

1 Corinthians 12:21-27

Accountability & Discipline: Church Body

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Last week I introduced our new sermon series, *Accountability & Discipline*, and talked about why we hold each other accountable, even up to the point of church discipline. Sin is real. God is holy. And we need to take that seriously. Today I want to talk about another, very serious, part of church discipline—and that's the church body. To kick this very important discussion off I thought we should all stand up and participate in theologically rich song. Go ahead and hit play. Play Head Shoulders Knees & Toes (Speeding Up) by Super Simple Songs - Kids Songs (1:53).¹

Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes
And eyes and ears and mouth and nose
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes

Thanks for singing along! The Bible calls the church, a local church like us, a body. That's right. A living breathing body. So what part of the body are you?

- Are you a head? Are you good at thinking critically, planning, offering words of wisdom?
- Are you shoulders? Are you a work-horse? Just point me in the right direction and I'll do it?
- Are you knees? You're a prayer warrior. You fight the spiritual battle. Will you pray for us?
- Are you toes? Your feet take the gospel message wherever Jesus wants it to go. Are you toes?

Maybe you're something I didn't mention? You are hands? Or the church belly-button? Instead of being the church sexton you're the church belly button! I want that job. To provide smelly lint wherever you go! Where do you fit into the church body? Do you feel like you're an important member of the body? You need to know that...

You matter to the church body.

If you know Jesus, and you come regularly, you are an important member of Christ's body.

1 Corinthians 12:21-27 (ESV)

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,

Whether you function in an obviously important role, you're the eyes of the body, or a less obviously important role, you're the finger nails of the church, you matter. We all have something to give.

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,

We care about everyone in our church. It doesn't matter if you're the pastor, the preacher, the worship team leader, the treasurer, or a greeter. There is honor in what God calls us to.

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.

When we see ourselves as one cohesive church body, it brings unity to our church and ministry. We show our unity by caring for each other, even when it's difficult. We show our unity by suffering together. When one experiences loss, a parent dies, a miscarriage, we all suffer. And when one is honored, when one does well at work, or gets recognition for their service, we all rejoice.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

We are the church body. We are a family. Do you know you matter? Do you know how important you are to this church? You don't need to be the preacher or on the worship team to matter.

This illustration is one of my favorites. Did you know that Redwood trees are some of the oldest and tallest trees on earth? Some of them were here when Jesus was born, 2,000 years old. They grow 200 to 240 feet tall and 10-15 feet wide, with the tallest of them all, Hyperion, coming in at 379.7 feet tall. The Statue of Liberty is only 305 feet tall. Did you know "their roots grow horizontally instead of vertically and intertwine with one another"? A 300 foot tree will only have roots that only go down 6-12 feet but go outward several hundred feet wrapping around other roots and other redwoods. "Even if a tree has been logged or fallen, its root system is still alive and it will keep supporting the other trees."

That's what the church body is like. We're like trees that hold each other up. We're interconnected. It's what allows us to grow and mature in the Lord and hold each other up, even when the winds blow. It lets us live a lot longer, eternally long. Each tree matters in a Redwood forest. Just like one part of the body supplies oxygen and life to other parts of the body, the heart to the fingers, so we help give life to each other. *Each of you matter to the church body. You are an important part of our church community.*

But are you living like a Redwood? Are you identifying with the church body? There are at least...

Three ways we identify with the church body:

When we identify with something, we align our lives, actions, beliefs with it. We say I belong to it and it belongs to me. So what's the first way we identify with the church body?

1) Recognize Jesus as your head.

In Paul's writings he talks about how Christ is the head of the church.

Ephesians 5:23b (ESV)

...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Jesus is providing leadership and authority to every church and every believer on this globe. It's not any other person that actually fills the role of head in the church, not your pastor or favorite teacher—only Christ. He saves us and leads our churches. Do you believe that? Is he your Savior, your leader, the head of your life, of our church?

To try and be religious or spiritual or know God without first knowing Christ just doesn't work. It's like you become the headless horseman, riding around knocking into people because you can't see where you're going. When we don't seek Christ's leadership in the church through prayer, and just do what seems best to us, that's the same thing. *The first way we identify with the church body is to recognize Jesus as our head.*

2) Commit to the church body.

To become a member of a church means to intentionally commit yourself to the leadership of the church Elders and to be accountable to your brothers and sisters in Christ. This commitment typically comes in the form of making a covenant, a promise. At Cornerstone we call it a membership covenant.

Part of me really doesn't even like that we have to have a thing like formal church membership. If you believe in Jesus, have been baptized, are coming faithfully, serving, giving of your finances, taking communion, aren't you a member of the body? Yes, I think you are. But... you can also walk away at any time. In formal church membership we make an intentional commitment to not walk away, but to work it out, to be accountable and hold each other accountable, to keep going forward.

