

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Gracious Heavenly Father, your mercy to us is beyond our understanding, yet our need is beyond limits. We are just so absolutely dependent upon your mercy and grace to us. Forgive us, Father, when we think that we can achieve righteousness, rather than recognizing through faith we receive righteousness, through the person and work of Christ. Father, guide our minds today. Remove the thoughts that are hindering our understanding of your grace and mercy, and may we sit at your feet once again today and trust your Holy Spirit to fulfill his job description, and that is to call attention to the glorious person and work of Christ and to guide us into all truth, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. Let it be. Amen.

I want to thank Ted last week for his excellent leadership in giving us the Colossians 1 prayer. I know that many of you have the little card that he passed out. That's a great little thing to do and I appreciate Ted taking us through that. That's a wonderful way to pray for people. The prayers of Paul are outstanding, and in my opinion, that's the greatest one that we could ever pray for somebody. When somebody says pray for me, I would just encourage you to pray what Ted taught us last week in Colossians 1.

*Ted: I found out last week that Dick [UNCLEAR], that's his memory prayer. He's actually committed that to memory.*

Wonderful.

*Ted: So that's a big part of his...*

He has a world vision for that.

*Ted: He does.*

Wonderful. Alright. Okay, moving on. Let's...

*Ted: You're being affected by Sig.*

You should have lesson 13 in front of you, I trust. We're continuing our examination of the essential ingredients of a healthy church. A healthy church is really defined as one that is growing in grace. It's the difference between church growth and church expansion, which we will talk about in a couple of weeks. On handout 13, you'll just understand that the essential ingredients really are expository preaching—that is how we are taught. The second essential ingredient or indicator of a healthy church is biblical theology. That's what we are taught. And then a biblical gospel. That's God-centered, not a man-centered Gospel of the person and work of Christ.

Then we've been talking about some important issues. These are all important. I just think the first three...if the first three are lacking, then you'll notice the next seven or eight are going to be really misshaped, and they will not be applicational.

We move into some important issues which we've talked about, and that is a biblical understanding of conversion, that salvation is a work of grace, not of works. We understand that through our sermons, and that is to be saved. To the unsaved, Charles Spurgeon says one of the problems with the church is we spend less time feeding the sheep and more time entertaining the goats. Sometimes that's what we do in our sermons. We need to be feeding the sheep as opposed to entertaining the goats.

Then we talked about baptism, not to be done hastily. We talked about the Lord's Supper, that that is the most...experience of our personal fellowship with one another is the observation of the Lord's Supper and at the table of the Lord and how wonderful that is. That's probably the greatest height of our intimacy is when we come together as the family of God and participate in the Lord's table.

Today we're going to talk about membership—responsibility and accountability. Next week, Bishop Rogers is going to take us through a session on church discipline. The following week we'll come back and talk more about some church responsibilities. What is the role of church membership?

Today I would just want to introduce that to us a little bit and set us up for the next couple of weeks. We need to have a biblical understanding of evangelism. We've talked about that. Is it authentic or is it synthetic? We need to have an understanding of church leadership, which we've done. That's mature under shepherds. Who does God qualify as church leaders? We've gone through that. We've had a biblical view of membership, which we're going to touch on today, and then you'll see the next two sessions will be one on church discipline and then understanding the difference between church growth and church expansion.

John Calvin has a wonderful statement about understanding the local church, "Of course we believe," he says, "in the invisible church. Evident to God's eye alone, but we are told to accept the visible church and remain in communion with it." That's what we want to talk about today. In the New Testament, you'll not find people church hopping. You just don't see that happening in the New Testament. There are many reasons for that, but one of the great indications is in our culture today, most people church shop.

If I'm correct, I remember that there was a survey taken several years ago, probably five years ago, that in any one county in the 50 United States there was not one church increase in membership in any one county of the United States of America. What you had is you had church hopping, people going from church A to church B, but there was no increase in church membership in any one county in the whole US. That's tragic when you understand that. People say, "We're gaining in...we're worried about spiritual growth." Well if we talk about church growth, that's church death growing in grace. Church expansion is increased numbers and membership. There has not been one county in the US that increased in its membership several years ago. That's tragic as we take a look at the responsibility of membership.

You don't see in the New Testament people church hopping. That was because there was only one church in the community, first of all. The community only had one church. But we do find, however, that they were keeping rolls, or at least keeping numbers of the people who did attend. You'll notice in 1 Timothy 8, there's a list of widows. There was some tracking of membership or what we would call membership. There was some involvement in the local community church. There was only one church at the time. If they were taking a list of the widows so that the church could take care of them, it's obvious they were counting heads to find out who is on the widow's list.

