

THE CHRISTIAN AND CHURCH

Romans 12:4-8

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Church attendance is on the decline in America. Two decades ago, 42% of Americans attended church weekly or almost weekly. Ten years ago the number dropped to 38%. Currently the number is at 30%. Only three out of ten Protestant Christians attend church weekly. ([Gallup, 2024](#))
2. There are plenty of things we can do with our time and money. Do we need to do church? Is church essential? How should the Christian think about the church?
3. And if we need to be a part of the church, in what capacity? Do we need to attend? Do we need to give financially? Do we need to serve?
4. When we describe what it means to be a Christian, we tend to say that it's about believing in Jesus, obeying Jesus, and serving Jesus. And all of that is true, but it's missing an important element of Christian living. The Christian faith is essentially communal, corporate, and social. The Christian faith is meant to be lived in the context of the local church. We are supposed to believe in Jesus together; to obey Jesus together; to serve Jesus together.
5. To be a healthy, growing Christian, it's essential that you understand the church, and the relationship God wants you to have with the church.

II. TEXT

1. **Romans 12:4-8** "4 Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, 5 in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. 6 According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness."
2. This passage teaches us three facts every Christian needs to know about the church.

III. THREE FACTS EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHURCH

1. The church is the body of Christ.

- i. **Romans 4:5-6** 4 Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, 5 in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.
- ii. The Bible gives several titles to the church: the bride of Christ, the temple of God, the family of God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. But Paul's favorite title for the church is the body of Christ.
- iii. **Ephesians 1:22-23** 22 And he subjected everything under his feet, and appointed him as head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.
- iv. The Bible teaches **three big truths about the body of Christ:**
 1. Christ is the head of the body.
 - a. **Colossians 1:18** He is also the head of the body, the church.
 - b. He is the leader of the church.
 - c. We need to do church according to His instructions not ours, and to please Him not ourselves or the world.
 - d. When you are looking for a church you shouldn't ask, "What kind of church do I like?" You should ask, "What kind of church does Jesus like?"
 - e. Leaders in the church shouldn't ask, "How do we want to do church?" but "How does Jesus want us to do church?"
 2. Christians are body parts.
 - a. **Romans 4:4-5** 4 Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, 5 in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ
 - b. We are Christ's hands and feet. One person is a hand, another a foot, another an ear, another an eye.

- c. In other words, Christ accomplishes His work on earth through the church.
 - i. When Jesus wants to tell someone how to get to heaven, He doesn't audibly talk to them; He uses the church.
 - ii. When He wants to love on someone, He doesn't give them a hug; He uses the church to hug them.
 - iii. When He wants to give food or money to the poor, He doesn't personally do it; He uses the church.
 - d. This tells us how important the church is. The church is how Christ moves and accomplishes His work on earth.
 - e. This also tells us that you shouldn't just be going to church, but you should be serving in church. How else is Christ going to love the world if you aren't fulfilling your bodily function in the church?
3. Christ provides and cares for the church.
- a. **Ephesians 5:29** For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church
 - b. The church is very important to Jesus. It's His body. So He provides and cares for it.
 - c. As a Christian, your goal is to imitate Jesus. To be like Jesus.
 - i. That means you need to care about the things He cares about – the church.
 - ii. You need to do what He does – He provides and cares for the church.
 - iii. You need to be where He is – His is active in the church.
 - iv. What's important to Jesus should be important to you – the church.

2. Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ.

- i. **Romans 4:5** in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.
- ii. **Ephesians 5:30** since we are members of his body.
- iii. **1 Corinthians 12:27** Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.
- iv. The Bible doesn't command you to be a member; it says that you are a member if you are a Christian.
- v. At Church Acadiana we have a Newcomer's Lunch in which we lead people to join the church and become members. Why do we do that if every Christian is already a member of the church?
- vi. There are **three types of church membership**: Spiritual membership, practical membership, and formal membership.

1. Spiritual membership:

- a. Every Christian becomes a member of the church at salvation.
- b. You are not yet a member of a local church (small "c"), but of the universal or catholic Church (big "C").
- c. You don't choose this; it just happens to you.

2. Practical membership:

- a. If you are a Christian, then you are already a spiritual member of the Church. But you are not acting like member until you find a local church and get involved. That's practical membership. And that's God's will for every Christian. That you act like a member.
- b. Practical membership is active participation in a local church. You are attending, and serving, and giving.

3. Formal membership:

- a. Formal membership is when you go through the process of joining a local church. Every church has a different membership process. At our church it involves attending the Newcomer's Lunch and signing the Membership Covenant.
- b. Why do we have formal membership? Remember, every Christian is a spiritual member of the Church,

but God wants you to be an active member of a local church. That's where formal membership comes in. The purpose of formal membership is to encourage and teach people to go from spiritual membership to practical membership.

