TRINITY CHURCH OF PORTLAND

Life in the Garden

Born Again, Baptized, Belonging, and The Lord's Table



"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."

GENESIS 2:15

A THEOLOGY CLASS · NOVEMBER 2026

WELCOME

Before You Begin

This booklet is for anyone who picks it up. Maybe you have been at Trinity for years. Maybe this is your first Sunday. Maybe you are not sure what you believe about any of this yet. You are welcome here.

These pages walk through four things the Bible ties together: how a person becomes a Christian, how a Christian is baptized, how a Christian belongs to a church, and how a church is fed at the Lord's Table. Most churches teach these as four separate subjects. Scripture tells them as one story. It is the story of a garden, a gardener who failed, and a better Gardener who did not.

We have tried to put the Bible in front of you on every page. Read the passages slowly. Look them up in your own Bible. Write in the margins. Bring your questions to any of our pastors.

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INTRODUCTION

A People with a Job

What is the church, and what do we do there?

Ask most people what church is and they will describe a place. A building on a corner. An event on Sunday morning. A community of people who like each other. The Bible describes something deeper. The church is a people. A particular people, placed together by God, with a particular job to do.

To understand that job, we have to go back to the very beginning. To a man in a garden.

The first job

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
> GENESIS 1:27–28

> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
> GENESIS 2:15

God did not place Adam in Eden simply to enjoy it, though he certainly did. Like a good father, God gave him work. Many biblical theologians call Adam the priest-king of the garden. His job description had three parts.

GLORIFY	GROW	GUARD
Bear God's image and reflect his glory to a watching world. Gen 1:27; Ps 8.	Be fruitful, fill the garden, and push its borders out into the wild. Gen 1:28; 2:15, "work it."	Watch over a holy place where God walked with his people. Keep out what defiles. Gen 2:15, "keep it"; 3:8.

The failure

Adam failed. He disobeyed the one command God gave him (Gen 2:16–17). The serpent got into the garden on Adam's watch. And the guard was replaced.

> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.
> GENESIS 3:24

Even then, God made a promise. A son of the woman would come and crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). So the story moves forward through a line of Adam-like men. Noah. Abraham. Israel. David. Each one is commissioned. Each one is given a covenant. Each one fails. The Old Testament leaves us longing for a better Adam, a more faithful Israel, and a greater David.

The better Adam

That longing is answered in Jesus Christ. He is the perfect priest-king. He kept the garden of his Father's will without a single failure. He crushed the serpent by being crushed in our place. He rose from the dead and made a new covenant, one that does not stop at the outside of a person.

> I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
> JEREMIAH 31:33

Now Jesus gives the old job back to his people. In him, the church is commissioned to glorify, grow, and guard. The church is the garden in this age, and its members are the gardeners, until the day God makes the whole world a garden again.

> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.
> REVELATION 22:3

The rest of this booklet asks four questions of that story. Who can live in the garden? How do they come in? What do they do once they are inside? And how are they fed until the end?

QUESTION	ANSWER	GARDEN PICTURE
Who can live here?	Born Again	New residents
How do they come in?	Baptized	The front door
What do they do?	Belonging	The gardeners
How are they fed?	The Lord's Table	The family meal

PART ONE

Born Again: How the Dead Come Alive

Who can live in the garden?

The problem is worse than we think

Everyone can see that the world is broken. The Bible says the problem is worse than broken. Humanity is dead.

> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.
>
> EPHESIANS 2:1–2

Dead people do not help themselves. They do not choose. They do not reach. If anyone is going to live in God's garden again, God himself will have to give life.

You must be born again

One night a respected teacher named Nicodemus came to Jesus. He was moral, religious, and learned. Jesus told him he needed to start over completely.

> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
>
> JOHN 3:3–8

Being born is something that happens to you. No one has ever contributed to their own birth. So it is with the new birth. Theologians call it *regeneration*: God giving spiritual life to a person who is spiritually dead.