Secondly, in 1 Corinthians 5, a man living in sin should be excluded from the assembly. Well one can't be excluded unless he's a member of the assembly. You can't exclude somebody who's not involved. So we do see some indications in the New Testament. While there may not be what we would call church membership as we know it and define it today, there was some indication that there was a roll taking, and they were aware of the people who were engaged in the fellowship of the worship of the church.

A healthy church is an assembly of people that increasingly reflects the character of God. That's a healthy church definition. It is constantly and continually reflecting the character of god as revealed in

the Scripture; not as revealed in society, but as revealed in the Scripture.

Our role should reflect that. Our roles in church membership should be modeled after the ones that are recorded in heaven. In other words, if your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, your name should be written in the church membership. That's who the members ought to be. It ought to be those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. You can read about that in Philippians 4:3 and Revelation 21.

Unfortunately, there are thousands, or at least hundreds of persons in the churches today who have been received by what we would call a transfer of letter without a sincere statement of their faith or of their commitment to the local church. Sometimes the churches are more interested in just gaining more people on their rolls than they are really examining the quality of the person who's being transferred into the church by a letter.

These ought never to be admitted to church membership without some examination of the depth of their faith. In other words, there's a difference between professing your faith and confessing your faith. The word "profess" means to make a statement about. You can just make a statement about your church life. I believe in Jesus. That's a statement. But a confession says this. A confession is the Greek word "homologeō" which means to say the same thing as what somebody else has already said. What is it that a person who says that have saving faith is saying? They're not making a statement about Christ; they're saying that, "I agree with everything that has been said about the person and work of Christ that somebody else has already said as defined in the Scripture."

There's a difference between professing one's faith and confessing one's faith. Do you see the difference? One is a statement of and the other one is an agreement of. When we take people into church membership, we need to take a look at their confession, not their profession. There's a difference.

I remember when I was on the staff of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Everybody always used to get excited when somebody gave some indication that they were a pro athlete and they had saving faith. Everybody got all excited when so and so crossed himself after a touchdown or whatever he did, or gave some indication he's a Christian. People got all excited, "Oh, he's a Christian."

People used to ask me, "Is so and so a Christian?" I really thought about this answer because it's not my role to evaluate or judge someone, so my response was generally this, "He professes Christ, but I don't know if he confesses Christ." They said, "What does that mean?" So I explained it. I said, "He said something about his faith in Christ, but I don't know if he agrees with what the Scripture says. I don't know that, so he professes Christ, but I don't know if he confesses Christ." There's a difference, folks. There's a difference in understanding what one's profession of faith is and what one's confession of faith is.

Here's a statement. I did some research. It came from a pastor who is talking about church membership. He says, "These ought never to have been admitted to the church membership without an examination of their confession, not just accepting their profession. It is a scandal and a great weakness to the local church when we accept people based on their profession and not their confession. For such persons and for the churches that permit a church membership that has become a partial fulfillment of Malachi 2:1-2, which says, 'And now this admonition is for you, oh priests. If you do not listen and if you do not set your heart to honor my name, says the Lord Almighty, I will send a curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them because you have not set your heart to honor me.'"

This Puritan pastor would go on to say, "In such cases, membership of the church of Jesus Christ is a curse, because what we have done is we've accepted people under the moniker of being committed to

the local church when we've just looked at their profession and not really examined their confession. It's already become a curse under which many a church and many a denomination are laboring intensely today."

So really what I'm saying is this. What we say about church membership—and we're going to get into detail on this—there are four kinds of memberships in a church. First of all, there are those that are tired. {LAUGHTER} Tired. There are some that are tireless, that are really workers. There are some that are tiresome. {LAUGHTER} And there are some that are retired. The four types of church membership we have, really, are tired, tiresome, retired and tireless. We need to be tireless. Unfortunately, you'll notice that three out of the four kinds have nothing to do with other than just being there. Tired, tireless, tiresome and retired. That's our church membership rolls. It's because we don't take church membership that seriously.

What are some of the responsibilities of church membership? Let me just list a few for you. First of all, it's a commitment to worshipping together. Take a look at Hebrews 10:23-28. Hebrews gives us some wonderful insights about our accountability and responsibility of church membership. Hebrews 10:23-28, <sup>23</sup>"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope." Now notice the word "confession." That means you're agreeing with the source of your hope, which somebody else has already defined for you. You don't define the source of your hope. You agree with what somebody else has already said your hope is. Our hope is found in a person, not in circumstances or events. Christ is a person. Our hope is a person. We find hope in a person.

