

Why Church Membership?

Treasuring the Church

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Bible Text: Hebrews 10:25

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Hebrews chapter 10 and we want to read verses 19 through 39 from the infallible Word of God. Hebrews 10:19 through 39.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will

not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.¹

Thus far the reading of sacred Scripture.

Dear congregation, we want to wish you and yours every blessing of the most high as we begin in a new year and a new decade worship to the living God on his own day, the Lord's Day, a day of great joy and great gift for and two his people.

It is often the custom of people at this time of the year to make various resolutions and many of our forefathers have done this as well, not in a joking way, but in a very serious way with dependency upon the God of grace. And certainly one of the best resolutions we can make as we begin this new decade of sabbaths is a resolution of commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ.

We need to know commitment in all areas of our life, particularly in a day like ours where commitment is at a low premium. We need commitment to God, commitment to our spouses, commitment to our families, commitment to our work, but also commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Today it seems that more than ever before there is very little understanding of what it means to make that commitment when we make profession of faith and become members of the local body of Jesus Christ. And so I thought it would be good, as we continue to look at Lord's Day 21, question 54—and we have done that seven times already, but we look now at the very last phrase of it—I thought it would be good to spend the first two sabbaths of this year setting the tone for the sabbaths of this year and the commitment that we need to have for the church to look at that phrase at the end of question 54 that I am and forever shall remain a living member thereof, focusing today on the word member and focusing next work in our preparatory message on the word living. And so with God's help I want to look with you at Hebrews 10 verse 25 and the closing statement of question 54 of Lord's Day 21.

Hebrews 10:25. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."²

And then Lord's Day 21, question 54, "What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Church of Christ?" And just the closing words, "That I am and forever shall remain a living member thereof."

And so our theme is really in the form of a question this morning. Why Church membership? We want to look at its importance, its responsibilities, its rights and then actually next week we will devote the sermon to its marks.

¹ Hebrews 3:19-39.

² Hebrews 10:25.

So this morning: Why Church membership? Its importance, its responsibilities and its rights.

Now let me say by way of introduction, of course, that the most crucial matter in our lives is that every single one of us—as you well know—absolutely must be a living member of the Church of Jesus Christ, the church militant here on earth, the fighting church, the pilgrim church, the church separated from the world, the church that consists of true believers so that we might be prepared to enter the church triumphant when the day approaches.

This is critical. It is critical because of the inseparable relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church, his invisible Church of true believers.

Christ tells us, of course, as we saw in the very first of the series of messages we have been bringing you on the Church that the gates of hell will not prevail against her and he will build his Church. And so while Christ was on earth he really founded the New Testament Church. He says as much in Matthew 18. And he gave himself for her on the cross as he says in Ephesians five. Even unto death as he says in Acts 20. And then he sent his Holy Spirit to empower that Church in Acts two. And if he is willing to give his life for the Church and willing to give his death for the Church and willing to send his Spirit for the Church, ought not we be willing to live for his Church, his bride?

And so to this very day Christ is protecting and nourishing and cherishing and purifying his Church and interceding for her at his Father's right hand. And, as we have seen in recent weeks, he gathers her. And we saw in another sermon, he defends and preserves her. Then we saw in another sermon that he brings her together to be one in the faith, to agree in the true faith. We saw in another sermon that he want to instruct her biblically and doctrinally, practically and also experientially. And we spent the whole message, you recall, on what it means to preach experientially so that we understand one of the greatest distinctives of this church that the truths of the Bible must not only be known and embraced in the mind, but lived in the life and experienced in the soul.

Now you and I must be acquainted with this experiential truth. We must know the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know the sinfulness of sin, the beauty of our Savior and the pursuit of holiness out of gratitude to God for his salvation.

But why is it, then? If this is the all important thing, why is it still important to be members of the local church? Isn't it everything to belong to Jesus Christ savingly in the invisible church? And, after all, if that is what gets us to heaven, isn't that all that matters?