Jesus expected Nicodemus to recognize this. The prophets had promised it for centuries.

> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.
>
> EZEKIEL 36:25–27

> *"They must be born of the Spirit working on their inward nature, as water works on the material body."*
>
> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, vol. 1 (Evangelical Press, 2024), on John 3:5.

Notice the pattern that runs all the way back to Eden. In Genesis, God formed Adam from dust and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen 2:7). In Ezekiel, God speaks to a valley of dry bones and says, "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (Ezek 37:5). Life in God's garden has always been a gift before it is a task.

God does it

> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.
>
> EPHESIANS 2:4–5

> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
>
> EPHESIANS 2:8–10

Read those words again. *But God. Made us alive. Not your own doing.* Regeneration is God's work from start to finish. And notice where Paul lands: we are re-created "for good works." New life comes with a job. The garden commission comes back.

Then we respond

The new birth does not leave a person passive forever. The God who gives life also calls for a response.

> The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.
>
> MARK 1:15

Repentance is turning. It is turning away from sin and returning to the God we were made to love. Faith is trusting. It is resting the whole weight of our lives on Jesus Christ and what he has done. Both are commanded. Both are gifts. And both flow out of the new birth, not the other way around.

> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.
> **1 JOHN 5:1**

A decision is real, and it matters. But a decision is the fruit, not the root. The root is a new heart that God has given.

How can we tell?

No one sees the Spirit at work, any more than anyone sees the wind. But everyone can see what the wind does.

> *"[W]hen we see the resulting fruit of a manifest change of heart and life, we have no right to question the reality of the Spirit's operations."*
>
> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, vol. 1, on John 3:8.

The fruit looks like this. A new trust in Christ. A new love for God's Word. A new desire to pray and to be with God's people. A new sorrow over sin. A new longing to tell others about Jesus. Not perfection, but direction.

Christians still sin, and they keep confessing it (1 John 1:9). What they no longer do is make a practice of it (1 John 3:9).

WHAT TRINITY BELIEVES

TRINITY STATEMENT OF FAITH

"We believe the Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells the people of God, enabling them to live holy lives."

REVISED NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION (1853), OF GRACE IN REGENERATION

"We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life."

For further study: Deut 30:6; Ps 51:5, 10; Ezek 37:1–14; John 1:12–13; Rom 10:14–17; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:9–10; Titus 3:4–7; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3, 23.

PART TWO

Baptized: The Front Door

How do the living come in?

If God gives new life on the inside, how does anyone on the outside know it? How does a newly born Christian step into the visible family of God? Jesus answered that question himself.

Jesus commands it

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
> MATTHEW 28:18–20

This is the garden commission spoken again. Grow. Make disciples. Fill the earth. And the first step in the life of every new disciple is baptism. Jesus himself was baptized at the start of his ministry (Mark 1:9–11). He did not need to repent. He was identifying himself with the sinners he came to save. In baptism, we identify ourselves with him.

What baptism pictures

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
> ROMANS 6:3–4

> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
> COLOSSIANS 2:11–12

> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
> GALATIANS 3:27

Going under the water pictures burial with Christ. Coming up pictures resurrection with him. Baptism is a portrait of the gospel, painted on a person. It shows what has already happened on the inside: the old life is dead, and a new life has begun.

In the old covenant, God gave Israel the sign of circumcision. It marked out his people from the nations and guarded the borders of the community. Paul says that in Christ there is a deeper circumcision, "made without hands," a work God does on the heart. Baptism is the sign that marks the people who have received it.

Who should be baptized

In the New Testament, the order is always the same. People hear the gospel. They believe. Then they are baptized.

> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
> ACTS 2:38

> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
> ACTS 2:41

This fits the shape of the new covenant. In the old covenant, the sign was given to a mixed people, some who knew the Lord and some who did not. The new covenant promises something different: "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer 31:34). So the sign of the new covenant is given to those who credibly profess that they know him.

