involve, our living in submission to one another? Well the Bible says that Christians should submit to their local church in seven ways. And I want you to know that I've borrowed these seven ways from Jonathan Lehman. The points are his, the words are mine, because I thought, well if it's not broken, don't fix it. Amen? And I felt like these are great points that he had in his book about church membership that was part of a Nine Mark series. So the first way that Christians are submit to their church, to one another, is this. A Christian should submit to their local church publicly. A Christian should submit to their local church publicly. By this I mean formally or officially they join the church. Again, these were things that we covered in last week's sermon. How for a person to join a church there must be a profession, a statement of faith.

They're agreeing with what we believe about God and about His Word, about what it means to live the Christian life. Another way that a person joins our church publicly is through baptism, as we witnessed with Sherry this morning, or through transfer of membership, having already been interviewed by the pastor in the elders. Church should not be a place where you show up anonymously and leave anonymously.

That is not what the church should look like. We are called, commanded by God, to disciple our members. And how can we do that if we don't know who our members are? How can we do that if we don't know what's going on in one another's lives? How can we keep each other accountable if we don't even know one another's names? Jesus publicly identified Himself over and over again with His church, and so should we.

Second, a second way, a Christian should submit to their local church physically. A Christian should commit or submit to their local church publicly and now physically. Now, obviously, we know that last year was a rough year. This year is starting out roughly, and COVID has affected our ability to meet.

In fact, the weather affected our ability to meet last week. We thank God for the ability that we have to be able to stay connected through this past year, even right now, even last week. Thank God that we were still able to come up here and record that service to share it with you on Sunday. But I believe that the time will come eventually, at some point in time, when we can gather, when all of God's church can gather together again physically in one place. But I've shared this before, and I'll share it again, that I know that many pastors have expressed concern that a lot of their members who have gotten used to watching the service at home are going to stay at home. But I don't think that that will be the case.

[14 : 58] It might be the case for some, but I don't think it's going to be the case on a large scale. Because I believe that Christians want to meet together. And they want to meet together because they understand that God commands that we should. And that's important to them. And so I believe He commands it because it's essential for our Christian lives. And we understand that. Hebrews 10, 24 through 25.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

If a Christian does not submit themselves physically to the church, we can understand from this scripture then that they will struggle to receive what they need from the church. That stirring, that strengthening, that equipping that helps them to know the Lord better and serve the Lord better. That leads to godly living that glorifies Jesus Christ. But I agree that some won't return. And I read an article that Tom Rainer put out not too long ago back in August. And he talked about how, yeah, there are going to be some members who will not return after quarantine. And he described three different kinds of church member who we can pretty much count on not coming back. The first one is the one who sees church as just another activity. Church is just another activity. Rainer said, these church members see gathered attendance as yet another activity on par or lower than other activities. They were the church members who let inclement weather keep them from the church, but not their children's soccer games. Commitment to the church was a low priority before the pandemic and will continue to be post-pandemic. The next type of member who we probably won't see back who will not submit to the church by being there publicly with them or physically with them is the constant critic church member. Rainer writes of that member, these church members always had some complaints for the pastor. In fact, your pastor may be dying a death by a thousand cuts. They are likely still complaining even though they have not returned in-person services yet. The third is the cultural Christian church member. They were those members who likely weren't Christians but came to church to be accepted culturally, Rainer says. Today there are few cultural expectations for people to attend church, so it has been no big deal for them to miss church, and they probably won't return. And he concluded by saying this in his article, church leaders and church members, however, should not fret about these losses. Your local church has the opportunity to write its future on a blank slate, and these church members really had no plans to be a part of that future anyway. Head into God's future with confidence. God's got your church, and he's got you.

I like that. You know, and we know from Scripture the church will prevail. The church will prevail over and through COVID-19 and whatever else might happen. Not because of who we are, but

because of who Christ is. And I think we've got to continue as a church to stress the importance of what the Bible says that church members should be. We continue to reach out to those who are on the fringes of our community, to those whose concerns are great that keeps them from being here. We continue to respect their decision and love them and reach out to them and make them feel as much as we can like they are a part. But in the end, no matter what happens, the church will prevail. We keep moving forward.

