

## SESSION 4

# Committed to His Church



### QUESTION 1:

*What are your first memories of church?*

## THE POINT

Commitment to Christ includes a commitment to His body, the church.

## THE PASSAGE

Romans 12:3-16

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” Many of us have used that timeworn phrase, but as we get to know a friend’s friend, we may change our tune. Just because we have something in common with a friend doesn’t mean we have anything in common with his other friends.

Friendships are one thing, but it’s a whole different matter with those we love. If someone said to me, “I love you, but I can’t stand your wife,” I would be devastated. My wife is a part of me, and someone can’t truly love me without also loving my wife. Such a negative attitude toward my wife would always be a barrier in our relationship.

We hear a similar statement in our culture: “I love Jesus, but I don’t love the church.” Maybe they’ve been hurt by people in the church or they found commitment to the church is too demanding or difficult. Whatever the reason, this sentiment is far from the heart of God. After all, the church is the bride of Christ.

We are to love that which Christ loves, and that includes His bride, the church.

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## Romans 12:3-5

**3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.**

**4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:**

**5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.**

Regardless of our view of the church, if we are connected to Christ as His followers, we are connected to the church. “We ... are one body in Christ.” We do not lose our individuality or uniqueness, but we have an inseparable connectedness with other Christians. We can be different in our race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, but we are all one in Christ.

Our physical bodies provide a great illustration of how we are one in the church. Look at your hands. Look closely at each individual finger. Now look at your feet. Grab a mirror and look at your nose and eyes. Consider how incredibly different your hands, feet, nose, and eyes are from one another. Each one functions separately, and they certainly don't look at all alike, but every one is a part of you. You are one singular body, made up of different, unique, and amazing parts. While your right thumb or your left eye is a distinct part of your body, both are still parts of *your* body—and that reality simply can not be changed or altered. So it is with the church.

Paul took it a step further. It's not just that *you* are connected to Christ and *I* am connected to Christ, but *we* are “every one members one of another.” We need each other, and we belong to each other. My role in the body of Christ is integral to your role in

the body of Christ, and your role is equally essential in how I carry out my role. Christ has formed His church so that we need each other if it is to function as a healthy body.

All this is only possible because we are “in Christ.” The world looks at diversity and creates divisions (and unfortunately, believers have often bought into those divisions). The world sees black and white, Republican and Democrat, blue-collar and white-collar, and on and on. With that mind-set, we separate ourselves into camps, tending to stick with those who are “just like me.” But within the church, those divisions are meaningless. Christ reaches into all these silos of distinction and brings people to faith in Him. He loves us all equally and brings us together through our shared faith.

Consequently, this means no believer should “think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Rather, we are to “think soberly,” acknowledging that none of us is better than another. We are unique—and uniquely gifted by God—without degrees of importance or superiority. We truly “are one body in Christ.”

#### **QUESTION 2:**

***What does it look like when a church sees itself as one body in Christ?***

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### **Romans 12:6-8**

**6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

**7** Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

**8** Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

We need one another to grow, flourish, and become everything God has called us to be. Other believers help and support us through the different gifts He has given to each one of us. We often refer to these gifts as “spiritual gifts.” When we are saved, each one of us—each member of the body of Christ—is given a unique gifting that we are to use for the purpose of helping the body of Christ—the church—be everything she has been created and called to be.

Paul only listed a few of these gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. This is not an exhaustive list. Paul also referred to gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11, and each list is slightly different. Paul meant to provide examples of spiritual gifts and how they are to be used. For instance, if we are gifted with ministry, we are simply to “wait on our ministering.” Paul offered no deep explanation; in fact, he did quite the opposite: he stated the obvious. “We are to do that which is obvious to us and which we feel compelled and capable of doing.”<sup>1</sup>

Our human tendency is to think some gifts are more important than others. Conversely, far too many Christians believe they don’t play an important role in the kingdom of God. They think to themselves, “I’m not a pastor, worship leader, or missionary, so I’m not that important.” That idea cannot be derived from this passage. In Ephesians 4, Paul stated the importance of *every* individual and *every* gift:

**“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).**

It bears repeating: The whole body promotes the growth of the body. You are part of the whole body. And “that which *every*

joint supplieth” (emphasis added) includes you! Regardless of the spiritual gift (or gifts) you received, you are a critical part of the life and ministry of the body of Christ.

The church does not function and grow only because preachers preach and missionaries do missions. The body grows as each one of us uses the gifts God has graciously given us. Regardless of whether you are young or old, rich or poor, male or female, you are a critical part of the body of Christ. The church can never reach its full potential until all the individual parts use the gifts God has given them for the good and the growth of the body.

If your church is anything like my church, it has problems—just like every church in the world. Unfortunately, no perfect church exists this side of heaven; no matter how hard you look, you simply will not find one. But we create a greater problem when we point the blame at different parts of the body. “If only my pastor were a better preacher.” “If only my church had this kind of music or that type of program, then the church would become healthy and grow.” “Evaluating and assessing blame” is not included in any of the biblical lists of spiritual gifts. Instead we are to exercise our gift “according to the grace that is given to us,” and we are to do our part to build up and work for the health of our church.