Baptism does not save

Baptism is commanded, and it is serious. But it is a sign, not the thing itself. The water does not give new birth. Peter makes this plain.

> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
> 1 PETER 3:21

When Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit fell on them while he was still speaking. Only afterward were they baptized (Acts 10:44–48). The Spirit came first. The water followed.

"Baptism does not save a person, but Jesus means for his saved individuals to publicly identify with him and his people. It's one piece of how his citizens become official. It's how they wave the flag."

Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Crossway, 2012), 89.

Why it is the front door

Baptism is not a private ceremony. Jesus gave it to his church to administer. When a church baptizes someone, it says publicly, in the name of Jesus, "We believe this person belongs to Christ." And the believer says, "I belong to Christ, and I belong with you."

> *"In baptism, a believer commits to God's people and God's people commit to that believer. ... Church membership is the house, and baptism is the front door."*
>
> Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism*, Church Basics (B&H, 2016), 67.

Adam was driven out of the garden. In Christ, buried and raised, the believer is brought back in. Baptism is the door he walks through.

WHAT TRINITY BELIEVES

TRINITY TEACHING POSITIONS, BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

"We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal."

REVISED NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION (1853), OF BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

"We believe that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit; to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, with its effect in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life; that it is prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord's Supper."

For further study: Gen 17:9–14; Matt 3:13–17; Acts 8:35–39; 16:14–15, 30–34; 1 Cor 10:1–4; 12:12–13; Eph 4:4–6.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Why We Baptize into Membership

Why not just baptize people and let them decide about church later?

This is the question that started this class, so it deserves a careful answer. Many of us grew up thinking of baptism as a private step between me and Jesus, and of church membership as an optional extra for the very committed. Scripture does not separate them that way. In the New Testament, no one is baptized into nothing. Every baptism is a baptism into a people.

Baptized and added

> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
> ACTS 2:41–42

Read the order slowly. They received the word. They were baptized. They were added. They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Table, and prayer. There is no gap between the water and the church. Baptism is how three thousand people went from being a crowd to being a congregation.

> 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.
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:13

The Spirit baptizes every believer into the body of Christ. Water baptism is the church's visible sign of that reality. So when a church baptizes someone, it is not only saying "this person belongs to Christ." It is saying "this person belongs to Christ's body, and so this person belongs with us."

> *"Baptism isn't just a prerequisite to church membership; normally, baptism begins church membership."*
>
> Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism*, 67.

A door into nothing is not a door

Remember the picture. Membership is the house. Baptism is the front door. A front door that opens onto an empty field is not really a front door. It is a frame standing alone in the grass. To baptize someone and then send them off with no church, no shepherds, and no

family would be to open a door into nothing.

"Under normal circumstances, baptism and church membership should be inseparable. Theologically, baptism confers church membership. So you shouldn't baptize people without bringing them into the church, and you should confer membership on all whom you baptize."

Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism*, 67.

Committed to discipleship

Look again at the Great Commission. Jesus did not say "baptize them and wish them well." He said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:19–20). Baptism is the first step of discipleship, not the last. And discipleship happens in a church, where the Word is preached, where shepherds keep watch, and where brothers and sisters speak the truth in love.

> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.
>
> COLOSSIANS 1:28

> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
>
> HEBREWS 10:24–25

When we baptize you into membership, we are promising to do this for you. To teach you. To pray for you. To encourage you. To walk with you for the long haul. And you are promising to do the same for us.

Baptized into discipline

There is one more thing baptism brings you into, and it may be the most surprising. When a church baptizes you, it publicly affirms that your profession of faith is real. A church cannot honestly make that affirmation and then refuse to keep watching over it. The same church that says "yes" in the waters takes responsibility to keep saying "yes" week after week, and to come after you if you ever begin to wander.

"No one should be baptized who is not intending to come under Jesus' authority by submitting to his church."

Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism*, 67.

That is not a threat. It is a gift. It means that if you are ever deceived by sin, you will not be left alone with it. We will explain why this is so beautiful in the pages that follow.

Why we walk through membership first

This is why, at Trinity, a believer who asks to be baptized also walks through the path to membership. We want you to know what you are stepping into, and we want the church to know who you are. Then we baptize you into the family, not into nothing.

> *"[A] church is justified in asking a new convert to work through the membership process before being baptized. This is not a probationary period. Instead, it simply ensures that they know what they're getting into and that the church knows who they are."*
>
> Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public*, 223.

> *"If you want to identify yourself with Christ's people and expect them to identify with you, you need to first identify yourself with Christ, which is the purpose of baptism."*
>
> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, 89.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Is membership required to be saved? No. Neither baptism nor membership saves anyone. Christ saves. Baptism and membership are how a saved person obeys Christ and is recognized as belonging to him.

What about the Ethiopian official in Acts 8? He was baptized on a desert road and went home to a land with no church yet (Acts 8:36–39). That is an exception for a place where no church exists. It is not a pattern for a city full of churches.

What if I was baptized as a believer somewhere else? Then you have already walked through the front door. The membership process at Trinity is how you come into this particular house.

TRINITY STATEMENT OF PRACTICES, MEMBERSHIP

Candidates are recommended for membership "on the basis of a credible profession of faith, a baptism upon that profession of faith, and confirmation of our Statement of Faith, Teaching Positions, and submission to the Membership Covenant."

PART THREE

Belonging: Gardeners in the Garden

What do the residents do once they are inside?

There is a difference between saying "I go to Trinity Church" and saying "I am a member of Trinity Church." The first describes a place you visit. The second describes a family you belong to and a job you have been given. The Bible knows nothing of a Christian who belongs to Christ but not to his people.

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.
> EPHESIANS 2:19

> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

"A Christian who doesn't belong to a local church is like a brick that jumped out of the wall, a hand that cut itself off from the body, a self-made orphan."

Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord's Supper*, Church Basics (B&H, 2016), 49.

A royal priesthood

Remember Adam's job. He was a priest-king in God's garden. Peter uses that same language for every Christian.

> 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.
> 1 PETER 2:9

Every member has the job. Not only the pastors. The pastors' work is to equip the members for theirs.

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
> EPHESIANS 4:11–12

GLORIFY	GROW	GUARD
Display the unity only the gospel can create, so the world sees what God is like. Eph 3:10; John 13:35.	Make disciples and share the gospel, so more people fill the garden and flourish. Matt 28:19; Eph 4:15–16.	Protect the gospel and watch over one another, so the garden stays holy. Gal 1:8; Heb 10:24–25.

The keys of the kingdom

To do that job, Jesus gave his church authority. He called it "the keys."

> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
> MATTHEW 16:15–19

Keys open and close doors. Jesus builds his church on Peter's confession and on those who make it. So the church uses the keys to recognize a true confession and the people who make it. The church does not make anyone a Christian. Only God does that. The church affirms, publicly and humbly, what God appears to have done.

"[W]hat makes people acceptable to a church is not their own moral purity, but Christ's."

Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, 89.

The back door

If the keys open the front door, they can also close it. When a member will not turn from sin, Jesus gives the church clear and patient steps (Matt 18:15–17). This is church discipline, and it is one of the most misunderstood and most beautiful things Jesus gave his church. It gets its own pages next.

Why the whole church decides

Jesus said "tell it to the church," not "tell it to the leaders." Paul wrote to the whole congregation in Corinth about removing an unrepentant member (1 Cor 5:4–5, 12) and later about restoring him by "the majority" (2 Cor 2:6). This is why Trinity is elder-led and congregational. The elders lead, teach, examine, and recommend. The members, together, affirm who belongs. And the members gladly follow leaders who "are keeping watch over your souls" (Heb 13:17).

