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TEACHING BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP  
AT REFORMATION BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN WETUMPKA, ALABAMA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
Brandon Ray Scroggins  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

TEACHING BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP  
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To my beloved bride and best friend, Kristy.

You are a priceless treasure from God, far more precious than jewels and  
a daily reminder of the glory of Christ and his bride—the church.

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## PREFACE

This project, along with the helpful sanctification which accompanied it, is a result of many dear influences in my life. I am utmost grateful for God who, by his grace through Christ, adopted me into his family and provided a place for me to serve in his church. He truly is still using the least and most unexpected of people to exhibit his glory through the church. He is surely worthy of the glad praise of all people.

I am abundantly thankful for the investment of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the direction of Dr. Albert Mohler, in my personal growth and pastoral ministry. The biblical conviction and personal graciousness of this community has served as a tremendous gift of God's grace in equipping me to more faithfully serve the church. I am also thankful for my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Haste, and his wife, Cheyenne, who have given much time in providing helpful direction for my own growth through this project. I am grateful for the treasure that they have been to our family throughout my doctoral studies.

I want to thank the saints at Reformation Baptist Church, who continue to demonstrate the life-transforming power of the gospel and covenant community within the context of a healthy local church. They have been a strong and sweet faith family who display the truth and grace of Christ in countless ways.

I am appreciative of my family, who have been my chief supporters in undertaking and completing this work. My parents, Ray and Teresa, have nurtured within me a deep love for Christ and his church and exemplified it before me in central ways that mark who I am today. It would not be possible to thank them enough for the eternal impact that they have made and continue to make in my life; I am deeply grateful for their overwhelming love and support. I am also continually humbled that God would

entrust the joys of Harlee, Micah, and Owen to my wife and me to train in the Lord. They have patiently supported this additional commitment upon their dad while serving as a beautiful aroma of God's grace and kindness.

I am foremost grateful for my wife, Kristy. I am humbled and awed by her love for Christ, which she faithfully demonstrates through unending care for me, our family, and our ministry. She is a living testament to—and example of—the truth of the gospel, and this project would certainly not have been possible without her sacrifice and service.

Brandon Scroggins

Wetumpka, Alabama

December 2019

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Biblical faithfulness in our worship and witness requires regenerate and healthy church membership. Many Christians fail to understand and treasure the privilege of personally identifying with the local church and corporately covenanting together in unity. However, Scripture establishes the local church as the context for Christians to worship God together, exercise biblical responsibilities toward one another, and extend a truthful, Christ-exalting witness before the world. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy so that the church in Ephesus “may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).<sup>1</sup> This project aimed to further shepherd the saints at Reformation Baptist Church (RBC) toward biblical church membership as a visible and verbal representation of the gospel of Jesus Christ before the world.

#### **Context**

Reformation Baptist Church enjoys blessings and endures challenges from historical remnants of cultural Christianity threaded throughout church life in Wetumpka, Alabama. RBC was planted in March of 2017 after a church split. The initial believers (around 115) who gathered for worship at what would become RBC stem from a sixteen-year old church that grew from a handful of members to over 400 regular attenders. Many members were previously unchurched and without Christ altogether, while others came from what was often described as bad experiences in traditional denominational

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

backgrounds. The senior pastor shepherded them for fifteen years, along with myself as a pastor for twelve years. As a faith-family, we enjoyed many years of fruitful ministry together that were committed to our local community. The impact began to overflow into missions throughout several nations. Numbers in the church building continually increased throughout a typical week as favor in the community broadened. The church simply sought to love God and people, but rapid numerical growth intensified the need for organizational structures to help clarify our theology, make wise decisions, install more leaders, distinguish and shepherd members, and grow together in unity.