### **QUESTION 3:**

*When have you been encouraged by someone using his or her gifts in the church?*

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## **Romans 12:9-16**

**9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.**

**10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;**

**11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;**

**12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;**

**13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.**

**14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.**

**15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.**

**16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.**

In verse 9, Paul gave us the “secret ingredient” that enables the body of Christ to grow, thrive, and become the healthiest version of itself: “love.” This is the Greek word *agape*, a word that expresses the essential nature of God (1 John 4:8). This is not a term that describes emotions; it is a word about how we act. We are not called to just have warm and fuzzy feelings about the church; rather, we are to love the church by serving her with our hearts and lives. We act with a love-infused, “all-in” commitment to Christ’s church.

Paul built on this *agape* love by referring in verse 10 to *philadelphia*: brotherly love. We are to “be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.”

All too often this is contrary to how we view love. I’ve sat in countless marriage counseling sessions where a husband or wife will look at me and say, “You know, I’m just not in love with my spouse anymore.” What that individual means is that he or she doesn’t have the warm and fuzzy feelings once experienced toward the spouse with whom they entered into the covenant of marriage. I tell them, “I understand that you may not be ‘in love’ with them, but now more than ever you need to *love them*.” They may not have *feelings* they once had toward their spouse, but now more than ever they need to *act with love*, serving and caring for their spouse.

#### QUESTION 4:

***How does humility promote harmony in the church?***

## DIGGING DEEPER

### TO PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

Reasons for extending hospitality varied through the centuries. From the beginning, the motivation for showing hospitality was rooted in the nomadic lifestyle of ancient peoples. The desert life fostered a sense of loneliness and awareness of the need for physical protection and sustenance. Extending hospitality by providing food, water, and shelter was a way to temporarily adopt strangers into the community.

In Hebrew, hospitality means “the bringing in of guests.” Hospitality for the ancient Jews went beyond necessity or an expression of good manners. To show hospitality was considered a sacred obligation. To the Jews, this commandment contained an element of joy that one received from serving others.

Such courteous expressions of hospitality grew out of the difficult existence of those who lived in desert lands where having water and food meant the difference between life and death. The

Ammonites and Moabites were cursed because they did not provide food and water for the Hebrews during their journey from Egypt to the promised land (Deut. 23:4).

During the first century AD, inns were established to meet the needs of travelers along major routes. However, Christian travelers sought the hospitality of fellow believers. Christians are urged to show hospitality (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). The Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenia*, means a “love for others.”

Paul’s instructions to his traveling coworkers revealed his concern that they be received hospitably by Christians along the way. Those who preached the gospel were in particular need of hospitality, since they had no other means of support (3 John 5-8). Their hosts extended hospitality for several days, and then the preachers moved on to another place (Acts 9:43; 16:15; Rom. 16:2). Paul insisted that showing hospitality was essential for the church leader (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

David L. Jenkins, “To Practice Hospitality,” *Biblical Illustrator*, Winter 2005-06, 12-15

In these verses, Paul gave us a practical picture of what sacrificial love looks like. Read verses 11 through 16 and underline each action step the apostle called us to do. Consider how we are to carry out these actions with Christlike love. Don’t be lazy. Be fervent. Serve. Rejoice. Be patient. Pray persistently. Contribute.



Show hospitality. Bless. Weep with those that weep. Live in harmony. Don't be haughty. Don't think of yourself too highly. This is a picture of what love looks like.

What a beautiful picture it is! Surely anyone among us would want to be a part of a church full of members like that, but this beautiful picture of what the church is to be begins with you and me. Why should we love and serve the church in this sacrificial way? Because that is exactly how Christ loved us. Jesus didn't sit back in heaven, fold His arms, and tell us to get our act together before He would love us. Despite all our failures and shortcomings, He left the glory of heaven, put on our broken flesh, and came to this planet for one reason: to love us. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). If Jesus loves us—His bride—in this sacrificial way, how then can we not love her in the same way?

#### QUESTION 5:

*What are some ways being part of a healthy local church helps us live out these verses?*

### ENGAGE

*Read the following scenario. Then develop a response based on what you've learned in this study.*

A friend tells you she doesn't see any need for attending a local church. She says she studies her Bible at home, listens to a Christian radio station for worship, and subscribes to several sermon podcasts. Based on this study, how might you respond?

## LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your commitment to Christ's church this week?

- ▶ **Think.** Think about the love of Christ for you. Consider all the ways Jesus has loved you and consider His call on your life to love His bride in the way He loves you. Ask yourself: "How should I live differently in light of God's love for me?"
- ▶ **Minister.** Identify the spiritual gift God has given you and get busy using it. Ask your pastor or others in your group how you might utilize your gift to minister, strengthen, and support your church.
- ▶ **Motivate.** As the body of Christ, we have a responsibility for each other. If you know a fellow believer who is either not connected to a local church or is not using his spiritual gift, lovingly confront and encourage the person to carry out his or her role in the body of Christ.



### END NOTES

1. Kenneth Boa & William Kruidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary, gen. ed., Max Anders (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 372.