

God has called believers to be identified with the local church

This morning we're hitting the pause button on our Acts series to start a 4 week look at the topic of membership. Let me begin by saying that 8 or 9 years ago this is a preaching series not one of us elders would have thought we'd be preaching. Over the course of the last couple of years it has been a topic of our discussions, and last January during our elders' retreat it was our sole focus. This isn't a topic we've taken lightly or moved quickly on, and we recognize that there are some mixed feelings and differing opinions on the topic of membership. We've searched Scripture, sought counsel from other pastors, devoted time to prayer about this, and have become increasingly convinced that the structure of membership will serve this local church body well. We're excited to be moving in this direction, and enthusiastic about how this will result in better pastoral care and more every-member ministry. So, over the next 4 weeks we're focusing on membership, and 4 headings related to membership. This morning we're covering the church's identification. Next week we'll look at the church's practice. In week 3 we'll look at the church's discipline, and our final week will focus on the church's evangelism. Identification, practice, discipline, and evangelism. To begin with, turn in your Bibles to **Genesis 12**.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 12

A People Called into Relation (Genesis 12)

1. Genesis 12:1-3

1. God's purpose through the ages has been to manifest his glory among the nations through a called out people. In **Genesis 12** God calls Abram to himself. Abram was an idolater living in Ur of the Chaldees, and God calls him, commands him to go to a land he will show him, and promises to bless him so that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. How would Abram be a blessing to all the families of the earth? Through covenant relationship with God. God, in his sovereign grace, calls Abram, declares him to be righteous by faith (**Genesis 15**), and enters into a covenant relationship with him, the sign of that covenant being circumcision (**Genesis 17**). In fact, when God enters into this covenant with Abram he even gives him a new identity, no longer Abram, but Abraham. His name changes from "exalted father" to "father of a multitude". Throughout the Old Testament God was working in covenant relationship, shining his light among the nations through his called out people. Indeed, this is the way God works throughout the old and new testaments.

2. John 1:1-14

1. John takes us back even before Abram, back to the creation account in **Genesis 1**. Jesus was there in creation, the agent of creation. He is the giver of life and the light of men. To all who believe in his name he gives the right to become children of God (**v.12**). Just as Abram believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness, those who believe God's promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the substitutionary, atoning work of Christ, are made children of God and receive the imputed righteousness of Christ.

1. **Romans 4:13-5:1** Justified (declared righteous) by faith.

2. And just as the children of Abraham had the sign of their covenant relationship with God (circumcision), we also have covenant signs - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Circumcision was the old covenant sign of relation to God and identification with his people. Baptism and communion are the new covenant signs of relation to God and identification with his people.

1. Baptism - **Matthew 28:18-20** Baptism is the initial sign of covenant relationship with God. We've been seeing this in the book of Acts.

2. Lord's Supper - **Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26** The ongoing, continuing sign of covenant relationship with God.

3. Through baptism and partaking of the Lord's Supper we show our relation and identification with God. Relation and identification go hand in hand. If we were to claim relation to God, but be unwilling to identify with him, then our claim of relation would be phony. If, on the other hand, we identified ourselves with God, but have no relation to him, that also would be phony.

1. Let me give you an example from marriage. If a man marries a woman, they stand before witnesses and exchange vows, which brings them into this covenant relationship with one another. Then they exchange rings to be worn to show their identity as belonging to the other. Now, if a man claimed to love a woman, yet refused to wear a ring or in any other way identify as being her husband, we'd have real reason to question his love and relation to her. A man in a loving relationship with a woman should be glad to be identified with her. For the first several years of marriage to Natalie I was known by most people as "Natalie's husband." And that's okay. On the other hand, if someone had no loving relationship with another, yet publicly claimed identification with that person, we'd have real reason to question that person's sanity. You can put a ring on your finger and claim to be the husband of the Queen of England, but unless we see an actual loving relationship, we don't believe you. Marriage is a covenantal relationship, a firm commitment to one another. That's what makes the vows so wonderful. It isn't a contract being made, but a covenant. "...for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health, 'til death us do part."

Transition: We are called into relation with God by God. We're also called to be representatives of God.

A People Called into Representation (John 13; Hebrews 13)

1. **John 13:35** *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

1. How are you to show your identity in Christ? By your love for the people of Christ. As in marriage, love is shown by our actions toward one another, but also undergirded by a firm commitment to one another. We're called to be more than just Christian acquaintances with each other, but to be in a committed, loving relationship with each other. We're stones being fitted together as a temple for the Lord (**1 Peter 2:5**), various members of a body (**1 Cor. 12:27**), members in the family of God (**Eph. 2:19**).

1. There are 59 "one another" statements in the New Testament, instructing us on how we are to treat one another. Here's a small sampling:

1. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (**Romans 12:10**)
 2. "...Honor one another above yourselves. (**Romans 12:10**)
 3. "Live in harmony with one another..." (**Romans 12:16**)
 4. "Greet one another with a holy kiss..." (**Romans 16:16**)
 5. "...Serve one another in love." (**Galatians 5:13**)
 6. "Carry each other's burdens..." (**Galatians 6:2**)
 7. "...Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (**Ephesians 4:2**)
 8. "Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (**Ephesians 4:32**)
 9. "...Forgiving each other..." (**Ephesians 4:32**)
 10. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (**Ephesians 5:21**)
 11. "...In humility consider others better than yourselves." (**Philippians 2:3**)
 12. "Do not lie to each other..." (**Colossians 3:9**)
 13. "Bear with each other..." (**Colossians 3:13**)
 14. "...Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." (**Colossians 3:13**)
 15. "...Encourage each other..." (**1 Thessalonians 4:18**)
 16. "...Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (**Hebrews 10:24**)
 17. "Confess your sins to each other..." (**James 5:16**)
 18. "...Pray for each other." (**James 5:16**)
 19. "...Live in harmony with one another..." (**1 Peter 3:8**)
 20. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." (**1 Peter 4:10**)
 21. "...Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..." (**1 Peter 5:5**)
2. My two oldest children recently joined the Civil Air Patrol. One evening we were driving them down to the airport for drill and they were working on reciting the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Oath. I know that some of you are former CAPers and know the oath, so feel free to recite it along with me. "I pledge that I will serve faithfully in the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program and that I will attend meetings regularly, participate actively in unit activities, obey my officers, wear my uniform properly and advance my education and training rapidly to prepare myself to be of service to my community, state and nation."

1. As I heard them working on committing this to memory, I couldn't help but think of our upcoming series on church membership. This oath touches on how a cadet is in a place of relation and representation, identifiable as a CAP Cadet. Serve faithfully. Attend meetings regularly. Obey leaders. Advance my learning to be of service to others. This is just a secular organization, a club if you will. The church is not a club. Jesus bled for you, gave his life for you, promised you eternity, gave you hope, and has called you to join together with others he has called and redeemed and invited us into covenant relationship with each other. Yet some of us will shy away from committing to that. Serve faithfully in the church? Attend meetings regularly? Obey the leaders? Grow as a disciple so as to be of service to others? If we're willing to commit ourselves to secular clubs, but not to the blood-bought bride of Christ, there needs to be a serious re-consideration of priorities.
2. Now while everyone is uncomfortable, go ahead and turn to **Hebrews 13**. Verses **7** and **17** have weighed heavily on us as elders as we've considered membership. The author of Hebrews touches on one important aspect of relationships within the church, that between church leaders and the congregation.
 1. **v.7** "*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.*" - The church, by God's design, has leaders. We see in the New Testament that the leadership model consists of elders and deacons. Elders are the pastors/shepherds/overseers of the church and have the privilege and responsibility of the spiritual oversight of the church, particularly in preaching and teaching God's Word. Deacons serve the church by assisting the elders in the care of God's church. Here the author of Hebrews tells the recipients of the letter to "remember your leaders." Not just look up to Christian leaders, generally. Those on radio or tv or podcasts or whose sermons you can watch live online. But remember *your* leaders. This involves a relationship. Verse 17 takes this even further.
 2. **v.17** "*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*" - Not only is there to be an identifiable relationship between church leaders and the congregation, but there are responsibilities that go along with that identifiable relationship.
 1. The congregation's responsibility is to obey and submit to the church leaders. This might make you uncomfortable. There's much said in the NT about how church leaders are to behave and lead, and time doesn't allow us to cover all of them, but let's just say that, if the church leaders are leading according to the way they're instructed, obedience and submission should be a delight for the congregation.
 2. The congregation has a responsibility, but the church leaders have a responsibility as well. They are to keep watch over the souls of the congregation. We don't just plan services, preach sermons, and make sure the pews are comfortable enough for a couple hours on Sunday morning. We concern ourselves with how the church is doing spiritually. This is why at every elders' meeting we talk about needs in the church body under the heading of "*admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all*" (**1 Thess. 5:14**). And if you think that you have reason for being uncomfortable, look at the second part of this sentence. "...*as those who will have to give an account.*" As leaders we know that there will be a day when we will have to give an account before God for our care of those entrusted to us. A question we ask, then, is "who will we give an account for?" Who can we identify, and who has identified themselves, as the people of Pillar who have come under the care of the leaders here? Who are those who represent God as believers from this local church, and how can we best lead and serve them so that they will declare the glorious light of the gospel in our community and beyond?

Conclusion: We've covered some ground this morning, but we're taking 4 weeks to work through this membership series, and each of the 4 weeks' teaching will be vital to our understanding. There is so much more that could be said this morning, but it's my hope and has been my prayer that what has been looked at this morning from Scripture would be helpful in our thinking about the local church, our relation to God and each other, and our representation of God to the world. I pray that we've grown in our understanding of identification, that we are believers brought in to be members of the household of faith by the grace of God, and as identifiable members of this body we are to represent God in this world.

Family

Table Talk



September 9, 2018

Family Discussion

1. Do you have a possession you treasure; something that is special and important to you? What is it? Why is it special and important? At what cost did you come to possess it (money, labor, patience, etc)?
2. Read about how God refers to those he has redeemed. What does he call them? Do you think of yourself in this way?
3. Do you think of others in the church as God's treasured possessions? At what price did you come to be God's treasured possession?
4. Are you willing to be identified with them, showing love to them, and helping them know and love Christ more deeply and show the goodness of Christ more fully?
5. What are some ways that you can carry this out, as members of the same body serving each other?

GOD'S TRUTH

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Key Verse

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into
God's Word...

2. Exodus 19:4-6; Deut. 7:6-8;
Deut. 26:17-19
3. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20
4. Romans 12:10; Hebrews
10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10-11
5. 1 Corinthians 12:21-29



Scripture Memory: Ephesians 4:13

"AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE I COMMAND YOU TODAY (EPL) BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL THINK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE, YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES, YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOST OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:5-9 (ESV)