As the church increased in number, important theological and ecclesiological convictions fostered division. The church was strong in genuine fellowship as well as fervent evangelism. However, this growth was undercut by a lack of meaningful church membership, unity around a strong confession of faith and covenant, biblical polity, and a culture of healthy church discipline and disciple-making. As pastors, our theology strengthened and further informed our ecclesiology. We realized that many of our church practices, though fruitful in many ways, began inviting larger numbers of people at the expense of theological and ecclesiological health. The influence of popular preachers and authors multiplied numerous unhealthy understandings of the church which included more programmatic and attractional approaches to ministry. The responsibilities of elders, need for deacons, and the role of the congregation required more clarity as regular attendance rose above three hundred. Church discipline, a necessary implication of membership, became a deep source of controversy. Unity was undermined through a variety of specialized ministries functioning more as islands. However, many believers matured as we patiently shepherded the church toward increasing health. Expository preaching coupled with personal discipleship bore fruit in the lives of many members. Yet, opposition grew toward this transition to biblical church-membership (among other issues) leading to a departure of the pastors without congregational consent.

After a painful parting, a team of leaders planted RBC with a desire for growth

in more reformed-Baptist theology. The church seemed to have a basic understanding of church membership yet needed further teaching in a biblical foundation along with its practical implications upon many aspects of church life. Many members had little to no prior experience before RBC with healthy member meetings or a congregational polity. Some struggled with the requirement of a new members class as well as the elder interview process. But, such need became increasingly clear. The church needed to learn to minister as one unified body under trusted elders. Due to concern over the doctrinal stance of our church, we needed to regularly incorporate a confession of faith into the foundation of our church to summarize our biblical beliefs. Along with a confession of faith to codify the church's profession, there was need for a church covenant to specify how we should live as a faith family. The church's confession and covenant form the bedrock of its existence. Consistent use of a confession of faith and church covenant with members unifies the church's profession. These elements guard the church from error and guide it to continual reformation according to Scripture (1 Cor 15:1-11; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 3:16).

Scripture teaches not only who God is, but how a covenant community belonging to him are to live as a result. The blessings and responsibilities of church membership further display the truth, beauty, and goodness of the gospel to one another as believers and to the world in our corporate witness. The church often absorbs the world's influence of post-modern philosophies. Hyper-individualism pervades life in a fallen world since the first sin. Consumerism drives daily life. Pragmatism is a central element in the worldview of even many church leaders who organize the church around what works rather than what is healthiest according to Scripture. Distorted concepts of love having no bounds rule the day. Christians need to see the central role of the local church for guarding the purity of our doctrine and worship, increasing the depth of our fellowship, informing the reality of our worldview, and extending the reach of our unified witness to the world. The church today needs a healthy understanding of its existence.

The church is both an organization with formal polity; it is also an organism with informal family care. Therefore, Christians need a healthy understanding of the local church's formal, as well as familial, existence.

### **Rationale**

The deficiency among Christians, including leaders, in ecclesiological understanding and healthy church life has been costly. Unbelievers often do not see an accurate picture of Christ through the local church; even church members often have little understanding of healthy church membership. However, Scripture provides the sufficient foundation for healthy church life. Therefore, this awareness warrants continual reference to the person and teaching of Christ. Christians must learn everything Jesus commanded and further work these truths out through healthy local churches (Matt 28:16-20).

RBC was in a place for reform. Such a reform invited specific instruction in multiple areas related to clearly defined membership: polity; discipline; the ordinances; priority of expositional preaching and a confession of faith; and roles of elders and deacons. These practices continually remind us of the blessing and responsibility of life together in a covenant community. RBC needed this healthier ecclesiology which is informed by a robust theology. In summary, membership marks off the church from the world to demonstrate the truth of the gospel before the world.

Current members (with prospective members at the time) were taught basic ecclesiology through a church-wide Sunday school. This class helped them to know what new members would be taught in the future since the material will be used in the ongoing membership class. Following the membership class, prospective members were interviewed by an elder to assess fundamentals of the faith (understanding of the gospel, credible profession of faith, and adherence to the confession, covenant, and governing documents of RBC). After a satisfactory interview, the prospective members were considered by the elder body for recommendation to the church for membership. Upon

affirmation, new members signed the church covenant, and were presented before the congregation (with baptism if applicable). RBC increasingly realized how the basis for these practices is thoroughly biblical.

This gospel-centered understanding and practice of local church life was intended to further picture, preserve, and proclaim the gospel through a culture of healthy disciple-making for many generations to come (1 Tim 3:15-16). May healthy church membership be a banner through which the gospel is risen high, to be proclaimed before our community and the world (Eph 2:11-4:16).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to teach biblical church membership for increasingly healthy church life at Reformation Baptist Church in Wetumpka, Alabama.