HOW MEMBERSHIP WORKS AT TRINITY

Attend the membership class. Complete the application. Meet with one of the elders. Then the elders recommend you, and the voting members receive you by majority vote at a congregational meeting.

Membership rests on "a credible profession of faith, a baptism upon that profession of faith," agreement with our Statement of Faith and Teaching Positions, and submission to the Membership Covenant (Trinity Statement of Practices, Paragraph 1).

REVISED NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION (1853), OF A GOSPEL CHURCH

"This universal church is made visible in the local church, which is a congregation of baptized believers. The local church is associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observes ordinances of Christ (believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper); is governed by his Word; and exercises the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in it by the Scriptures and given by his Spirit."

TRINITY STATEMENT OF PRACTICES, CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

"The purpose of church discipline is to maintain unity of the church body, for the purity of the church and the glory of God, and restore each offending member to Christian fellowship." Any disciplined member, "upon confession of his or her sins, and upon giving satisfactory evidence of repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-11), may be restored to membership (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)."

For further study: Exod 19:5–6; Acts 2:42–47; 14:23; 15:22; Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 5:1–13; Gal 1:6–9; Eph 3:8–11; 4:1–16; Phil 3:20; James 5:19–20; Titus 3:10.

The Surprising Beauty of Church Discipline

Not cancel culture. Protection for the saints.

To many people, the words "church discipline" sound cold, controlling, even cruel. That is partly because some churches have practiced it that way. But when the Bible describes discipline, it does not sound cold at all. It sounds like a father. It sounds like a shepherd. It sounds like a friend who loves you too much to lie to you. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov 27:6).

It is how God loves his children

> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.
> HEBREWS 12:6

> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
> HEBREWS 12:10–11

A father who never corrects his children is not kind. He is absent. God disciplines because he is a good Father, and he has given his church a share in that loving work.

Most discipline is ordinary

When people hear "discipline," they picture a congregational vote. But almost all discipline is quieter than that. Every sermon that teaches you, every friend who encourages you, every brother who asks how you are really doing, is the church disciplining you, in the sense of shaping you as a disciple. Correction is only one small part of discipleship, and it is meant to happen in the most private way possible first. "Exhort one another every day," Hebrews says, "that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13).

It is pursuit, not punishment

Jesus' instructions on discipline begin with a story about a lost sheep.

> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.
>
> MATTHEW 18:12–14

> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
>
> MATTHEW 18:15–17

Notice the goal: "you have gained your brother." Every step is an attempt to win someone back. Privately first. Then with one or two others. Only after all of that does it come before the church. And even then, the person is treated "as a Gentile and a tax collector," the very kind of people Jesus spent his ministry pursuing.

It tells the truth when the truth is hard

The kindest thing you can do for someone walking toward a cliff is to tell them. When a professing Christian refuses to turn from sin, the church can no longer honestly affirm that their profession is real. To keep affirming it would be to give them false assurance. Removing them from membership and the Table tells them the truth, so that they might turn and be saved. Even then, Paul says, "Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Thess 3:15).

> [Y]ou are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:5

> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
>
> JAMES 5:19–20

Not cancel culture

Our culture knows how to cancel people. Cancel culture is public first and private never. It moves fast. It is run by strangers. It shames, discards, and offers no way back. Church discipline is the opposite at every point. It begins privately, between two people who know

each other. It moves slowly and patiently, step by step. It is carried out by brothers and sisters who love you and who will be with you at the end. And it always holds the door open for a homecoming.

Protection for the saints

Discipline protects the one who is wandering, by telling them the truth. It also protects everyone else. Paul warns that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6). Unaddressed sin spreads, and the weakest sheep are usually the first to be hurt. A church that will not guard its members leaves them exposed. And a church that looks no different from the world gives the world no reason to listen.

"Jesus intended our lives to back up our words. If our lives don't back up our words, the evangelistic task is injured."

Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4th ed. (Crossway), 159.