<sup>23</sup>"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup>and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup>not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. <sup>26</sup>For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup>but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Basically what we're saying here is there is a degree that we need to come together for church worship. Do you know what your first responsibility of church membership is? Show up. That's it. That's your number one responsibility. If you say that you're a member of a church, your first responsibility is when the church's doors are open, you are there. That's your responsibility, because you're saying this is part of my commitment to the person and work of Christ, this is part of my commitment to the body of Christ, and that means your number one responsibility is when the doors of the church are open and you're having a worship service, your and my responsibility is to show up and be there.

There are other things we need to do after we show up. But first of all, let's get to the very basics. The basic rule of church membership is be there. Show up. Come to church. That's what the Scripture teaches us. There's a commitment to worshipping together.

Remember the word "worship" means to kiss toward. It means to give a blessing. How many times have you heard somebody say, "Well I'm not going back to that church because I didn't receive a blessing." Well guess what? You weren't supposed to receive one. You were supposed to go give one. That's what worship is. Worship is not a noun. It's a verb. Worship is something that you do. You go to church, not to get your batteries recharged. That's the difference between the Sabbath, which is at the end of the week, and the Lord's Day, which is the first of the week.

You see, we go on the first of the week to say thank you for letting me survive the past six days. Now give me the grace so that I can have energy to survive the next six days. You and I go to worship on the

Lord's Day to say thank you. It's to go give a blessing for the benefits that we've received in the previous week. We start off that week with gratitude.

In the old covenant, it was the Sabbath. You went there to rest. We have rested in our salvation because it's no longer of works, so our whole motive to go to church is to give a blessing. And guess what happens when you give a blessing? You get one. You get one. But your motive is not to go get a blessing. My motive is how can I go give a blessing the Lord today?

That means this, brothers, that you and I are responsible for our own worship. You can't delegate that to a worship team or to the pastor or to the musicians or whoever is up there leading the worship. It's your responsibility and mine to take care of your own worship. That's your responsibility. You do that because you're grateful; a sense of gratitude. You go with the idea of, "Lord, how can I go give you a blessing today? That's why I'm going to church."

Now granted, we pastors and musicians, we can facilitate that and make that easier on you than others can, so it's not a responsibility to be sloppy about that. All I'm trying to say is who are the worshippers? Who's the worship team? The congregation, not the people up front. We call them a worship team. They're not a worship team, they're musicians. They may be facilitating our worship, but who's the team of worshippers? It's the congregation. You see, that's what we need to understand about our confessing church membership when we go get involved. So we go to give a blessing.

We have a warped understanding of what worship is.

***Jay:** I just have a question regarding...you had said about showing up. Just recently, I've kind of been recognizing that in church, when I come to worship the Lord, the people that I care about are not showing up, so let's just say they're not showing up on a regular basis. How do we, as believers, encourage them to come, because it's so easy for them to be defensive and who are you to look at me and notice that I'm not there. I just wanted just to touch on that because it's something I've been recognizing just in my heart, not having the ability to come to them in a way that's loving to say that I love you, I want you to be in church, and they're not there.*

You just said it. You just did it. I love you. I'm caring for you, and I want you to be there. You just said it. So well done. You answered your own question. The issue is, first of all, we need to hear that from the pulpit. That's where it starts. Guys, everything starts in the pulpit. You can't expect the congregation to do anything that they haven't heard of from the pulpit. That's why our pulpits are a disaster as it relates to church membership, because we talk more about stewardship than we do about responsibilities of membership. You see, stewardship is a result of. It's not the center focus of membership. It's a consequence. So we need to start from the pulpit talking about church membership and the responsibility. The pastor needs to say, "Get your butt in church. You need to be here. The doors are open. I want to see you next week." And then, you lovingly can make up for all the damage you just did. {LAUGHTER}

But no, seriously, I don't mean to make light of it. Brothers, you've got to realize this. Everything starts in the pulpit—everything—because that's where you start teaching the Scripture. Everyone needs to hear the same message, because the Holy Spirit will apply that differently to the person's need who, we as a pastor and the teacher, don't know what those needs are. You're trusting the Holy Spirit to apply that to that individual person's need because he knows what that is. He's the one who has the responsibility of guiding us into all truth. Our responsibility is to proclaim the truth. We can't guide people to it; with can proclaim it and trust the Holy Spirit to do this. It starts in the church.

I would say if you're concerned, go to your pastor and say, "Would you remind us to show up," and then

you get together and just call people on the phone like you did, and just tell them lovingly, “I care for you. I’m concerned for you. I love you as a brother and sister in Christ. I miss you in church. I’d like to have you be there. Can I come and pick up?” Whatever you want to do. Trust the Holy Spirit to do that. Make sure you have the right spirit because it’s got to be done with grace and truth. But I think, Jay, you answered your own question just in the last statement.