- c. We do that by leading people to make a formal commitment to the church. Joining the church is the formal commitment to act like a member in a particular local church.

vii. When it comes to church membership, many Christians make one of **three mistakes**:

1. Many Christians never get involved in church.

- a. They just remain spiritual members and never connect. They are lone-ranger Christians. If that's you, you need to get involved in church.

2. Many Christians are practical members of the church, but they never become formal members.

- a. They are very active, tithing, serving, attending, contributing, but they don't actually go through the formal membership process and join the church.
- b. If that's you, I would encourage you to join the church. Why?
- c. Because until you join it's hard for the church to know how to treat you.
 - i. Are you planning on leaving at some point?
 - ii. When the church goes through hard times, are you going to bolt or are you going to help us work through it?
 - iii. Do you want to be held accountable when you sin?
 - iv. Do you want the church to care for you when you go through hard times?
 - v. Do you want to be considered for volunteer and leadership roles?

- vi. Do you agree with our church's essential beliefs?
 - vii. Do you support our church's mission?
 - viii. Why are you here?
- d. If you don't join the church, we don't know the answer to these questions. We don't know where you stand, so it's hard to know how to treat you.
 - e. When you join the church you are making a declaration and an invitation.
 - f. First, you are making a public declaration to the church. You are saying, "I am committing to this church. I am sticking around. It's not that church, it's my church. He's not that pastor, he's my pastor. This is my church family. This is my church home. I agree with the church's doctrine. I support the church's mission and vision, and I want to be on the team. I want to be a part of what they are doing. I stand with them. Count me in."
 - g. As well, when you join the church you are making a public invitation. You are inviting the church to treat you like family; to count on you; to hold you accountable; to check on you when you are absent; to lean on you when it has challenges; to call on you when needs help; to love and support you when you go through hard times.
 - h. The truth is that some people don't want to be treated like a church member; they don't want to be treated like an insider; they don't want to be treated like family. They don't want to get too close, to involved, too committed. They want to stay on the periphery. And until you formally join, that's the message you are sending.
 - i. But formal membership lets us know that you want to be treated like an insider, and not an outsider. Like a family member, and not just a neighbor.

- j. So if that's you, you are a practical but not a formal member, then I encourage you to sign up for the next Newcomer's Lunch.

3. Many Christians are formal members, but not practical members.

- a. Some non-members act more like members than some members. When you formally join the church, you are making a commitment to attend regularly, to volunteer and serve, to give financially. But many Christians formally join but do none of that. They either stop attending, or they attend here and there but don't contribute in a meaningful way. This defeats the purpose of formal membership. Formal membership is intended to move you from mere spiritual membership to practical membership. If you don't intend to act like a member, then don't join the church. But maybe you are already a formal member, and you needed a loving reminder this morning that you need to act like a member.
- viii. Why does Christ make you a member of the church when you get saved? Because you need the church. Think of yourself as a body part, like a hand. If the hand is cut off from the body, the body will survive, but the hand will not. For the hand to survive and thrive, it needs to be connected to the body. To survive and thrive as a Christian, you need to be an active member of the church.
- ix. You don't need to go to church to go to heaven, but you need to go to church to be a healthy Christian. Think of a hand. If the hand is severed from the body, it is still a hand, but it is not a healthy hand. A Christian disconnected from the body is still a Christian, but they won't be healthy.
- x. Christianity is a team sport. It's not golf, it's football. A football team has 11 players on the field. The best football player in the world today is Patrick Mahomes. As good as he is, imagine if he tried to play a game without his team – all by himself. He would get killed.

- xi. Sure, being a member of the team means you have team meetings, you have practice, you have to get along with the other players, you have to share the ball, you have to share the spotlight, you don't always get your way, but without a team you can't win. You can only win with a team. As a Christian you can only win with the church. That's why Christ has made you member.
- xii. The question is, are you acting like a member? Are you connected, plugged in, involved, active, participating?

3. Every Christian has been given a spiritual gift.

- i. **Romans 12:6-8** 6 According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness."
- ii. Next Paul talks about gifts. 1 Corinthians calls them spiritual gifts.
- iii. **1 Corinthians 12:1** "Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware."
- iv. What are spiritual gifts? Spiritual gifts are Spirit-empowered abilities given to believers to build up the church.
- v. This passage gives **four insights about spiritual gifts:**

1. Spiritual gifts are given by God.

- a. **Romans 12:6-8** According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts
- b. Notice that we have spiritual gifts "according to the grace given to us."
- c. You don't deserve a spiritual gift. You don't earn your spiritual gift. You simply receive a spiritual gift from God.
- d. Therefore you can't take pride in your spiritual gift. You can't take credit for it. Just as you can't take credit for your natural talents because you were born with them, you can't take credit for your spiritual gift because you receive it when you were born again.