Part of being a church member is intentionally submitting to the authority God has placed in the church. So if you truly believe God has called your pastor and elders to be your pastor and leaders, one of the ways you can demonstrate your submission to them, and through them to Christ, is to become a member. We are asking every regular attender to become a member. Will you let us lead you in this way?

Maybe you're not there yet. You need time to process. The Elders and I recently read the book *I Am a Church Member* by Thom S. Rainer. It's not a theological argument for why you should become a member. Rather, it simply describes how to be a good member. We're asking everyone to take home this book and read it. It's only 79 pages! We're adding it to our membership class going forward, so if you've already been through the class, please read it (copies in foyer). *The first two ways we identify with the church body is by recognizing Jesus as our head and by committing to the church body. Third...*

3) Love the church.

Revelation describes the church, our broken and insufficient group of people, as the bride of Christ. Once again, Paul in Ephesians describes the church as a beautiful bride.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)

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.

The image we get is of Jesus washing and sanctifying his church with the word of God, cleansing us and making us whole again, repairing our lives, restoring us to right relationship with him. Then there's a wedding celebration where we are presented in splendor, white gown flowing, perfectly beautiful. Revelation, the last book in the Bible shows us a beautiful photograph of the church on her wedding day.

Revelation 19:7-8 (ESV)

7 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.

If the church is the bride of Christ, we're to embrace her, love her, dedicate our lives to serving and caring for her. But that gets messy real quick because the church isn't a single person, but a whole bunch of people,

all of us, and we have very messy lives. We hurt each other, and it's tempting to run away. But we can't walk away from the church and do Christianity on our own. How easy is it to stay best friends with a guy once you've told him his bride is ugly and you don't like her?

Your friendship wouldn't last long. But we do something similar when we stop attending church and just do Christianity on our own. We reject the bride, and try to have a relationship with the groom, but that's just not how it works. That's why it's so important to be a part of a church community, love it, serve it, get to know the people, suffer with it, rejoice with it, be a shoulder, knees, or toes. *We identify with the church body by: 1) recognizing Jesus as our head; 2) committing to the church body; and 3) loving the church.*

You matter to the church body. But maybe you're wondering, "How does this tie into accountability and discipline?" We've already heard some of it. Accountability and church discipline is primarily for the members and by the members. It doesn't mean if you sin and aren't a member you're off the hook; it's just here we have a clear, Biblical and legal way to gently correct sin among our church body.

When the body gets sick, we need each other and we need Christ.

I said something very similar last week. We need help for our Christian walk. Sometimes I get caught in sin, which makes me spiritually sick. If I continue in unrepentant sin, I become so spiritually sick it could lead to my spiritual death. We need someone to help us.

That's why God gives us a church family to help us along the way. The Christian journey is like a long hard hike, like walking the Appalachian trail. We need hiking buddies for the journey. A gym buddy told me they were hiking a stretch of the Appalachian trail and they met two hikers, a man and a woman, who were vegan, and hadn't packed enough food. About 50% of their diet was coming from foraging mushrooms and berries along the trail. They were thin as a rail. When they got to the AMC hut, they'd missed its closing by half an hour. They were devastated. I guess they were going to buy food there but couldn't.

Sometimes we don't prepare well for the Christian journey. We don't pack enough spiritual sustenance. And then we get ourselves in a bind and because of one decision leading to another we are foraging for the spiritual scraps in the bushes and underbrush. We're off the trail, we're starving, and we just need some help. I think the Lord graciously sent my friend and her friends to those two hikers as they had vegan food in their backpacks and were able to help them. They didn't starve to death, at least not yet. We need each other. That's why Jesus gave us the church. That's why he gave us accountability and discipline. And that's why we have a thing called membership.

And here we are, starving in our sin and brokenness, and Jesus comes to rescue us. He didn't come to save "the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17b ESV). Jesus "forgives all your inequity" and "heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:3 ESV). "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden," Jesus says, "and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28 ESV). Jesus can heal all of our church body because he laid down his holy body willingly on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, not just my sins, our sins. Then God raised him up so whosoever repents and believes in him receives eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus laid down his head, shoulders, knees, and toes, so that we can be a part of the church body. *You matter to the church body.*

Ephesians 6:24 (ESV)

24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the church body?
2. What does it mean to be part of the body?
3. How can you identify more with your church?
4. What is church membership? What do you think of it?
5. Why did you become a member already or what has prevented you from becoming a member in the past? Is anything changing?
6. How can our church body help us when we're spiritually sick?
7. Why can Jesus heal us from our sins?

¹ Head Shoulders Knees & Toes (Speeding Up) | Nursery Rhyme | Super Simple Songs. Published July 15, 2015. Accessed September 15, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX8HmogNyCY>