**Audience Member:** *When you were giving a definition of worship, it refers back to your initial statements about church hopping. That’s why there is church hopping because they’re not going with the right...people aren’t going with the right motive of blessing and seeking on an individual basis, and they’re looking to be blessed somehow.*

That’s correct. That’s why people hop is because, “We didn’t get a blessing. We’ll go to another church that gives us one,” or whatever they’re looking for. That’s why from the pulpit, we need to teach the significance of church membership and its responsibilities.

**Sig:** *I’ve heard other ministers say that you need to be in a church where you’re being fed. Would you distinguish that differently from getting a blessing? Being taught? Being lead?*

**Audience Member:** *Jesus said that, “Feed my sheep and feed my lambs.” Right?*

I’m going to get into that when we take a look at a passage, Ephesians 4:11-17, so Sig, if you could hold onto that. There’s a difference. You know, we have a responsibility to mature ourselves; to place ourselves in a position to gain maturity. That’s the whole purpose of the church. It’s not conversion, its maturity. I’m going to go into that in greater depth. We have to grow in grace. That’s why we need to understand the difference between church growth and church expansion. Church growth we often use the moniker to say we need more membership. That’s church expansion. Church growth is becoming more mature. It’s in our becoming more mature that we receive the greatest blessings. The degree of which we gain maturity will be the degree to which we experience and feel blessings.

**Don:** *Yes, again, you did cover it well, but when you were talking before about that you have to prepare yourself for worship and to, what did you say, be your own worshiper? I think, though, also that is the responsibility...a good church will see to it that their members are growing in grace, and in a worship service does not have good preaching, if they’re music is, if they’re entertainment focused or whatever, it’s going to be very hard for a person to grow in grace and to worship properly.*

Amen to that.

**Tom:** *Isn’t it also a responsibility to go and exercise your gifts?*

Well, we’ll get into that. Remember I just touched on the first one, and that was to show up. What you do after that, there’s a whole bunch of things we do. The first thing is just be there. Just to show up.

Go back to your notes again. Don’s got a very critical point, that we need to understand this—we, individually, have the responsibility to take the responsibility for our own worship. We, pastors and teachers, have a responsibility to create an environment where that worship can be facilitated easily and where it can be done graciously and where you will grow in grace. That’s why the first three essential ingredients are expository preaching, biblical theology and a biblical gospel. When those three things are not paramount in the church, is the focal point of the church, you’re going to have a bad worship service, because it’s likely to fall into entertainment. People will not grow in grace. That’s why I list those as the first three essential ones because if those three are missing, everything else is affected.

Church membership is affected when those three things are not in place. When you do not have expository preaching, when you do not have biblical theology, and when you do not have a biblical gospel because people will not be growing in grace. They will not be maturing. That then makes it difficult for members to want to come back.

**Ted:** *Although I love, I mean, this is, the Holy Ghost is hitting homeruns today. God-centered versus man-centered preaching—I don't know if there's a church, an evangelical church would say they're not God centered. That pastor would say, "Of course I'm God-centered in my preaching." But if I were to sit there, I would say, "Wait. There's way too much emphasis on do it yourself, how to do things." It just, it seems to have a lot to do with me versus the Lord. I think there's not a pastor would say, "Oh yes, I'm teaching a man-centered Gospel." Maybe if you could talk about that, marks of that versus...*

Well, that's a good question. That's going to be something that everybody...it's going to be relative, because everybody evaluates it differently. You'll know when you're sitting under expository preaching. You'll know that because that is how you are taught. You'll know that when you're sitting under biblical theological teaching that is very Christocentric; it is Christ centered. You see, the real test would be this. If you're wanting something that is really a litmus test is this. Is the message always Christocentric? Is it always about the person and work of Christ? You teach the Old Testament, you're teaching about the Christocentric, Christological emphasis of Christ in the Old Testament. You see, that's the real test. I would say this. If you're looking for one barometer, one little litmus test, is the message Christocentric? Do you always hear something about the person and work of Christ? That's the starting point I would suggest, Ted.

**Ted:** *Thank you.*

**Audience Member:** *That's one of the problems, again, with maturity. If you're not mature, you don't know what food is.*

That's correct.