It aims at joy

The story of discipline in Corinth does not end with removal. It ends with a man restored, and with Paul urging the church to throw its arms open.

> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 2:6–8

This is the surprising beauty of church discipline. It is the shepherd carrying the sheep home on his shoulders. We have seen it happen in our own church: members who were lovingly removed, who later repented, and who were joyfully received back into our fellowship.

How it connects to everything else

Discipline is not a separate program. It is what membership means. The church that affirmed you in **baptism** keeps watching over that profession. The **membership** that welcomed you is the family that comes after you. And the **Lord's Table**, where the family eats together, is where that affirmation is renewed every week, and from which an unrepentant member is lovingly held back, always in hope of a homecoming.

For further study: Lev 19:17; Ps 141:5; Luke 15:1–32; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1–13; 2 Cor 7:8–11; Gal 6:1–2; 2 Thess 3:6–15; 1 Tim 5:19–20; Titus 3:10–11; Rev 3:19.

PART FOUR

The Lord's Table: The Family Meal

How are the residents fed until the end?

A meal lost, a meal promised

The Bible's story begins with a meal. "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden," God told Adam, with one exception (Gen 2:16–17). Adam ate what was forbidden, and he was barred from the tree of life. From that day on, the Bible keeps returning to meals in God's presence. The Passover lamb (Exod 12). Bread from heaven in the wilderness (Exod 16). A feast promised for all peoples on God's mountain (Isa 25:6–8). Every one of them points forward.

> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
> JOHN 6:35

On the night he was betrayed

> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
> 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26

The bread pictures his body, broken. The cup pictures his blood, poured out. On the night Jesus first gave this meal, it was dark and heavy. On this side of the resurrection, it is sober and vivid, and more than anything, it is a celebration.

Four directions at the Table

Each time we come to the Lord's Table, we look four ways.

We look back. We proclaim the Lord's death (1 Cor 11:26). We remember a finished work. We bring nothing to add to it.

We look up. We are fed by faith. The Table is more than a memory. It is a real participation in Christ.

> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.
> 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16–17

We look around. We are made one. The Table is a family meal, and it shows the world who the family is.

> *"[T]he Lord's Supper is a meal for the church. It makes the many members of the church into one body. … He needs to join the family before he sits down at the family table."*
>
> Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord's Supper*, 49.

We look ahead. We taste the feast that is coming.

> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.
> MATTHEW 26:29

> And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."
> REVELATION 19:9

Who comes to the Table

The Lord's Table is for those who belong to the Lord. That is why the New Testament calls for care.

> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.
> 1 CORINTHIANS 11:27–28

Self-examination is not a test of perfection. No one is worthy of this meal. The Table is for sinners who know it, who have trusted Christ, who have been baptized, and who come confessing and hungry. If you are not yet a Christian, we are glad you are here. Let the bread and the cup pass, and watch. Every time the church eats this meal, it is preaching the gospel to you.

At Trinity we come to the Lord's Table every week. Scripture gives no set frequency, and we have chosen to be fed often.

Back to the garden

The meal Adam forfeited, Christ gives back. The Lord's Table is not the tree of life. But it points to it, and it promises that the way is open again.

> Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.
> REVELATION 22:14

WHAT TRINITY BELIEVES

TRINITY STATEMENT OF FAITH, THE CHURCH

"We believe the Church is the covenant community called by God through Jesus Christ and signified by baptism and the Lord's Supper."

REVISED NEW HAMPSHIRE CONFESSION (1853), OF BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Baptism is prerequisite "to the Lord's Supper, in which the members of the church by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination."

For further study: Exod 12:1–14; 24:9–11; Ps 23:5; Isa 25:6–8; Matt 26:26–29; Luke 22:14–20; 24:30–35; John 6:32–58; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:17–34.

CONCLUSION

How It Fits Together

Four doctrines. One story. God makes the dead alive. He brings them in through the waters. He gives them a job in his garden. And he feeds them at his table until he makes all things new.