[19:17] We keep advancing the gospel together. Thirdly, the third way a Christian submits to their church. A Christian should submit to their local church socially. Socially. Publicly, physically, socially. Now, a church isn't just a social club, but there is biblical precedent for us to be more than casual acquaintances. Again, this isn't a place where people should be able to show up anonymously and leave anonymously. The Bible says that God cares about who we associate with socially. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 33. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins or corrupts good morals. James 4.4. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

And so we've got to understand that as believers, as the church, we have been called to not be of this world. But we do still have a responsibility to share the gospel in the world with the world. And so striking that balance for us is really important. But we must be aware that there is a temptation for us to imitate the behavior of those whom we associate with, those whom we socialize with. Remember, as a youth pastor, we're trying to communicate this principle to our teenagers. And so if you've been a youth pastor before, and I know that we've got quite a few, you probably remember this illustration.

You have one of your teenagers stand on a chair, and you have another teenager laying on the floor in front of them, and they grab hands. And the job of the one on the ground is to pull the one on the chair down. The job of the one on the chair is to lift the one on the ground up. Guess what was a lot easier to do? Pull them down. And so it was a great illustration to say, hey, you know, it's easier to be pulled down than it is to be raised up. Now, of course, God can do all things, but again, just a way to communicate to them that be careful about who you associate with. People of the world tend to socialize with people who are like them, we see, who are like them ethically, who are like them and similar to them economically and even educationally. But the church should not follow such patterns. That pattern does not communicate the gospel. In fact, it's anti-gospel. Galatians 3, 27 through 28, the Lord makes this thought clear. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no divisions here. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female for all are one in Christ Jesus. And so when we're thinking about our church socially and how we submit to one another socially, we should strive as a church to be a diverse congregation, diverse ethnically, diverse economically and educationally. We shouldn't divide socially in the ways in which we see the world dividing itself. There should be no divisions within our church based upon a person's race, based upon a person's age, or based upon any other kind of status that they have or don't have in the world.

We should foster and pursue, as a congregation, friendships between old and young, black and white, rich and poor. Those things shouldn't matter to us in whom we think about, who we are going to socialize with, because we see one another as being equal before the cross of Jesus Christ. Equally in need of salvation, equally saved. And so I have a challenge for you, for us as a church. I believe tonight we're going to have a time of fellowship after our town hall meeting, and we're going to meet in our fellowship hall, and tables and chairs will be set out. And here's my challenge to you.

[23:44] Sit with somebody whom you haven't sat with before. Amen? All right. Amy will try it out. Will the rest of you? But do that. Go in and think about the fact that, you know what, I'm going to sit with somebody who I haven't sat with before. Because I know how it can be, and I do the same. I tend to sit in the same place because it makes me feel comfortable. But I encourage you to sit with somebody else. Get to know someone else in our church better. And we should be striving to do that, not just in that situation, but in all things. Getting to know our church family better and better, and socializing with them. Fourth, a Christian should submit to their local church affectionately.

A Christian should submit to their local church affectionately. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 12, verse 24 through 26.

But God has so composed the body, speaking of the church, 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. Romans 12, 10.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. You see, God commands us as His people, as His church, to rejoice with other members of our body when something happens in their life that gives them reason to rejoice.

[25 : 38] When we find out that a member of our church has received a job promotion, when we find out that a couple in our church is having a baby, when we realize likewise to maybe another couple, they're getting together and they're going to be married, whatever the case may be, when good things happen to people in our church, we should rejoice with them, not be jealous of them.

We see that a lot in our culture, don't we? Keeping up with the Joneses is what they say, right? A lot of times our relationships in the world aren't based upon affection, but are used in ways to maybe make us feel better about ourselves, or we just like to associate with people who we feel similar to.