**Audience Member:** *So you'll buy whatever they're selling because, hey, he went to seminary; he must know.*

That's a good point. That's why you have to understand the difficulty the pastor/teacher has. It is his responsibility to preach to the sheep and to the goats. You have to do...every message is evangelical. Every message has got to be evangelical. In other words, you're making application. That doesn't mean you're giving an altar call. I don't mean that. What I'm saying is you're driving home the Christocentric message to the believer about the person and work of Christ and justification by faith alone that produces maturity to the person who's not in Christ. You're developing the Holy Spirit's emphasis on the conviction and the conversion and the convincing of their sinfulness. You've got to have...that message has got to cover both sides. You've got to be creating maturity in one group and you're developing conviction and conversion in another group. That doesn't mean that you have altar calls. That's not what I'm saying. The difficulty...and that's why it's so important that you pray for your pastor's teaching and his preaching.

Another thing. Those of you who are involved in church leadership. How many hours do you let your pastor study? I was leading a group of pastors this weekend and one of the things I asked them...we're going to do a study on developing effective church leaders this weekend at a conference I'm leading in West Virginia, and I asked them this, "How many hours does your congregation permit you to study to prepare for a sermon?" Do you know what the average time was? Two and a half hours...per week. Two and a half hours—that's what the trustees, the deacons, the elders permit their pastor to do because he's

doing so many other things—hospital visits, all this other stuff, budgeting, all those other things. What’s the role of the pastor/teacher? It is to proclaim truth. If you’re involved in church leadership, create an environment where your pastor has the time to study so that he can be preaching biblical theology and the messages will be Christocentric. Two and a half hours is what they allocate?

Now in my churches, the two that I had the privilege of pastoring, before I ever accepted the call, I said, “I need a minimum of 30 hours a week. You can’t give me that I’m not your guy. For me, it’s one hour per minute. If you want me to do a 30-minute sermon, you’ve got to give me 30 hours. If you want a 45-minute, you need to give me 45 hours. Roughly, it’s going to take me, to do it well, so that I can be preaching biblical theology, a Christocentric message, I need an hour per minute.” That’s what you have to do when you’re an expository preacher. You just can’t pull something out of Reader’s Digest and say, “Oh Lord, bless it.” Studying is really hard. Creating a sermon is really hard. You can’t take that easily. You can’t take that flippantly.

If you’re involved in church leadership, do something to put your pastor in a position where he has enough time to study so that he can give you a good Christocentric message. You see, it all starts in the pulpit. Unfortunately, what we’ve done is we’ve created an environment where the pastor/teacher is now an administrator as opposed to a proclaimer. Now that’s a responsibility of church membership. If you’re really serious about being a good church member, create an environment where your pastor can fulfill his job description by giving him the ample time that he needs to study so that he can preach.

First of all, there’s this whole issue of a commitment to effective biblical worship. Next there’s a commitment to obey church elders and to obey church leaders. Look at Hebrews 13. We’ve talked about this as we looked at qualified church membership, as looked at qualified church leaders. Hebrews 13:17. Now here’s a responsibility you have. <sup>17</sup>“Obey your leaders and submit to them.” First of all, show up. Secondly obey your leaders. “For they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Sometimes people ask me, “Should I join this church?” You know what one of the first questions is? “Can you obey their elders?” “What’s that have to do with it?” “That’s one of your responsibilities. You have to obey the leadership. What do you know about the leadership? What do they teach? What are their doctrines? What is their confession of faith? Do you know what their direction of ministry is? What are their priorities? Have you asked those questions? You need to go ask the church leaders that, because your responsibility, once you say, “I’m going to align myself with this church body as an expression of my love for the kingdom of God and the joy of serving Christ,” the moment you say that, one of your responsibilities is, “I’ve got to follow those guys.”

The real issue for us, as we’ve been talking about it in recent weeks, is are we the kind of men that people will want to follow? You see, why is that leaders have people follow them? You see, there’s no leadership without followership. That’s what we’re going to talk about this weekend. Why is it somebody would want to follow you as a church leader? Has God qualified you? That’s why we went through the 28 qualifications of an elder.

You see, God qualifies those people because inherent in that qualification is the motivation for people to want to follow them, because they’ve been qualified. Not because they’ve been selected or voted into office. It’s because they’ve been qualified by the Holy Spirit, and the natural consequence of qualified church leaders is people will want to follow them because that’s their responsibility. You see, God never requires of us something he doesn’t equip us to do beforehand. One of the things he expects of you as a church member is to follow. How is he going to qualify you to follow? He’s going to qualify leaders who will develop in you the spirit and the desire to want to follow. That’s why church leadership is so critical for the health of the church.



A church can only go as far, brothers, as church leaders will take it. A church can only go as far as its leadership takes it. If you're looking at joining a church, go talk to the elders. Talk to the pastor. Find out what they believe. Are they teaching the doctrines of grace? What type of sermons are they preaching? Ask those questions. That's a responsibility you have, because once you say yes, your responsibilities are to show up and obey the leaders. Take that seriously. Take that seriously.

