

Stop Dating the Church
Part II

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I. Why We Really Need the Local Church

Questions to Ponder:

1. Is church membership required?
2. Is church membership just a formality?
3. If you have all of your beliefs figured out do you need a church family?

Theological Diatribe:

“I believe in a triune God as revealed in Scripture, as conveyed in a heritage, as made real by experience both corporately and personally.”

A. The Distinctive Nature of the Local Church.

Much of what we believe and understand about God through the Scriptures has been arrived at through our heritage of faith. The local heritage is the Body of Christ. *A local church is the visible, tangible, real-world expression of the body of Christ.*

The local church is the special theater for the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is the one place on this earth that a person can see the gospel in action as masses of people join together to hear, proclaim, and serve the God who has redeemed them. Thus, we are distinct from every other gathering in this world. Moreover, we have been given practices by Jesus to assist us in remaining distinct.

1. **Baptism:** shows those who have been saved and who have identified with the death and resurrection of Christ (Matt. 28:19; Romans 6:4)
2. **The Lord's Supper:** shows those who are continuing in fellowship with Christ and are remembering His death until His return (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23).
3. **Discipline:** is the process that removes a person from the church who is acting and living in ways that contradict New Testament teaching for godly living. In order to most helpfully love the person in unrepentant sin, and so as not to confuse others as to what it means to be Christian, church leadership lovingly puts them out of the church in the hope they'll be restored (Matt. 18; 1 Cor. 5:1-9)

Thus, the church is distinct. To be sure, you can receive teaching and instruction from other para-church ministries, but only the church can display the distinct qualities of a God-honoring community.

B. The Church: A place where you can have a shepherd for your soul.

The local Church is a group strives daily to be set apart. Thus, Sanctification is a community project.

Hebrews 10: 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

As we hold to the hope we profess, the church:

1. Is the body that considers how we spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
2. Reminds people that meeting together is not an option.
3. Is the group that encourages one another as we wait for Christ's return.

The church also provides a local pastor to shepherd our souls. Thus, he helps us apply God's Word to our lives and helps us see our sin.

*Hebrews 13: 17 obey your leaders and submit to their authority. **They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.** Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

The Church is also where we as the temple of the Lord collectively worship. You may worship by yourself everyday, but a unique expression arises when we corporately worship. Our corporate worship edifies and strengthens us and glorifies God in ways nothing else can. (Eph. 2:19-22)

C. The Real Issue of Church Membership

1) Verifies or Falsifies My Christianity.

- a. In the New Testament, it seems that the local church is present to verify or falsify our claims to be Christian. (1 Cor. 5 "the man who was sleeping with his father's wife thought he was a Christian." Also important in understanding why cults should not be called "churches")
- b. Many people claim to be Christian but they are not living a new life. They either do not understand the gospel or have not been transformed by the Gospel. Thus the local church is present to help people understand the claims of the gospel. **If you have no love for other believers and cannot commit to them the Bible offers no word of affirmation to you that you are a Christian.**
- c. 1 Peter 2:10 "*Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your **calling and election sure.***" Before Peter writes this mandate, he gives a list of attributes, motives, and behaviors we should adopt. Membership to a local church is a tie that will practically help you live up to these commands which make your calling and election sure.
- d. If you want to see how much you love God commit yourself for many years to a group of saved sinners, and then you will see just how much you love God and how well you are being obedient to Him.

D. Biggest "Hold-Ups" Concerning Membership

- a. Self-Centered Attitudes- we believe we will be happier the less we sacrifice.

- b. Proud Independence-“I don’t need other people in my life.”
- c. Critical Eye Toward the Church- constantly logging the errors and wrongs.

II. Join the Club: What Passion in Action Looks Like

What are you consumed with or preoccupied by?

- Passion in action will create a lifestyle that organizes activities from your heart’s desire.
- John Stott, “If the Church is central to God’s purpose as seen in both history and the gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center?”

What does your Passion for the Church look like?

A. A Profile of Commitment

1. **You Join:** Becoming a member gives you specific accountability, care, encouragement, and leadership. Jim Elliott, “Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.” Be all there with your heart to the church.
2. **You make the local church a priority:** Think about why people relocate? For matters of climate, money, schools, people move. They also normally say, “We will find a good church when we get there.” If the place that offers you family, accountability, Truth, and application is important why not make it a major prayerful consideration?
3. **You try to make your pastor’s job a joy:** Hebrew 13:17 *obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
4. **You find ways to serve:** 1 Peter 4:10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.*
5. **You give:** (Malachi 3:10, 2 Cor. 9:6 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*
6. **You connect with people:** Actively doing life together. (Jn 13:34, Rom. 12:5, 12:10; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Peter 4:9; James 5:16)
7. **You share your passion:** As you are passionate for God it will spill over to encourage others to be passionate.

III. Choosing Your Church: 10 Things that Matter Most

How do you know that the church you are going to commit too is operating as it should?

10 Questions to ask:

1. **Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught?** You want to be in a church that has a high view of Scripture and it can be seen in its teaching and way of living.
2. **Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?** Doctrine is what the Bible teaches concerning a subject. You want to make sure that the doctrine being taught is biblical, and you can see this by lining up what is taught with the whole counsel of God's Word.
3. **Is this a church where the Gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?** Do you visibly and audibly hear the story of the life of Jesus as it was sinlessly perfect, broken in death, raised to victory, and now can change the life of a person proclaimed?
4. **Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the Gospel?** Does the church actively pursue the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)?
5. **Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?** Do the leaders of the church embody the principles of Scripture or do they ask in the name of God what they have no right for to be used by selfish desires?
6. **Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?** Do you actively see the people of the church concerned about living out God's Word Daily?
7. **Is this a church where I can find and cultivate godly relationships?** Does the household of faith offer me a quality in relationships where I can have accountability, affirmation, and discipline?
8. **Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?** Is this body "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry?" (Eph. 4:12)
9. **Is this a church that is willing to kick me out?** Is this a body that will stop at nothing to verify and encourage the claim of my life to be Christian?
10. **Is this a church I'm willing to join "as is" with enthusiasm and faith in God?** Can you joyfully and fully support this church's leaders, their teachings, and the direction they have set?

IV. **Making the Most of Sunday**

For many Sunday is just another day, but God's people it should be prepared for and enjoyed with a few things in mind:

1. Remember Sunday is the day we celebrate the Resurrection.
2. Prepare all week but especially on Saturday night for Corporate Worship
3. Before you enter the sanctuary, check your heart for sin and anything that would hinder worship.
4. Be careful how you hear. God is speaking through His Word and His Man. Limit Distractions, Bring your Bible, Be ready to take notes.
5. After Sunday, take the notes you have written and talk about them with a spouse or family member
6. Rejoice that you just met with a bunch of other people who need God as desperately as you do. You are not alone.