The answer of the Bible to that question is a resounding no, a resounding no. And I want to give you eight biblical reasons this morning why we bind ourselves to a local church in membership. Now this is important because who would have dreamed? Who would have dreamed 20 years ago that we would have large mega churches in this vicinity in

Grand Rapids who would say, “You don’t need to be a member of this church to just come”? There is no responsibilities, no family visitation, no supervision. You come when you feel like coming. Just come. You don’t have to belong to any ministries. You don’t have to participate in anything. Just come. No responsibilities. That is what attracts the natural man today. Modern man want no responsibilities. All of the privileges, but none of the responsibilities. That is unbiblical, really false Christianity.

Let me show you why. Number one, Christ’s intimate care, Christ’s intimate care. We bind ourselves to a particular church because of the example of Jesus Christ who showed intimate care for local churches. You find that particularly in Revelation. In Revelation one verses 13 and 20 Christ is pictured as standing and walking among the golden candlesticks of local churches caring for them, embracing them. And then he writes letters to all seven local churches among whom he is walking at that period in John’s vision, designed to meet their specific needs.

In Revelation two and Revelation three to all the churches of Asia. And the meticulous directions Christ gives to these local churches in these two chapters is a biblical penetration into the depths of his soul and a biblical illustration of his love for the local church.

And, you see, if you are to be a Christian you are to hate what he hates, right, and to love what he loves. And if he loves the church so much that he cares for her down to every detail and gives her admonitions and encouragements, commendations and warnings in great specificity, so ought we to love the Church and care for her every need and detail.

And if Jesus’ great concern is that on the great day he will present the Church without spot and wrinkle to his Father, so we ought to be concerned as followers of him for the purity of the church, the local church here on earth. So that is reason number one, Christ’s intimate care.

Reason number two: the apostles’ practice, the apostles’ practice. We bind ourselves to a particular church because of the apostolic example and practice. If you read later at home, perhaps, Acts 13:1-4 and Acts 14:23-28, you will see that the apostles operated under this principle that they and the early Christians served and fervently served the Lord from within the local church.

The early believers didn’t distance themselves from the churches when they saw shortcomings and problems, but they became energetically prayerful and involved to make those churches more faithful to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. And that is what every church member is called to do because a church member belongs to a church family.

When you have got problems in your family you don’t run away from your family. At least I hope you don’t. You don’t say, “Well, I am going to divorce my wife if I have got some problems with her temporarily, or I am going to divorce my children.” No, but you work on the problems. And that is, you see, what the example of the apostles conveys to

us in their actions in the book of Acts, but also in all the Pauline and other kinds of letters by other apostles in the New Testament.

In fact, it is interesting that almost all of Paul's letters are generated by problems in the local church. We just heard for several years from reverend [?], 1 Corinthians expounded and we were just overwhelmed, weren't we, with all of the problems in the Corinthian Church and yet Paul approaches that Corinthian Church as the body of Christ and is optimistic about her future well being and patiently works with her, binding himself to her welfare.

And that was Paul's purpose, actually, in his nearly 10 year ministry in Antioch as well as the purpose of all his missionary journeys to look after local churches. And he addressed letters to local churches with local needs for their local well being. And when Paul and his partners would finish a missionary tour, they would return to their sending church and they would give a report of what God had done through their ministry in the local churches. You see, everything was connected to local churches. So that is the second reason.

The third reason is the early Christian's example, the early Christian's example. We bind ourselves to a particular church today because of the example of the early Christians who bound themselves to local churches in different vicinities. At Pentecost, the birthday of the world wide New Testament Church as we know it today, one of the first things the Holy Spirit did was he came upon the multitudes, brought them to repentance and faith and then committed them immediately to a local body of believers meeting together for corporate worship, for fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer.

And so we read already in the very first chapter, Acts two verse 42, "And they continued steadfastly,"³ that is in their local churches they committed themselves. They were firm on this. They didn't run away to other churches or do other things. They continued steadfastly from sabbath to sabbath "in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."⁴ How we need to understand that word steadfastly today.

