

Church Membership Matters

Session 2

Course Overview:

Session 1 – What is a Healthy Church?
Session 2 – Why Should You Join a Church?
Session 3 – What is our Statement of Faith?
Session 4 – What is our Church Covenant?
Session 5 – Church History
Session 6 – Conservative Baptists
Session 7 – Elders & Deacons
Session 8 – Congregationalism & Our Local Fellowship

- I. Review: *What are you looking for in a Church?* ... Quote p. 48
 - A. The Ultimate How-To Guide: How to Display God's Character
 1. Two kinds of people (Cf. 2 Timothy 4:2-4)
 2. Listen & Obey...

 - B. What are the *Essential* Marks of a Healthy Church?
 1. Expository Preaching
 2. Biblical Theology
 3. A Biblical Understanding of the Good News
 4. **A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline/Spiritual Growth**

- II. Five Reasons You Join a Local Church?
 - A. ***First, join a church for non-Christians***
 1. Read: **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**
 - a. One of the reasons that we join a church is because it is there to help you understand ***if you are truly living as a Christian.***

 - b. More than likely the man in 1 Corinthian 5 thought of himself as a Christian.
 - 1) I bet he went to church regularly.
 - 2) I bet he did all the things a person would do in that community.

 - c. They had to make it clear to him, ***for his sake***, that his life's actions were that of a ***non-Christian.***

 - d. The main thing in scripture that God has set up for us to deal with our self deception is the local church.

 - e. ***The Gospel is made clear***, it is defined and ***made visible*** by Christians who gather together to form congregations of believers.

 2. Being here for ***non-Christians*** does not mean we will use "**altar calls**"
 - a. American churches that have used altar calls have filled their seats with ***non-Christians***, with people who sincerely intend to be Christians but are not.
 - b. This prevalence of ***false hope*** is the main reason Steve does not use alter calls here at NBC.

- 1) “Alter calls” were never practiced before the 1800’s.
- 2) The first great awakening occurred in America without *any* “alter calls”.
3. **What do we do?** What is the solution? We call people to *repent* (submit) and *believe* (rely).

B. *Second. Join a church for weaker Christians*

1. You should help put *social pressure* on those believers who think it is ok to “*go-it-alone*”.
2. We all know of plenty of examples of this here on Cape Cod.
3. God saves each individual person but he saves them to be part of his household. Anyone too focused on their own individual walk is missing much of what he has been called to.

C. *Third. Join a church for stronger Christians*

How do you define a “Strong Christian”? Does it include being a committed member of local church? Or is it an option?

1. It is very interesting what Jesus says in **John 13**, “*A new command I give to you, to love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another. **By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another as I have loved you.***”
 - a. The kind of love that we as Christians should have for each other is a *fundamental* part of God’s plan for evangelizing the world.
 - b. In all of man’s great plans for evangelism we routinely forget the church. But I think when it works as it should, it’s a tremendous witness for Christ. “*This is how we know what love is, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*”
 - c. Christian love is **not** a *sentimental pleasant disposition*. It is a committed, faithful love that is especially directed toward other Christians. This command is meaningless if you do not have any contact with actual brothers.
 - d. John says in **1 John** that “*If anyone loves God yet hates his brother he is a liar; for anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command whoever loves God must also love his brother.*”
 - e. A *worship CD* or *John Piper book* is no substitute for the commitment to a group of people who are different than you, who the only thing they may have in common with you is Jesus Christ, with all their faults and foibles.
 - f. The more we know about our own sin and the way God has forgiven us in Christ, then surely that kind of love must find a way out of our hearts to other people, *particularly those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ.*

D. *Fourth reason. Join a church for church leaders*

1. If you are not a member of this church, the elders don’t even know if you are a Christian. We’ve not heard your testimony.

2. The next step after this class *to become a member* of this church
 - a. Meet with the elders
 - b. We will commit ourselves to pray for you regularly and *hold you accountable* to God's Word
 - c. Without a clear membership process the shepherds are left without clarity about who they are to shepherd. (e.g. **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**)
3. Certainly we as church leaders cannot function if everybody just kept hopping and shopping around.
4. The only reason there are churches is because people realize "Ok, no church is perfect." "I'm going to settle in this place and I'm going to try and prosper here spiritually. I agree with what they teach, their *statement of faith*, I agree with the summary on how we should live, the *church covenant*. These are things in good conscious I can commit to, I will do this, I will live for Christ with these people."

E. *The fifth and final reason. Join a church for God*

1. It is interesting if you look through the book of Acts, it is the Lord who adds people to their number and being added to the Christians number meant being identified as the church. *And who identifies with the church?*
2. If you look at **Acts 9:3-4**, Saul's vision of the risen Christ.
 - a. He doesn't say "Saul, Saul, why are going to persecute those Christians".
 - b. He doesn't even say "Saul, Saul, why are you going to persecute the church."
 - c. He says, "Saul, Saul, why are you going to persecute me."
3. In Acts 20, it says that the church is *the body of Christ*, and that *God bought the church with his own blood*.

IV. Some Practical Considerations: **Come as a Provider not a Consumer**

- A. Often *questionnaires* are created and *polls* are taken to find out what people out in the community would like the church to be.
- B. We need to understand that *we are to come here as people who are providing a ministry to other people*: to each other as Christians, to other Christians who come and visit, and then to non-Christians who attend for one reason or another.
 1. **One way** this is demonstrated in practice is in our commitment to attend regularly.
 - What if everyone were to have the church hoppers attendance pattern?
 - So we stress regular attendance.
 - For people to see the body of Christ they need to see you.
 2. What about being here punctually?
 - I realize I may be preaching to the choir, but do you slip in the morning service, at 10:10, because "Oh well, you got up late"?
 - Isn't it good that a lot of other people don't do that?
 - Isn't it good that you can actually come and something is provided for you?
 - These things are provided by the service of others.

3. One incredibly practical way we can be a provider here at NBC is to pray through the church directory for our brothers and sisters.

Conclusion

So many of the things that we understand to be Christian are simply not things that can be practiced as individuals but are actually virtues that express themselves in relationship with other people, especially other Christians.