- e. You shouldn't envy other people's gifts. And you shouldn't be frustrated with the gifts that God did or did not give you. It's all decided by God according to His infinite wisdom.
- f. **1 Corinthians 12:18** But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted.

2. Every Christian has a spiritual gift.

- a. **Romans 12:6-8** According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts
- b. Notice the word "we." He's talking about all Christians. He didn't say "some of us have gifts," he said, "we have different gifts."
- c. **1 Peter 4:10** Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.
- d. If you are a Christian, then you have a spiritual gift.
- e. There are not two classes of Christians, the gifted and the regular. All God's children are gifted.

3. There are different gifts.

- a. **Romans 12:6** According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts
- b. While every Christian has a gift, no Christian has every gift. No gift is possessed by every Christian. We have different gifts.
- c. There is a reason for this.
- d. **1 Corinthians 12:17-19** 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?
18 But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. 19 And if they were all the same part, where would the body be?
20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
- e. Remember that the church is the body of Christ. For the body to be a functioning body, it needs many parts. If it was just a bunch of eyes, how would it

hear? If it was just a bunch of ears, how would we see. If we were just a bunch hands, how would we smell. So God has given us all different gifts so that we can work together to be a fully-functioning, effective body.

- f. What are the different spiritual gifts? Romans 12:6-8 mentions seven gifts.
- g. **Romans 12:6-8** 6 According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.
- h. But there are more gifts. The Bible has five lists of spiritual gifts (Rm 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:10-11). Other than the gifts already mentioned, there is the gift of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, helping, evangelism, pastor/teachers.
- i. Most theologians believe that these lists are merely representative, not comprehensive; in other words, that there are more, perhaps many more gifts than those listed in Scripture.

vi. Every Christian must use their spiritual gift.

1. Paul makes an important point about spiritual gifts that we must not miss.
2. **Romans 12:6-8** 6 According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness."

3. His point about spiritual gifts is to use them. It is a command. Whatever your spiritual gift, use it. Work it. Employ it.
4. Peter said the same thing.
5. **1 Peter 4:10** Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.
6. How should Christians use their spiritual gifts?
7. **1 Corinthians 12:7** A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good
8. “For the common good” means that your spiritual gift was not given for your benefit, but for the benefit of the church. You should use your church to benefit and built up the church.
9. In his book on the Holy Spirit **John Stott** writes, “Some speak of them [spiritual gifts] as ‘love gifts,’ as if their main purpose is to enrich the recipient and we are to use them for own benefit. Others think of them as ‘worship gifts,’ as if their main purpose is the worship of God and their main sphere of operation is the conduct of public worship. But Scripture asserts that they are ‘service gifts,’ whose primary purpose is to edify or to build up the church... Thus spiritual gifts are given not to help, comfort and strengthen ourselves (the recipients) but others.” John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*
10. **Adrian Rogers** said, “Your spiritual gift was not given for your enjoyment, but for your employment.”
11. **David Jeremiah** said, “Gifts are not toys to play with, they are tools to build with.”
12. When it says “the common good,” it’s talking about the common good of the church, not society, not your job, not the community, not the school – the church. Spiritual gifts are given to believers to benefit the church.
13. The way the church grows and becomes healthy and effective is when each member puts their spiritual gift to use.

14. This is why we are always encouraging and inviting you to find a way to serve in the church. God has called you to it, gifted you for it, and the church needs it.
15. How can you discover your gift? God doesn't audibly tell you what your gift is. And scripture doesn't tell us how to discover our gifts. Therefore you'll never know objectively; you can only guess. The important thing is for you serve in the body of Christ in a way that you enjoy and that builds up the body. And to find your place, your gift, you just have to start serving in any and every way you can until you find "your" ministry.
16. Charles Swindoll told the story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to do and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody would do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.
17. If the church is going to be healthy and effective, then Christians need to get involved, employ their spiritual gifts, and serve.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. During the second world war, there was a statue that had been bombed in Germany. They were trying to repair it so that it could be put on display. As they were repairing it they couldn't find the hands. It was supposed to be a statue of Jesus with his arms outstretched and the caption reading, "Come unto me." They looked everywhere for the hands but couldn't find them. So, they decided to leave the arms off and they changed the caption from "come unto me" to "He has no hands but your hands."
2. Jesus is on mission in this world – to save a lost world, to love on people, and He has no hands but your hands. He has no method but the church.

3. The church is the body of Christ. You are a member of it. And God has given you a gift so that you can help to build up the church.
4. Today I encourage you to do three things:
 - i. Make the church a priority. It is Christ's priority. And you need it.
 - ii. If you haven't joined the church (formal membership), then sign up for the next Newcomer's Lunch.
 - iii. Find a place in the church to serve. We need you.