### **Goals**

The discipleship of current and prospective members at Reformation Baptist Church was guided by three goals. These goals were based on a study of ecclesiology from the exposition of Scripture along with the use of biblical, systematic, and historical theology. These goals included the following:

1. The first goal was to assess the biblical knowledge and practice of church membership among participants of a church-wide Sunday school class.
2. The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum to teach biblical ecclesiology and healthy church membership in a church-wide Sunday school class.
3. The third goal was to change knowledge and practice of church membership among participants of a church-wide Sunday school class by teaching the curriculum.

Definitive research methodology was used to evaluate the satisfactory completion of each of these three goals.<sup>2</sup> A defined means of measurement and a

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<sup>2</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the



benchmark of success was used to assess the achievement of each goal. The research methodology and instruments were used to measure the success of each goal will be detailed in the following section.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the biblical knowledge and practice of church membership among participants of a church-wide Sunday school class. This goal was measured by administering the Biblical and Healthy Church Survey (BHCS) concerning ecclesiological doctrine and practice during the RBC Sunday school hour.<sup>3</sup> This survey included two sections to gauge biblical knowledge and personal practice of church membership and related concerns. The survey was provided on paper for completion at the end of the Sunday school hour prior to the beginning of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of twenty-five individuals completed the BHCS and the inventory was analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the biblical knowledge and practice of healthy church life among individuals at RBC.

The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum to teach biblical ecclesiology and healthy church membership. This material was taught in the church-wide Sunday school gathering through one-hour sessions. This series covered the biblical development, nature, marks, polity, and mission of the church, particularly as it concerns the blessings and responsibilities of being affirmed in faith and covenanting together at RBC. This goal was measured by expert practitioners in pastoral ministry and ecclesiology from other local churches<sup>4</sup> through use of a rubric to evaluate accuracy,

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ministry project.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 1. Participants had to be at least eighteen years of age. The survey was tested through a review team as a trial to determine an approximate length of time the survey would take to complete and in order to note any questions that seemed unclear or unnecessary. The results are reported in chap. 4.

<sup>4</sup>The expert panel consisted of five Baptist pastors with at least ten years of experience in

clarity, sufficiency, and relevancy of the teaching series for healthy church membership.<sup>5</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meet or exceed the sufficiency level. Had the initial feedback yielded less than 90 percent, the curriculum would have been revised in accordance with the panel’s evaluation until the criterion meets or exceeds the sufficient level.

The third goal was to change knowledge and practice of church membership among participants of a church-wide Sunday school class by teaching the curriculum. This goal was measured by re-administering the BHCS within one week after the participants finished the class<sup>6</sup> to the same participants who previously completed it and was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post assessment scores. The *t*-test for dependent samples “indicates that a single group of the same subjects is being studied under two conditions.”<sup>7</sup> The test compares “the means from each group of scores and focuses on the difference between the scores.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

*Church membership.* For the purposes of this project, Jonathan Leeman defines church membership as “(1) a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant that consists of (2) the church’s affirmation of the Christian’s

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pastoral ministry, as well as training on the doctoral level.

<sup>5</sup>See appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup>Only those participants who were present for at least four sessions and listened to a recording of any missed messages before the post-survey was administered were recorded in post-survey results.

<sup>7</sup>Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 189.

<sup>8</sup>Salkind, *Statistics*, 191.

gospel profession, (3) the church's promise to give oversight to the Christian, and (4) the Christian's promise to gather with the church and submit to its oversight."<sup>9</sup> More simply, church membership is "a covenant between believers whereby they affirm one another's professions of faith through the ordinances and agree to oversee one another's discipleship to Christ."<sup>10</sup>

*Church discipline.* Church discipline consists of formative discipline and corrective discipline. Formative church discipline refers to the ordinary sanctification process whereby a Christian is continually taught and formed further into the image of Christ. Corrective church discipline refers to the process of Christians addressing unrepentant sin in each other's lives as outlined most clearly in Matthew 18:15-20.