Fourthly, the focus of the New Testament epistles. The focus of the New Testament epistles teaches us to bind ourselves to a particular church. It is the whole context of the New Testament Church. You see, our 21st century exhibits a radical kind of individualism that is unheard of in the history of the Church and even of mankind. We have been taught by modernism and humanism that seeped into the church every man can do that which is right in his own eyes. Just think of religion as a God and you thing.

That is not the way God thought covenantally in the book of Numbers where he speaks over 100 times of family. That is not the way the Church of all ages has thought. No, the Church is a body. The Church belongs together. And it is the local church that is supposed to be the manifestation of the body of Christ as accurately as possible. Despite

³ Acts 2:42

⁴ Ibid.

sin and infirmity this is the goal, this is the striving of the local church. And that is why almost all the New Testament epistles are written to local churches. Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Revelation. Even the pastoral epistles—Timothy, Titus, Philemon—were written to leaders directing them how to lead and govern those local churches.

So the New Testament knows nothing of believers not being committed to the well being of a local church.

Now even though these letters were written to local churches that doesn't mean they don't have anything to say to us today. Well, of course they do. They are inspired. And God meant to apply them to every local church throughout the ages unto the end of time.

Fifthly, we have the implicit imperative, the implicit imperative of Hebrews 10 verse 25. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.

So it is not new... nothing new under the sun when people go church shopping or church hopping, as the manner of some is. So they faced that problem already then. But it is unbiblical, you see. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves, "but exhort one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."⁵

So what the author to the Hebrews is saying is as you see Christ coming closer to the end times on the clouds and things will get worse rather than better, you need to all the more be bound together as a local church and don't forsake yourselves in getting yourselves together in worship.

Well, generally speaking compared to other churches our church would get very, very high marks and most ministers in this town would be very jealous of reverend [?] and me that we have such a wonderful church that comes together so well Sunday morning, particularly Sunday evening, new year's day, new year's eve. Well, there was... not everyone was here, but a goodly number were here and many churches tending to have church on those days because, well, no one comes. So we are not complaining this morning. We are grateful that you are committed.

But at the same time we want to deepen the level, the understanding of biblical commitment because we have had problems with people leaving very easily. We have had people make confession of faith and two years later, gone. And we have talked to them and they have said, "Well, I have got friends in the other church." Or, "Oh, I really miss your preaching. But, you know, some of my friend are over there and I... I just feel more accepted over there and..."

Say what? You are leaving the church? You are leaving the sound church to go to another local church and you even though you made a commitment to stick with this body and help this body, belong to this family and you are leaving like within a couple of years of

⁵ Hebrews 10:25.

making the commitment and you have no substantial complaint? You just feel like it is better to be over there and your friends are there?

So is church then about a horizontal relationship? Is that the primary emphasis of church or is it, indeed, vertical, about God and our soul and then out of that flows the horizontal. It is staggering how people could grow up in this church and hear about the truths, the experiential truths of God's Word and then leave for a church that has absolutely no emphasis on the experiential end of religion and say they don't hear a difference.

It boggles our mind.

So that is why we need, we who have remained, we need to fortify as we enter a new decade and a new year, our convictions about the need of remaining true to the Scriptures and worshipping as a body of believers in a reformed, experiential church that upholds the full model of biblical Christianity, that the truths of God's Word must penetrate the mind, the soul and impact the hands and the feet that the whole man is involved. And we need to have ears to hear the difference between the typical evangelical church today which merges worldliness and church truths and doesn't demand an experiential reality of these things in the soul. We need to be able to grasp these things and not forsake ourselves, binding ourselves together.

And, of course, it is easy to do. Grand Rapids, as I think I have mentioned that to you before, is the easiest city in the entire world to do this in because Grand Rapids, as you know, has more reformed churches than any other city, English speaking city on the face of the globe. And so there are all kinds of alternatives. If there's a few problems you can quickly run to another family and desert the family to which you have made a commitment. It is very easy to do and tempting, more tempting than in any other city on the globe.