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR] question obeying leaders. Most people don't, most leaders in the churches are now elders are people that are just willing to serve [UNCLEAR] ones willing to show up, so a lot of times their theology is not the most sound, so you have a number of different varying...[UNCLEAR] ...any suggestion how to help them draw into unity on that or is that strictly from the pastor?*

It starts in the pulpit. Every question you're going to ask me, I'm going to say it starts in the pulpit. That's what the pastor's got to teach. He's got to teach qualified church membership. That's why before you start looking at who are the leaders, you need to understand how has God qualified you, so that you can recognize them. It starts in the pulpit. The pastor has to teach this is what church leadership is biblically. Remember our definition is demonstrating the character of God as revealed in the Scripture. So it starts in the pulpit. The best way to have unified leadership is for the pastor to teach what are the qualifications of biblical church leadership, "Let's see, has God qualified anybody in our membership to do that? If so, let's resurrect them, let's put them out, hold them up front, and the rest of you obey." It's got to start with the pulpit.

You've got to teach it. You don't bring about change in a church unless you've taught from the pulpit first. You understand that? You never bring about change in the church until you've taught it biblically from the pulpit first, because then you're giving people a reason to respond. Now you can say, "We're going to apply what we have just learned over the past nine weeks," whatever that series might be, "Here is the application of what we're going to do. We're going to be an aggressive responder to what the Holy Spirit has taught us." You never go in and say, "We're going to change this and then try to teach on it." You see, information beforehand is a reason. Information afterward is an excuse and nobody like excuses. If you don't teach it first, it's an excuse. If you teach it first, and then apply it, it's a reason. People are much more likely to want to follow you when you give them a reason than they will want to follow you if you give them an excuse. Everything starts in the pulpit.

Number three, I would say this—a commitment to hold them accountable. Hold who accountable? Church leaders. Look at Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." One of the things that church leadership is to do is to model the biblical standards of a mature relationship through the person and work of Christ. We are to imitate them. That means we need to hold them to some degree of accountability in the quality of their life. That doesn't mean that we're judgmental. It just means this, that there's a responsibility that we need to hold our leadership accountable to the standard that God has qualified in them.

That may mean that sometimes we might need to sit down with some of our church leaders and do that graciously and ask for their help, ask for their guidance, let them know that we're praying for them. You see, the word "remember" there is an idea, basically carries the idea of pray for the leaders. How often do you pray for your church leaders? Here's normally what we pray for—our future, our finances, our family, our church, our work and the issue at hand. Those are the six things that everybody prays for all the time. You sit down and pray, what are you going to talk about today? You're going to pray for this—your future. You want a better job. You're going to talk about your family. You're going to talk about your finances. You're going to talk about your ministry, if you're involved in that, the church. You're

going to talk about your work environment. And you're going to pray about your issues. You pray about those six things all the time. That's just human nature.

What I'm suggesting is you pray Colossians 1 for your pastors and your teachers and your leaders. What Ted taught us last week from that prayer in Colossians 1, pray for your leaders and pray that prayer. Take that little card and sit down before you prepare to go to worship. Ask the Lord to bless the pastor, to bless your leaders. You see the responsibility they have is they're going to be held accountable.

Now I know this as a pastor/teacher, and Bishop Rogers I'm sure would agree with this. When we stand before the Lord, he's not going to say, "How many people did you have in your church?" He's going to ask me one or two questions. First, "Why did you say what you said? Why did you say that? Where did you get the source of that? Was that from me or was that from you?" and then secondly, "How did you develop maturity in your people? How mature are your people?" You see, that's the accountability that our pastor/teachers and church leaders have. We're going to be held accountable for that. We're going to be held accountable for that. Pray for your pastor and your church leaders. That's critical. Your responsibility and my responsibility as a church member is to obey them. Put them in a position that you want to obey them, so the Holy Spirit will identify those who are qualified and you can support them by remembering to pray for them.

I would say a commitment to worshiping together, a commitment to obey church leaders, a commitment to hold them accountable, and then next a commitment to being held accountable. Hold yourself accountable. We need to hold ourselves accountable.

Let's go to Ephesians 4. I'm going to deal with this in a couple of weeks in greater depth, but I just want to highlight this to help you begin to think about this. Ephesians 4:11-16, "<sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." So often times, churches ask me to come in, "Would you come in and help us create a mission statement for our church?" I said, "I can't do that. You've already been given one. It's right here, 'Equipping the saints for the work of service.'" That's the mission of the church. You don't need to sit down and have somebody come in and pay them \$500 to take you through a strategic plan. It's right there. That's your mission statement. Every church's mission statement is the same—it's to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.