*Elder-led congregationalism.* Elder-led congregationalism is a form of church government in which the gathered members of a local church acting in Jesus' name hold the final authority (under God's Word and in conjunction with the leadership of the elders) for all essential matters of their local congregation as it pertains to doctrine, membership, leadership, and discipline.<sup>11</sup>

*Church practice.* Church practice refers to the way church members relate to one another and to the church on a regular basis. Such practice can be thoughtful or habitual.

Several limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre and post surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of their knowledge and practice of church life. To

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<sup>9</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 217.

<sup>10</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding the Congregation's Authority* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 34.

<sup>11</sup>My understanding of this polity has been largely shaped by the ministry of 9Marks. For a simple summary, see "Clarifying Congregationalism," Nine Marks, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.9marks.org/article/clarifying-congregationalism/>.

mitigate this limitation, the respondents' surveys were completed anonymously through the use of a four-digit code that was used to compare the pre and post surveys of each participant. Second, the effectiveness of the class was limited by the constancy of attendance. If the participants did not attend at least four of the sessions in person, it would be difficult to measure the benefit of the curriculum. To mitigate this limitation, the audio for each week of the teaching sessions was recorded and made available so that those who are present for at least four sessions could listen to the recording of the sessions they missed and remain eligible for inclusion in the post survey results. Third, the effectiveness of the curriculum was limited by the quality of its content. To mitigate this limitation, an expert panel consisting of selected experts evaluated the curriculum by use of a specially designed rubric.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed the knowledge and practice of basic ecclesiology and church membership particularly as it concerns the local church rather than the universal church or an individual's personal spiritual disciplines. The universal church is not less important than the local church, but the importance of the local is often less emphasized and understood (especially among the western world of professing Christians) than the universal. Personal spiritual disciplines are crucial, but this project aimed to address discipleship as it relates to church membership. Second, the project was confined to a twenty-one week time frame. This gave adequate time to prepare and teach the seven-week class and conduct the post-series survey after sessions were completed. Third, the project was limited to adults (eighteen years of age and older) who regularly attend the RBC Sunday school hour to ensure that the participants evaluated represented generally committed members or prospective members and to more easily obtain the survey assessments.

### **Conclusion**

The glory of God, sanctification of believers, and salvation of sinners is at

stake in the worship and witness of the local church. RBC members must understand the blessings and responsibilities of life together in the local church. Millard Erikson states, “Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relation to others.”<sup>12</sup> The following chapters assert that church membership is required for biblical faithfulness in the lives of Christians. Chapter 2 focuses on the necessity of biblical ecclesiology and practice for healthy Christian disciple-making. Chapter 3 focuses on forming a fundamental understanding of biblical ecclesiology. Having established the biblical and theological basis for healthy church membership as well as theoretical, practical, and historical issues related to ecclesiology, chapter 4 details the process of equipping the saints at RBC through implementing this ministry project. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals with reflections on its implementation and considerations for future implementation.

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<sup>12</sup>Millard J. Erikson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1988), 1058.

CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
THE CHURCH AND HEALTHY  
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The starting place for Christian discipleship and church growth is not simply what seems right, feels comfortable, or appears to work; Scripture is the authority, and it is sufficient. This chapter expounds the biblical and theological basis for the church and healthy church membership. The exegesis of four passages complemented by many other texts validates that a biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology) and church practices is essential for healthy Christian disciple-making. First, exegesis of Matthew 16:13-20, along with Matthew 18:15-20, establishes the foundation and authority of the church. Rightly understanding the church begins with rightly understanding God and His redemptive work in Christ. Jesus founded the church as God's covenant community which rests upon a true confession of the Christ. Second, a survey of the Pastoral Epistles clarifies the priorities of a biblically-ordered church. God provides a basic organizational structure for the church with instructions in carrying out his purposes through the church. Elders and deacons along with all members have responsibilities in preserving unified biblical worship, raising up fully devoted followers of Christ, and proclaiming gospel truth. Third, exegesis of Ephesians 4:1-16 expounds on the responsibilities of church members and leaders for unified maturity in a healthy church. Finally, exegesis of Hebrews 10:19-25 urges the church toward faithfulness to God together through devotion to one another.