Think about it. And so, so often relationships in our world are rooted in conceit, in envy. You see your friend get a new car, and automatically you think what?

You could think this. I need a new car too. I've got to keep up with them. And there's fear if we don't, isn't there? There's fear that we're going to get left behind. If I don't keep up with this group that I'm hanging out with, then I'm going to get left behind, and they may not want to hang out with me anymore.

[27 : 12] And so we can feel afraid that we're going to lose our friends. That should never be the case in the church. Never. That's not how we love one another.

And friendships like that are exhausting. We rejoice with one another, and guess what too? We suffer when one of our members suffers. When someone is in the hospital, when someone has lost a loved one, we suffer with them because we genuinely care about that person.

They're a part of our body. They're a part of our family. Fifth, a Christian should submit to their local church financially. Financially.

Okay. Romans 12, 13. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 2 Corinthians 9, 7.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And so we understand that we are stewards of what God has given us.

[28 : 25] All things are God's. He has placed them in our hands, and so we hold them with our hands open, not clutching on tightly. Whatever God gives, he's given to us.

We rejoice in that. Whatever he takes away, he takes away. And so we must be stewards of what God has given us, thankful for what he has placed in our hands, and generous to share a portion of what he has blessed us with to advance the gospel together, so that the work of the church can carry on, and that the church can continue to thrive in its mission.

Sixth, a Christian should submit to their local church ethically. Ethically. Ethically. Ethically. By this I mean that each church member should submit to the church for ethical instruction, counsel, for accountability, and discipline in all matters that the Bible addresses.

Galatians 6, 1. The instruction for the church there. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. In the church, we help one another fight against sin in our lives.

[29 : 47] And we need to be willing to open ourselves up to receive help from our church whenever we are the ones who are living sinfully.

Whenever we are the ones who are living in a way that does not match God's word, that tarnishes our witness and reputation as a church.

Matthew 18, 15 through 17. Our Lord knew that this would happen. He's given us clear instructions of how to help our church submit ethically to what we have been called to believe as Christians.

Jesus says, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. So there's an important instruction here for our Lord

that we help one another fight against sin.

[31 : 00] Seventh, a Christian should submit to their local church spiritually. A Christian should submit to their local church spiritually.

I mean, at least three specific things here. First of all, we understand that as believers, we have been given spiritual gifts from the Lord. And so we should submit those gifts in service to one another to the Lord.

Second, the local church is a community where Christians should build one another up through faith in God's Word. We're teaching. We're giving that instruction. We're sharing the Word of God with one another.

And third way that we submit to one another spiritually is that we do so through prayer. You think about it. How often this past week have you prayed for people in your church?

How often have you done that? We need to be praying for one another consistently and regularly, submitting ourselves spiritually to the church, praying for them as well.

[32 : 09] And you know, in all these things, Jesus is our example. Jesus is our supreme example. So let's go back and see how Jesus submitted Himself to the Father and to His church in all of these ways that have been mentioned.

Publicly. The Father put Him forward publicly, presenting Him as a propitiation for our sins.

Remember Paul's testimony to Agrippa in Acts.

He says, these things were not done in a corner. The world has witnessed Christ crucified. God has revealed Himself publicly through Jesus. You want to know what God is like?

Look at Jesus. He has fully revealed Him and done so in a very public way. Ultimately, through His death on the cross to atone for our sins.

So yeah, He submitted Himself publicly. He also submitted Himself physically. We see in Philippians chapter 2, He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant being born like men.

[33 : 19] Fully God, fully man, having a physical body to dwell amongst us. And He submitted to the Father and to His church socially.

Scripture says that Jesus was a friend of sinners. He didn't just go up somewhere and build a house for Himself, some church, and ask people to come. No, He would go to them, socializing with them, sharing the Word of God with them, no matter who they were, no matter what station of life they were in.