And the way it goes is this. Well, the new minister comes to town. You heard he is very good and so you go and you hear him once or twice. It doesn't matter if I just absent myself a few times from the body to which I have made a commitment not to forsake the assembling of myself together. It doesn't matter if I just disobey God's Word a few times. After all, lots of other people are doing it. Some of my friends are doing it. And then you begin to absent yourself a bit more and you like some things in the other church and, oh, minister is kind of interesting and, oh, you get lots of attention when you come to a new church if you are a visitor, of course. Everybody loves you there and you feel taken for granted in a church where you are a part of the family all the time. And pretty soon you are going there more often. And then you start complaining about this or that in our church because, well, you are not there. You are not very involved anymore.

You know the old saying that 90 percent of the fringe members of the church are the... 10 percent of your members of church are fringe members and they do 90 percent of the complaining. Because as you distance yourself you begin to see more flaws and faults. You are not involved anymore in the prayers of the church. You don't even get the bulletin sometimes so you can't pray your way through the church family every week.

You don't know what is going on anymore. You become distant from the family. It is no wonder.

You eventually are attracted to another church. You see, it doesn't happen in one day. And then often what happens is when you go to other churches then you... you lose that experiential emphasis that you get in our church and also the conservative elements tie in with it of a godly lifestyle and, well, it gets easier to mix worldly things in with it. And pretty soon you are walking a more worldly way even as you profess Christ and you profess the truth you say. And so it goes step by step and pretty soon you ask for your church membership papers and you are in another church family and then some years down the road you are not too happy with that church for reason A, B or C and then it is just that much easier to divorce that family, have a second divorce and go to a third church. And don't be surprised, then, when your children and grandchildren don't go to any church at all.

You see, don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together. It reaps very negative consequences.

Our Belgic Confession of Faith says, "No man has a right to separate himself from the church." They are talking about the local church. Unless that church separates itself from the truth, then you have to go. But only then through using proper means of trying to correct the spiritual adultery that the church is engaging in.

And so what happens, you see, is when people begin to forsake the assembling of themselves together you see yellow flags going up and then red flags and pretty soon these people are gone and very, very seldom, a year or two later are they really living as close to the Lord as they did before.

I suppose there are exceptions, but generally people that don't show church commitment, show very little God commitment and usually they end up suffering spiritually. Maybe not the first year, because everything is new, everything is exciting. But eventually it becomes banal in that church as well.

And that is why it is important to be in church, not just to be there, not just to have a body in church, but to be there with your mind and soul. This is God's ordinary way of feeding his people, not through great Spurgeons or great Calvins, but through ordinary gifted, ordinarily gifted preachers faithfully working week after week to bring you the Word of God. It is God's normal way to bless his people.

So you need to be there prayerfully.

I spoke recently with a hunter and he was going to go and hunt even in the rain. And I said to him, "Why would you go hunt in the rain?"

And he said, "Think of what I could miss. Might be a deer that comes by in the rain."

I say to you this morning, congregation, as our old former minister used to say, reverend [?], “You are responsible not only for what you could have heard or did hear, you are also responsible for what you could have heard but chose not to hear.”

Well, the church doors are open try to be here. You know that new year’s eve is coming. You know new year’s day was coming. Make provision to be here. Be in the church of God. Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves together.

Sixthly, the church’s benefits. We bind ourselves to a particular church because of the benefits we receive from being a member of it. As Calvin put it, “In the church community with the church pastoral oversight and the church fellowship we actually help each other consciously, unconsciously and we are constrained to borrow from each other’s gifts,” said Calvin, so that we all might walk more consistently with the Lord.

I have given you that example weeks ago. I told you, again, I can’t sing. I need your gifts of singing. I don’t sing well. But I can... I have some gifts, maybe that I can impart some instruction from the pulpit to you. And so we feed one another.

When I go to a choir night I just drink it in. I am just amazed at the gifts of these people that can sing this way. It ministers to me. I hope I can minister to you as well, reverend [?] as well.

And so you appreciate each other, you see. And you are to appreciate the pastoral oversight from pastoral visits of reverend [?] and the elders through family visitation and the catechism instruction of your children. And when is the last time you went up to your... up to one of the elders and... And thank the elder for teaching your children in catechism class, all the hours he put in preparing. He has got full time jobs. But they are doing it out of love for you. Do you appreciate it? Do you see these things as real benefits or do you just take them all for granted?