**The Foundation of the Church:  
Matthew 16:13-20 and 18:15-20**

Jesus establishes the foundation and authority of the church in Matthew 16:13-

20, which Matthew 18:15-20 applies with further clarity. In a day when the church is dangerously anemic, searching for innovative strategies and charismatic leaders to make Christianity relevant, the Bible teaches that the church is engineered by Christ with a divine blueprint to reflect his glory. The church is a direct result of Christ's work, which Old Testament redemptive history foreshadows. As the Gospel accounts reveal Christ, the curtains are then pulled back to see the church.

Matthew is a Gospel of fulfillment<sup>1</sup> and a “manual for discipleship.”<sup>2</sup> The hidden truth (Matt 13:35) that the righteous longed for (Matt 13:16-17) will be made plain (Matt 16:8). Matthew 16 then contains rare, theological jewels aimed at the foundations of ecclesiology. One scholar notes, “The entire narrative thus far has prepared for this climactic moment . . . Jesus' ministry moves up to this . . . recognition of the messianic nature of Jesus, then down to the cross.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Biblical Confession of Christ (Matt 16:13-17)**

In Matthew 16:13, Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi with his disciples. Jesus referred to himself by his favorite self-designation, “the Son of Man.” Though ambiguous until the end of his ministry, this term was laced with undertones of both humanity and divinity (depending on the context). Jesus demonstrated that though the Son of Man has no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20), he has authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6). Rumors about Jesus ranged from him being John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or a prophet (Matt 16:14). The identity question of the Christ must be established before that of the church.

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<sup>1</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 20.

<sup>3</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 622.

Peter often served as the representative spokesman for the twelve disciples and proclaims Jesus as “the Christ” (v. 16). The Jews hopefully anticipated God to send “the Christ” to rescue them. He would lead a greater exodus. R. T. France explains that this title’s “primary connotation would be of a ‘son of David’ who would restore the nation to the glory and independence it had known under the first David.”<sup>4</sup> In the passage that follows, Peter became a satanic hindrance to Jesus (Matt 16:21-23); therefore, Peter had to continually grow in his understanding of the truth of Christ.

Matthew emphasizes the Old Testament concept of the true God as living in distinction from lifeless gods (Isa 40:18-21; Jer 10:5). John Nolland concludes, “To refer to God as the ‘living god’ is to point to him as one to be reckoned with, who has all the powers of deity to bring to bear on the situation.”<sup>5</sup> This term implies that “God has life in and of himself, and alone gives it to others.”<sup>6</sup> Adam failed as the first son who served as the authorized representative of his divine father. Many son-like figures such as David were types of one to come. Israel is God’s son in Hosea 1:10, which Matthew 2:15 applies to the only Son *par excellence*, Jesus. He is “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16).

Matthew alone recorded what profoundly follows (Matt 16:17). Peter is singled

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<sup>4</sup>France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 618. “Christ” refers to the “Messiah” or “Anointed One” and is used by Matt sixteen times, also coupled with “Son of David” in Matt 1:1. Jesus has been referred to editorially by Matthew as ‘Christ’ (1:1, 16-18; 11:2). Herod inquired of the new born Christ (2:4). But, this is the first unmistakable proclamation of Jesus as Christ in direct speech from first-century lips in Matthew. Jesus will go on from here to refer to himself as “the Christ” (22:42; 23:10; 24:5, 23-24). Then, he is questioned by the religious establishment as such (Matt 26:63, 68) and put before Pilate as the one called the Christ (Matt 27:17, 22). Donald Hagner further explains that the ‘Son of God’ “defines the Messiah as more than a human figure, as someone who is uniquely a manifestation of God, the very agent of God who somehow participates in God’s being.” He sees this passage as the fulfillment of what God promised David in 1 Sam 7:4-16 in building a house which would be established forever. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 468.

<sup>5</sup>Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 665.