"<sup>12a</sup>To the building up of the body of Christ." Right there is your mission statement for your church. Notice on, "<sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man." Now there is one of our personal accountabilities. We need to make sure that we position ourselves so that we will become more mature. I'm going to go into greater depth on all of this in a couple of weeks.

"<sup>13b</sup>to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Guys, right there is our membership responsibility to hold ourselves personally accountable. Am I putting myself in a position to become all that? That's our responsibility. Notice he gives some as pastors and some as teachers to make that possible. But my personal membership responsibility is this—is that what I'm positioning myself to do? Am I holding myself to become mature? To serving the body of Christ? To building unity? I want to go through all these ingredients itself in a moment. Essentially,

this is how we hold ourselves accountable. Not only do we hold our leaders accountable, we hold ourselves accountable.

Then I would suggest this. It's an affirmation of our true saving faith. Church membership is you're making a confession of your true saving faith. Now what faith is that? Let's go to the book of Jude, right before Revelation. What is it we are confessing? Let me read verses 1-4 of the Letter of Jude, "<sup>1</sup>Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." Do you every wonder why God protects you? It's not for your sake, it's for Christ's sake. He keeps you for Jesus Christ. He preserves you for Jesus Christ. Do you realize you're being protected, you're being preserved for Jesus Christ? It's not necessarily for your benefit. That's a consequence. The motive is it's for Christ's sake.

"<sup>2</sup>May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. <sup>3</sup>Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." What are you confessing? You're not confessing a new man-centered Gospel. You're confessing the once for all, delivered to the saints faith. What is that? It is the faith of the person and work of Christ. It's the doctrines of grace. It's by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed in the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone. That's what you're confessing. It's the once for all, delivered to the saints faith. It's the same faith that you read about in the apostles. It's the same faith that you read about in Abraham. It's the same faith that you read about in the old covenant and the new covenant. It's the same faith that's been delivered to the body of Christ from the beginning of all creation in Genesis 1:1. That's what you're confessing. It's not something, a new doctrine as you come along that you're embracing.

It's really strange. Last night I had...I don't dream much, but last night I had a really a goofy dream. Maybe it was because the last thing I read before I went to bed last night was this passage in Jude. You know what my dream was about? Somebody was preaching a false Gospel. It was really strange. I'm just saying, that's not right. It's not the once for all, delivered to the saints faith. That's our standard. That's what you go back to. It was really strange. In my dream, that's what I was saying, "No! No! Don't do that! Don't say that!" I was pleading because it was not the original, once for all, delivered to the saints faith. Brothers, that's what you're confessing.

Part of our church membership is when somebody says, "What are you confessing?" You're confessing what Jude just wrote—once for all, delivered to the saints faith. The original faith of the Scripture, the person and work of Christ.

Sadly, many churches have more members than they do worshipers, and most churches are more concerned about the numbers of their membership than they are distressed about the number of members who don't attend worship. Ideally—notice this—in my judgment, ideally, we should have more worshipers than we do members. Really. It ought to be that way. We ought to have more worshipers than we do members, because that's a sign of what? Growth and expansion. You see, what do we do? We have 750 people on our membership roll and 300 worship. That's what we take...what about the 450 who don't show up? You see, we're not concerned about that as much as we are the 300 who are there. Ideally, in an ideal world, if we understand biblical church membership, we ought to desire to have more worshipers than we do members on our rolls, because that means that the body of Christ is serving, we're becoming our own evangelists and we're out inviting our neighbors.

Let's just take a quick...and be honest. How many of you have invited a neighbor to come to your church service in the past year? Be honest. Very few. You see, that's our responsibility. Equip to do the service of the ministry. Who are the ones who are to invite members? It's members who invite new members. It's not the pastor's role. What he does is, "You bring them, I'll preach and teach them."

There's a combination of that. But it all starts in the pulpit. And then you start with expository preaching, biblical theology and a biblical gospel. It's the role of the membership to invite their neighbors. We're more concerned about the people who show up than the members who are not showing up.

There's a church, [UNCLEAR] church in America, they always talk about, "Wow! Read his book because his church has 25,000 members, and we have 12,000 that worship with us every Sunday." My first question is, "Where are the other 13,000? Where are they? You're taking pride in your 12,000 who show up? You ought to be discouraged that over half your membership aren't even there." You see, ideally brothers, we need to have more worshipers than we do members. That's a healthy church. That's a sign of a healthy church, because it means this. The memberships of the church are fulfilling their responsibilities, and the pastor/teacher and the leadership are bringing them to maturity, and part of that maturity is outreach. It's evangelism on the part of the membership. So Jay, I appreciate your question. Make that call, and just say, "Listen sister," or brother, "I love you and I'm concerned you're not there. Is there something I can do to help you come to church?"