And the love of the deacons reaching out to people in need. And the love of God’s people, the love of you one to another. What a great thing it is.

I was just speaking to one of our members yesterday saying to me that as people recover she sends a card every single week, every single week to people in need. Amazing. What love.

You see, the love and the service of fellow members. When you are really in need, when you are really down and out this church family is going to come around you and love you, love you in a deeper way than any church family could do if you are only there two weeks or two months. Love builds over the years. It is not always expressed as it should be and we have got a ways to go still in that. But it will be there. When you are down and out you will get the love.

So the benefits of church membership are really great. Also in the sacraments. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, what wonderful things they are.

Seventh, God's providence, God's providence. We bind ourselves to a particular church because the Lord in his providence has placed us in one church family and not another.

When God places us in a church that is sound and true to the biblical, reformed, experiential faith as a general rule we should stay in that church and grow in it and through it and learn to bear one another's burdens and learn to bear one another's weaknesses. And we will have weaknesses. This church has plenty of flaws. If you want to pick apart a church you can do that with ours as well as you can do it with anyone else's.

So the point isn't how good is the church. The point is how good is Jesus Christ, the head of the Church. And he is perfect. And he is the Church's ideal. And so our goal now is to make the church more Christ like by the grace of God and we are all to put our shoulders to that task, not to run away when there are a few infirmities and weaknesses.

But just as the Heidelberg Catechism says in question 104, we are to submit to our parents and to those in authority because it pleases God to govern us by their hand no matter what their weaknesses are. So in the church we bear with each other's weaknesses and we submit to authority even when things don't always go the way we think they should and we live together as a body.

And, finally, family commitment, family commitment. The church is a family and it is just a simple fact of life. If you are a member and you make a commitment that is stronger than if you are in a body of people who say there is no responsibilities, no commitments, no membership. You can do whatever you want to do.

Let's look at it in natural marital life. All the statistics show us that couples that sign a marriage license and take a vow have a much better chance of sticking together than those who live common law and say, "Oh, well, we don't... we love each other. We don't need to get married. We don't need to sign anything. We are going to love each other and stick together..."

Well, that is what these churches are like that have no membership requirements. It doesn't work. It is a simple fact of life that when you enter something major like church membership and you make a major commitment, that family feeling and that commitment, that signature, as it were, that vow in front of the church has got to hold water. It has got to hold weight.

So there you have eight reasons, eight reasons for local church membership: Christ's intimate care, the apostles' practice, the early Christian's example, the focus of the New Testament epistles, the imperative of Hebrews 10:25, the church's benefits, God's providences and family commitment.

Let's keep these things in mind as we enter this year, as we enter a new decade. Let's be committed to the Church of Jesus Christ.

When we make profession of faith in the Church we answer four questions written by [?] a Dutch further reformation divine that encompass the entire life of those who make confession of faith.

The first question says that we will adhere to the doctrines the local church teaches. The second, we will profess this doctrine in our daily life. The third, we will conduct our lives in accord with that doctrine. And the fourth, we will submit to admonition or correction in the event which, God forbid, we wander from the teachings of the Church which are based on Scripture.

So that is a very, very serious commitment. But how do you flesh that out now? What responsibilities does that involve in a very concrete way?

Well, let me divide this into four categories. The first is this. When you are a committed church member you support the testimony of the congregation, the testimony of the congregation. And how do you support that? Well, you support that, first, by attending church faithfully. We have already talked about that this morning so I won't belabor that. Attending church faithfully.

Secondly, by living a Word centered, godly life. That is part of your commitment to the Church. You represent the Church wherever you go.

So beginning with the inner closet, Matthew six verse six, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret."⁶ From there to family worship. "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD,"⁷ in worship. Out into the public. We are called to live a godly life everywhere we go as members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

And, thirdly, the flip side of that is we are called to avoid worldliness. We are to be a separate people, a separate people. And so yes we are to avoid immodest fashions and casinos and dance halls and drinking parties and idolization or sports or movie heroes and worldly music and addictions such as alcoholism and smoking and drug use and other forms of gluttony. We are to avoid materialism and negative uses of the media. That is why we warn against the evils of television and movies and trashy books or magazines and the abuse of the internet.