<sup>6</sup>W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew on Matthew 8—18*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 621.



out as “blessed.” *Makarios* rings a familiar tone from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7); it expresses divine approval of those living in harmony with the kingdom. Peter named Jesus as “the Son of the living God,” then Jesus named Peter as the Son of Jonah and recipient of divine blessing from Jesus’ heavenly Father. The bestowal of new names “signifies a new status and ministry,” which the New Covenant would entail.<sup>7</sup> Peter did not come to this confession through human brilliance, namely “flesh and blood.”<sup>8</sup>

Biblical confessions develop throughout Scripture from the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9) to this great confession of Peter (Matt 16:13-17). As error further infiltrated the church, this confession matured from the foundation that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 8:5-6; 12:3; Eph 4:4-5; 1 Tim 2:5) to a confession of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 3:16) to a test of biblical orthodoxy summarized through Christ in the flesh as the Son of God (1 John 4:2, 15; 2 John 7). The early church expanded this growing confession through creeds.<sup>9</sup> R. C. Sproul contends,

The church stands strong and unconquerable as long as it remains committed to its confession that Jesus is the Christ . . . [which] is the very foundation of the church. A loss of confidence as to the identity of Jesus does not disrupt merely the external trappings of the church; it disrupts the church’s foundation. We who confess the name of Christ must remain firm in our conviction that He is God in the flesh.<sup>10</sup>

Matthew then moved from the truthful confession of Christ to the confessor and community of Christ.

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<sup>7</sup>Osborne, *Matthew*, 627.

<sup>8</sup>Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 313.

<sup>9</sup>These creeds include the Apostles’ Creed (third-fourth centuries), Nicene Creed (AD 325, revised in AD 381), Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451), and Athanasian Creed (fourth-fifth centuries), then extending into Reformation confessions which later would also include the *1689 London Baptist Confession*.

<sup>10</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, St. Andrews Expository Commentary (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 196.

## **The Biblical Community of Christ (Matt 16:18-20)**

The implication of a biblical confession of Christ is the biblical community of Christ, the church, which holds kingdom authority. Jesus told Peter (meaning “rock”) that he will build his church on “this rock.” “The rock” which directly follows “Peter” clearly refers to Peter in his truthful confession. Jesus addressed Peter personally, and Jesus’ promise aligned with Peter’s name change. Yet, nothing is found here or anywhere in Scripture of the later historical development of the papacy and apostolic succession.<sup>11</sup>

Though the builders rejected him, Jesus is the chief cornerstone (Matt 21:42; 1 Pet 2:4-10; cf. Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14; 28:16) building his church (Matt 16:18) through the witness of the apostles. As William Klein argues, “The apostles and prophets, in fellowship with Christ, are the first layer of God’s new building and can justly be called its foundation.”<sup>12</sup> They were “the custodians of the special revelation that originated God’s household . . . [and] extended the ‘preaching’ of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Peter is the representative apostle as a truthful confessor of Christ; yet, all believers are living stones (as Peter penned in 1 Pet 2:4-8). The apostles laid this foundation by proclaiming Christ, planting and shepherding churches, and penning Scripture. As the apostolic era faded, apostles were not replaced because the foundation was set. The early church devoted

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<sup>11</sup>As D. A. Carson points out, Peter is the first to formally confess Jesus as the Christ. Peter plays a lead role in the early church as a sort of first among equals whom Jesus used to lay the groundwork for the church, but Scripture does not describe a successor for Peter. Carson states, “These late interpretations entail insuperable exegetical and historical problems—e.g., after Peter’s death, his ‘successor’ would have authority over a surviving apostle, John.” Also, Peter did not have any sense of infallible authority. He had deficiencies and was rebuked by Jesus (Matt 14:28-31, 15:15, 16:23) and Paul (Gal 2:11-14). He and John were sent by authority of other apostles (Acts 8:14) and were responsible to give account to the church (Acts 11:1-18). Peter had one voice at the Jerusalem Council with decisive word left to James (Acts 15:7-21). Peter disappeared after Acts 15. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 419.

<sup>12</sup>William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 80.

<sup>13</sup>Klein, *Ephesians*, 80.

themselves to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) and built on that foundation (1 Cor 3:5-17). Elders then instructed the local church according to God's Word and the work God had done through the apostles.