I have a neighbor. Every time I preach, I ask her to come. She says, "One of these days, I will." That's been going on for eight years. One of these days, she will, but I never stop asking. She just, we have a great relationship, but she's my next door neighbor. I saw her last night and I said, "I'll be preaching in a little church next Sunday in the North Hills, New Hope Church. Why don't you come and go with me." "I might do that. I might do that." It used to be, "One of these days I will," now it's "I might do that." I'm encouraged that the next time she'll say, "Okay."

You see, part of our membership responsibility is that we are to be the means by which we invite people to come. That's our responsibility.

***Audience Member:** Do you have an opinion on the thought that Sunday morning is becoming kind of not a good time for this culture, that maybe we need to do ministry at other times of the week or whatever, because Sunday morning is just losing its umph?*

Do I have an opinion on that? {LAUGHTER} Yes. I have an opinion on that.

***Audience Member:** Would you share it?*

I just did. Do not forsake the assembling of the saints. There's nothing wrong with making worship difficult. People need to sacrifice. We have become a society in its Christian church whose three favorite words are me, my and I. Those are our three favorite pronouns—me, my and I. There's nothing wrong with having people sacrifice to want to go to church. The Scripture says, "Keep the Sabbath day and keep holy." Scripture says, "Do not forsake the assembling of the saints."

I know people are going to say, "You've got to make it easy for them." I understand that. "We don't want to make it difficult." But we've got to set a standard. You don't deviate the standard because culture dictates that. I would rather have a church of 75 people who are faithful, and we have 50 members, but we've got 75 worshipers who come every Sunday, than I would have 300 people come Friday or Saturday night just because it's convenient and they're not confessing the once for all, given to the saints faith. I would rather have that; the small one than the large one who has the numbers.

All I'm saying is, brothers, we're to be different. We are to set a standard. We can't let culture dictate what we do. Yes, we have to live with those consequences, but our role is, the Holy Spirit is really building his church. That's not us. The Holy Spirit does that. We don't do that. We are faithful to what

the Scripture teaches us about a healthy church, and we do our best and trust the Holy Spirit with the rest.

**Audience Member:** *[UNCLEAR] at what I do, and I do it mostly with the young people. I'll walk up and say, "How are you doing?" and they'll say, "Okay." "Now that we've got that out of the way, how are you really doing?" Maybe it's a neighbor you ought to try, "Why don't you come to church with me tomorrow. Alright, we got that out of the way, are you coming to...?"*

Good. I'll try that. Good suggestion. One of the things I want you to take a look at, part of your handout, was the 58 one another commands. We want to talk about the responsibility that we have inside the church membership roles, as to how we treat each other. You bring that next week. Bishop Rogers is going to teach us one of our responsibilities of church membership is church discipline. We're going to talk about that.

The following week after that, we'll talk about the one another commands. How is it we relate to each other. The Greek word "allelon" is the word for one another. It's used 103 times in the New Testament; 58 of those are commands given to the body of Christ, not to the world, given to the body of Christ to teach us how to relate to each other. We need to perfect these. Practice them inside the church so we take it out into the world. When you take a look at those, that sheet of the 58 one another commands, you'll notice they all start with our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another and our restoration of one another. Bishop Rogers, next week, is going to teach us on how do we restore one another when there's something amiss in the body of Christ, which is our responsibility. Part of the church leader's responsibility and church membership responsibility. We'll cover that next week, so being back your one another commands and we'll pick up on that the week after that.

We did a series several years ago, we went through each of those at length. It took us about a year. I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to touch on them because I want you to recognize, take a look at those responsibilities you have as a church member. Those 58 one another commands are not options.

**Audience Member:** *It would be a great preaching series.*

It's a great series. It is. I've always used that as a series. It takes about 10 weeks to go through it. If you're going to teach people seriously about relationship, you've got to teach them the one another commands. These are the responsibilities of fellowship are these commands. They're not optional guys. They're commands. They're designed for the glory of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your mercy. We thank you for your Holy Spirit teaching us. Father, if anything has been said that is contrary to biblical theology, that is contrary to a Christocentric message, that is inconsistent with your nature, your glory or your attributes, would you be gracious to remove those from us, and only let us remember those things that are consistent with your nature and your glory, and to that end, all the Brave Men said...Amen!