Church membership involves avoiding all that glamorizes sin and promotes the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. That is exactly what most movies do today, isn't it? Isn't that true?

⁶ Matthew 6:6.

⁷ Joshua 24:15.

And today young people, dear young people, we warn you from these things not because we want to drive you from the church, but we want to protect you from the world. We don't want to desensitize your consciences.

You know, it is the story of the old proverbial frog. You throw a frog into very boiling hot water and it will jump right out because it feels, oh, this is hot. But you put a frog in lukewarm water and you increase the heat bit by bit by bit by bit by bit and the frog won't realize and pretty soon he kills himself. And that is what you do with... when you go to movies and you start out with general family movies and then you go to GP 13 movies or something like that and eventually get into R rated movies. You are the proverbial frog. You are killing your conscience.

A few weeks ago some of you were face booking each other. This is a good movie to go to, *Blades of Glory*. So I looked it up. I have a whole list of things here in that film. I can't even read them from the pulpit. There's 60 some morally objective problems in that film. But those of you who watched it are so—may I say it in love—you are so desensitized in your conscience that you are freely writing about it on face book, not even feeling guilty for going to it. There were 40 some swear words in that film. That alone.

Oh, I know what you say. But I hear swear words around me all the time in society.

Well, that is true. But when you take a movie out and you listen to it, it is a volunteer thing on your part. And, you see, when we can't respond to it we are actually guilty of it. So you are guilty of what you allow yourself to see.

Now if you or your parent would simply go to dove.org you would know immediately and just type in that movie you would know immediately this movie was absolutely something you were not to see and it would just desensitize your conscience the more, not just because of the language, but because of all the sexual innuendos, all the violence, all the drugs, the nudity problems. You are not to be seeing things like this. It desensitizes your conscience.

And when we join a church like this we make a commitment to avoid this kind of worldliness that glamorizes sin.

So that is the first thing. You protect the testimony of the congregation, promote it when you are a committed church member.

Secondly, you protect the unity of the congregation. How do you do that? Well, three ways. You act in love toward other members. You remember everyone is a family. So you act in love toward other members.

“Seeing you have purified your souls,” 1 Peter 1:22, “in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”⁸

⁸ 1 Peter 1:22.

Secondly, you pray for ministers, for office bearers, for other members. You pray for them rather than gossip about them.

Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto [one another].”⁹

Just like you wouldn’t speak ill of your dad or mom or your brother or sister—at least I hope you wouldn’t. You are in a church family. The person you are thinking about gossiping about, if he is in this church family he is your brother. She is your sister. So you pray for them rather than gossip about them. If they are really doing something wrong you go to them and loving talk to them about your concerns.

And, thirdly, you respect and follow the leaders insofar as they follow Scripture and Christ. Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.”¹⁰

So when you are a committed church member you have a testimony to promote and you have a unity to protect. And, thirdly, you have to pursue the growth of the congregation. How do you do that? Well, you pray for spiritual and numerical growth.

Paul said to the Thessalonians, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,”¹¹ that you might prosper, that you might grow, qualitatively, quantitatively.

And, secondly, you invite the unchurched to attend. If you have got some friends, young people, that’s great. Invite them to come or older folk as well. Invite your friends to come to church. Bring them along.

Luke 14:23. “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled,”¹² the Lord said unto the servant.

And then when people do come, when you see new faces warmly welcome them.

“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God,”¹³ Romans 15 verse seven says.

And, finally, when you are a committed church member you will serve the ministries of the congregation, not only the testimony and the unity and the growth, but also the ministries.

⁹ Ephesians 4:29.

¹⁰ Hebrews 13:17.

¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:12.

¹² Luke 14:13.