He identified as one of us affectionately. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

And Jesus willingly died affectionately for us, His church, that we would have eternal life. Well, how about financially? How did Jesus submit to the Father and to His church financially?

Well, again, going to Philippians chapter 2, remember, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He left the riches of heaven behind, the glories of heaven behind, to become poor, to be born in a manger, to a lower class family, and to die with only the possession of the clothes that His mother had made and which the soldiers were gambling for at His feet.

[34 : 50] He became poor, that we would become rich. How about ethically? He fulfilled all that the law required, which we could not.

Giving us words of eternal life, showing us and enabling us to live a better way. How about spiritually? Well, it's through faith in Him that we go from spiritual darkness to spiritual light in this life and in the life to come.

Jesus as Christ, I want to quote Jonathan Lehman here at the end of his chapter, just as Christ submitted His whole life for our good, so we should submit our whole life for one another's good.

It's not as if there is some area of our life that is exempt from considering the interests of others better than our own. Specifically, we should give ourselves to our churches publicly, physically, socially, affectionately, financially, ethically, and spiritually.

When you came to church this morning, whether you drove in physically or you got on Facebook or watching at home, how much were others on your mind as you prepared to worship?

[36 : 18] That's convicting even for me to think. And so I encourage you and I hope and I pray that for us, the Lord would begin to change the way that we think.

And when we come to church, we're not thinking about what's in it for me. Oh, we're going to sing that song? I don't really like that song. Oh, he's going to preach on that passage? I think he preached on that passage not that long ago.

Oh, there's seven points? This is going to be a really long message. But you know what I'm saying. How often do we think about when we go to church, you know, they have a surgery coming up. They've lost someone they love. I know they've had a rough week. Lord, what can I do to go out of my way to love them this morning? We need to change the way we think. We need to change the way we think that we would think more like Jesus Christ. Thinking less of ourselves. Thinking more of others. Submitting ourselves to Him, to His ways, to His will, to His church.

[37 : 23] Three questions of application that I hope that you'll take time to think about. Maybe later today. Maybe later this week.

First question. Which area or areas of submission do you struggle with the most? Thinking of those seven ways that we are to submit to the church. Which one of those do you struggle the most with? And then I hope that you'd think about, well, why? Why do you struggle with that one? And then also with that, to think about how can Christ's example help you to change? Where do you struggle with?

What area of submission to the church do you struggle with? Why is that? And how can you look to Christ and His example to change? Second question.

Which area or areas of submission do you excel in? And why do you think that's the case? And how can Christ's example of His submission in that way encourage you to excel still more as you live your life in submission to the Lord, to His will, and to His church?

[38 : 33] And then the third question. If you are unwilling to submit to the church in any of these ways, what does that indicate about your submissiveness to Christ?

If you're unwilling to submit to the Lord's commands, how committed to you are you? How submissively are you living to the Lord? Submission to Christ involves submission to His church, which means living in submission to one another as members of His body.

Will you remain committed to be a member of His church? Or maybe you need to recommit yourself and you've been convicted in some of the ways that you have not been submitting to the Lord and to His church like you need to be.

In a moment, we're going to take communion together as a church and so I encourage you if you want to come forward and pray, if you want me to pray for you, I'll be down here to pray with you as well. Let's get our hearts and our minds set for what we're about to do as we come together and take communion.

Right now, I'm going to pray. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we pray that we would live lives that please You, that glorify You, Lord, that we would understand that the lives that we have, we would not have if it were not for You, that You have given us this life and that You've called us, Lord, to make much of it by making much of Jesus Christ.

[40 : 04] And we know, Lord, that we can do that through being submitted to You, being submitted to Your church. Lord, I pray that You would help us to think like You, to not see submission as weakness, but submission as something that is good, something that builds Your church, something that leads us to advancing the gospel together and making disciples.

And so, Father, I pray that in all of these ways and more, we would submit to You that You would use Highland Park Baptist Church to accomplish much in the name of Jesus Christ.

In His name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.