

Church Membership

Week 3

What are the Church and its members like?

Schedule:

Week 1: What is the church and is it important?

Week 2: What is Church Membership and is it important?

Week 3: What are the Church and its members like?

Week 4: What are the responsibilities and privileges of membership?

Week 5: What do we do if a member does not represent Christ?

Week 6: What will practicing meaningful membership look like?

Week 3:

Q1: What are the church and its members like?

Metaphors for the Church – Why are they Important?

3 Reasons

1. Each one describes something about our union in a church.
2. Each one describes something about a church and its members.
3. Each one gets put into practice in a church.

6 Helpful Metaphors for the Church

Metaphor #1: The Body of Christ

The “body of Christ” metaphor for the Church draws an analogy between the people of God and the human body. It celebrates the position and ministry of Jesus as “Head” of His body, the Church. He provides its identity, its coordination, and direction. United under Him, each person discovers his or her vital place and part as members. People also discover spiritual gifts for serving God and neighbor, whether as freshly imparted capabilities or the blessed anointing of strengths already in place. In response to Christ, the exercise of these gifts and godly virtues “builds up” the body in condition and extension.

Ephesians 1:22–23 22 And he put all things under his feet and **gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 4:11–12 (ESV) — 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, **for building up the body of Christ**,

Colossians 1:18 (ESV) — 18 And **he is the head of the body, the church**. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Romans 12:4–8 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 **so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another**. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:12–26 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

What do we learn from this metaphor about church life?

Metaphor #2: The Flock

The “flock” metaphor for the people of God draws on pastoral imagery. Utilizing the shepherd—sheep relationship of the ancient Near East, this analogy celebrates the position and ministry of Jesus as Great Shepherd of His flock. He provides to a rescued and gathered community its focus, leadership, and care. Under Him, each sheep is known intimately and by name, learns obedience is vital to respectful discipleship, and receives guidance along a purposeful journey. While life’s journey is perilous (predators and pretenders abound), the shepherd staff which rescues the wayward, and the rod which repels the assaults of evil, strengthens and defends the flock. Hearing the beckoning word, and heeding divine direction, the flock is fulfilled—and the shepherd-pastor draws other sheep in.

Luke 15:3–7 3 So he told them this parable: 4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

John 10:7 – 16 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

1 Peter 5:1–2 1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you**, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

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Metaphor #3: Branches of the Vine

The “branches of the vine” metaphor for believers in Jesus draws on agricultural imagery. The people of God are likened to parts of vineyards. This metaphor celebrates the position and ministry of Jesus as true vine. He provides true life to a deeply rooted, well-watered, and blossoming community. The marks of this community are intimacy, fruitfulness, and joy. Extending this metaphor, the Church finds itself spiritually “grafted into” God’s historic, chosen people Israel. The Messiah’s reign is the focal reality which creates a new humanity, eager for fulfillment of God’s plan.

John 15:1–9 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

Romans 11:16–24 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

What do we learn from this metaphor about church life?

Metaphor #4: Household of God (Family)

The household of God metaphor for the people of God draws on familial and residential imagery. This analogy specifically emphasizes the relationship between the people of God and those who are now their “relatives” through Christ’s work. It celebrates the position and ministry of Jesus as master of the house. He provides the invitation to belong to a scattered community of strangers and aliens—everyone becomes valued parts of a relational whole. Whether seen as family through birth or adoption, all are united under Christ.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 6:16–18 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, **18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.**”

Ephesians 2:18–22 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints **and members of the household of God,** 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

Hebrews 2:10–15 10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, **in bringing many sons to glory,** should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not **ashamed to call them brothers,** 12 saying, “**I will tell of your name to my brothers;** in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” 13 And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, **I and the children** God has given me.” 14 Since therefore **the children** share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 3:1–6 1 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2 who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. 3 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, **6 but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

What do we learn from this metaphor about church life?

Metaphor #5: Bride of Christ

The bride of Christ metaphor for the Church profoundly depicts the relationship of Christ to the Church as a relationship between a husband and wife in marriage. This metaphor celebrates the position and ministry of Jesus as the bridegroom in the wedding celebration. He offers to His chosen one unconditional love, responsive leadership, glad provision of needs, and deepened identity. In the life of each believer and the community, there is both an abiding security in this relationship and a call to prepare for the fulfillment of this divine marriage at Jesus’ second coming.

Faithfulness and loyalty in the marriage relationship between God and His covenant people is a primary theme¹

Matthew 9:14–15 14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, **“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.**

Ephesians 5:25–32 25 Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.** 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as Christ does the church,** 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**

¹ Miller, J. E. (2016). Bride of Christ. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Revelation 19:7–9 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

What do we learn from this metaphor about church life?

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Metaphor #6: Pillar of Truth

1 Timothy 3:15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, **a pillar and buttress of the truth.**

The Church is to safeguard sound doctrine and to lift it on high by the proclamation of the Gospel and by exemplary conduct.

What do we learn from this metaphor about church life?

Each metaphor teaches us something different about what a church and its members are like. To describe the church as a family is to speak about its *relational intimacy* and *shared identity*. To call it a body is to say that its members are *mutually dependent* but have *different roles*. To refer to it as the temple of the Spirit is to say that God *specially identifies himself and dwells with these people*. The language of vine and branch communicates the church’s *dependence on Jesus and his Word* for its life.³

² III, J. D. S. (2012, 2016). Metaphors for the Church. In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

³ Leeman, J. (2012). *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (pp. 70–71). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.