¹³ Romans 15:7

Now how do you do that? Well, you seek to know and to use the gifts and the talents God has given you in at least one church ministry. If you can do more without sacrificing quality family time that's fine, but use your gifts somewhere, be it in the choir, be it in stuffing envelopes, be it in visiting the sick, whatever, Sunday school outreach. You see the requests in the bulletin for more help in different things. We still have a few members—happily not too many anymore—but we still have a few members who aren't contributing anywhere to any ministry. That shouldn't be. Church membership isn't only when you are only receiving. It is also giving.

So you should ask yourself. Please ask yourself. Where can I contribute even in a small way to the church's well being?

Peter puts it this way. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."¹⁴

And, secondly, develop an attitude of servanthood, an attitude of servanthood. Philippians two.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.¹⁵

And then it goes on to talk about how Christ emptied himself and so we should be willing to serve others and sacrifice ourselves and so on.

And then, finally, by giving regularly. Church's ministries can't function as you well know without monetary gifts.

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come,"¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 16 verse two.

So in other words, each week you make money you lay aside a certain amount for the church as you are enabled. That is part of your membership commitment as well.

Now what about rights? Well, let me close with that this morning. You see, when you have responsibilities, you also have the flip side of rights. And one of your rights is that you have the right that the consistory looks after your genuine welfare. We are to care for you as fathers in the church. And so we welcome your advice. We welcome your concerns. And we will be glad to converse with you at any time about any concern that can arise in your life. We will gladly offer you biblical and spiritual counsel to the best of our ability. That is your right.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 4:10.

¹⁵ Philippians 2:3-5.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Sometimes people say, “Well, our ministers are so busy, they are so overworked. We don’t want to go to them. We don’t want to trouble them.” And so what they end up doing is they come when their marriage is in total shambles. And they should have come at the first sign of trouble.

We are never, ever, ever too busy to help you and give you spiritual counsel. When you are in trouble, just like a father in a home want his children to come to him, we want you to come to us. We want you to come to us. We will make time no matter what because we love you.

So you have that right to come for help, confidential help. We will keep it confidential and we will give you the best wisdom we can or point you in the right direction biblically as God enables us.

Second, you have the right that we set an example for you as leaders of the church in godliness, in conversation, in walk of life. That is a tremendous responsibility on our shoulders and we feel it keenly. Pray for us that God will give us grace to do just that.

And, thirdly, you have the right and the privilege of receiving elder visits every single year or every 18 months, 12 to 18 months to lovingly ask you how your soul is faring, how your family is doing. This is a tremendous privilege, not something to be afraid of, something to be coveted and enjoyed.

And, as full professing members, of course, you have the full right to the use of the sacraments providing you are not under some form of discipline or leading willfully in some known sin. And you have the right to speak your personal convictions and voice your objections over things in the church to an elder or to a minister.

And you male members, you have the right to attend, participate in congregational meetings and to vote and to have a say in the matters of the church.

Well, all these things are involved, then in church members. I hope I have showed you this morning the importance of it, the responsibilities of it, the rights of it. Let me close now by just asking you a couple of questions. What kind of a member are you? Are you exhorting, encouraging, challenging, comforting, inviting one another so much the more as you see the day approaching?

That is my first application. What kind of a member are you? Do others profit from you?

And then let me apply just a word quickly to young people. Young people, we need you. We need you not to run away. We need you to help us build this by the grace of God to be a better church. Let us know your needs. Let us know what is eating away at you. Let’s talk about it. Don’t run away. Build the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church needs you.

And, finally, thirdly, let us treasure our rich, rich, rich, godly, biblical, reformed, puritan, experiential heritage. Let's treasure that immensely. And let's not sell it for a mess of this world's pottage. But let's walk in the ways of God, seek his face, discern his will and love his truth, keep ourselves unspotted from the world and walk in godliness, loving the Lord Jesus Christ with heart and soul and mind and strength.

Jesus said to Peter, "Will you go away? Will you also go away?"

And to the disciples and Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."¹⁷

Dear congregation, in this church with all its faults and flaws you will hear the words of eternal life. Don't go away. Seek to help us build the walls of Zion that this church may increasingly reflect the New Testament apostolic pattern where the church continued steadfastly in the doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and in prayers. Amen.

¹⁷ John 6:68.