Distinct, so we do not confuse them

- **New birth** is God's inward work. It happens once, and only God does it.
- **Baptism** is an outward sign. It happens once, and the church administers it. It does not cause new birth.
- **Membership** is an ongoing covenant relationship. It does not save, but it is how the saved belong to one another.
- **The Lord's Table** is a repeated meal. It adds nothing to the cross, but it feeds us and makes us one.

Together, so we do not separate them

New birth leads to baptism. Baptism brings a believer into membership. Membership gathers at the Table. And discipline guards all three, so that the church can keep saying with honesty and joy, "This one belongs to Christ."

	WHAT GOD DOES	WHAT THE CHURCH DOES	PICTURE
Born Again	Makes the dead alive	Listens for a credible profession	New residents
Baptized	Unites the believer to Christ	Affirms and receives, once	The front door
Belonging	Gives the keys and the job	Gardens and guards together	The gardeners
The Lord's Table	Feeds his people by faith	Gathers, proclaims, examines, restores	The family meal

Notice the order. Everything God asks of us rests on what he has already done. You were made alive. You were received in his name. You belong to a body. You are fed at his table. So glorify him by reflecting his image together. Grow the garden through discipleship and evangelism. Guard it with love, patience, and a readiness both to open the door and to go after the one who wanders.

We are gardeners in this garden until God restores this world and makes it a garden again. The New Eden. "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5).

AN INVITATION

If You Are Not Yet a Christian

Maybe you have read this far and realized that you are still outside the garden. You are welcome here. You can listen, ask questions, and watch. But we want more for you than watching.

The Bible says your problem is not that you are a little off course. You are dead in sin, separated from the God who made you, and you cannot fix it yourself (Eph 2:1; Rom 3:23). That is the bad news.

Here is the good news. Jesus Christ, the better Adam, lived the life you could not live. He died the death you deserved. He rose from the grave to give new life to all who trust him.

> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

> Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
> ROMANS 10:9

Turn from your sin. Trust in Jesus. Come alive. And if something in you is stirring as you read these words, the Spirit may be opening your eyes. Do not ignore it.

Come and talk with one of our pastors after the service. We would love to open the Bible with you.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sources and Further Reading

TRINITY CHURCH DOCUMENTS

- Trinity Church Statement of Faith and Teaching Positions
- Revised New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1853), the confession held by Trinity's elders
- Trinity Church Statement of Practices, Paragraph 1: Membership; Church Discipline and Restoration

BOOKS QUOTED

- Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4th ed. (Crossway).
- Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (B&H Academic, 2015).
- Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism*, Church Basics (B&H, 2016).
- Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord's Supper*, Church Basics (B&H, 2016).
- Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Crossway, 2012).
- J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, vol. 1, modernised by Graham Hind and Mary Davis (Evangelical Press, 2024).

Going deeper: Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding the Congregation's Authority* (B&H, 2016); 9Marks, "12 Propositions," 9marks.org/propositions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Born Again

1. Read Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:5 side by side. What do they teach about who gives life?
2. Think about who you were before God made you alive. What changed first: what you believed, what you wanted, or how you lived?

Baptized

1. Read Romans 6:3–4 slowly. What does going under and coming up out of the water say about a Christian?
2. If you have been baptized, who was there? What were you saying to them, and what were they saying to you?
3. If you are a Christian and have not been baptized, what is holding you back? Talk with one of our pastors. We would love to help.

Belonging

1. Which part of the job comes easiest to you: glorify, grow, or guard? Which do you tend to avoid?
2. What would change if you thought of membership less as a list you are on and more as a job you have been given?

The Lord's Table

1. When you come to the Table, where does your mind usually go: back, up, around, or ahead? Which do you tend to miss?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:17. What does one loaf say about the people who eat it?

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

REVELATION 22:1–2

TRINITY CHURCH OF PORTLAND