The first New Testament use of the Greek word for church (*ekklēsia*) is from the lips of Jesus (Matt 16:18). One's understanding of God and Christ fundamentally impacts one's understanding of the church. It made sense to the disciples' ears for the Messiah to gather a community around himself, but their ecclesiology was in infancy. Craig Blomberg clarifies, "Jesus, however, implies nothing here of any particular church structure or government; he merely promises that he will establish a gathered community of his followers . . . . Christ's 'church' will comprise *the community of people who submit to God's kingly rule.*"<sup>14</sup> The use of *ekklēsia* in Matthew 16:18 along with two related uses in 18:17 are its only uses in the Gospel accounts. Nolland maintains, "For Matthew the church can be Jesus' church because Jesus' presence effects the presence of God."<sup>15</sup>

The Greek word *ekklēsia* is often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) for the assembly of God's people, Israel. They gather to hear from and respond to him. God has been building a people upon his covenant promises after the fall and the flood, beginning especially with Abraham, to bless them so that they would be God's blessing to the world. By the first-century Roman world, *ekklēsia* was used generally for a public gathering of people for a particular purpose, often denoting a formal gathering to hear a conclusion or judge a matter. First century disciples expected some sort of restored congregation of God ushered in through messianic rule.

After Pentecost, *ekklēsia* increasingly referred to the new covenant community of God's people in Christ. Over ninety of 114 uses refer to local churches that assembled

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<sup>14</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 253.

<sup>15</sup>Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 673.

together for worship and lived in devotion to God’s Word. France explains that “for Matthew and his readers, as members of the Messiah’s *ekklēsia*, the phrase would aptly sum up their corporate identity as the new, international people of God.”<sup>16</sup> In Matthew 18:17, the church is a local assembly of believers, but in the initial instance (Matt 16:18), the universal church of all true believers is in mind. The church is not the kingdom, but a living expression of the kingdom or rule of God. As Mark Dever affirms, “Jesus is the One who is ultimately building his church (Matt 16:18). But he has graciously allowed his people to participate in the construction process, and it is therefore according to his biblical blueprint that they must build the structure and life of the church” (1 Cor 3:5-17).<sup>17</sup>

Jesus preserves the church from “the gates of hell” (Matt 16:18), namely powers of death and, by implication, Satan. The gates of the city of death and Hell will not so extend its borders to overtake the church and claim its citizens. God has made no such promise to any other institution or parachurch ministry. Blomberg notes, “Jesus encourages his followers that, irrespective of how Christianity may be attacked in a given place and time, the church universal will never be extinguished.”<sup>18</sup> The church is seen here as “rescuing people from the grip of Hades and opening up for them a future in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus is not promising to build individuals or guaranteeing any local church its existence, but to build a people set apart to display his glory.

Jesus moved from the “gates of hell” (v. 18) to the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19). Entrance to the kingdom is a scarlet thread through the Gospels. Jesus

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<sup>16</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 624.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 26.

<sup>18</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 254.

<sup>19</sup>Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 676.

proclaimed the kingdom (Mark 1:15) along with the heart and conduct of kingdom citizens (Matt 5-7). He warned that one's righteousness must exceed the religious leaders for kingdom entrance (Matt. 5:20). "Keys" denote authority to lock and unlock doors (Isa 22:20-22; Rev 1:18; cf. 9:1; 20:1). As false teachers shut the kingdom doors in people's faces through false teaching, the apostles open it by proclaiming Christ (Matt 23:13).

Ultimately, Christ holds the keys as the King who inaugurated the kingdom on earth. However, Peter (on the basis of his confession and on behalf of the apostles) is entrusted with kingdom authority as the steward of the keys to lock and unlock heavenly realms. Man's eternal destination does not rest on Peter or any man but on God. Yet as David Turner explains, "The church is the agency that extends the kingdom on earth."<sup>20</sup> It does so through opening the kingdom doors by preaching sound doctrine as well as closing off or maintaining that kingdom life through discipline.<sup>21</sup> The church (built on the apostolic foundation) renders heaven's verdict. The keys of the kingdom mark the church off from the world in reflection of God's holiness. Through the keys, the church applies the gospel to people's lives.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus moves from locking and unlocking to binding and loosing.<sup>22</sup> In a Jewish context, it may refer to the authority to interpret law and evaluate one's fidelity to it.<sup>23</sup> Satan's affliction upon people is bound and loosed (Mark 3:27; Luke 13:15). Hagner notes, "In its primary meaning, the phrase 'binding and loosing' refers to

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<sup>20</sup>David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 407.

<sup>21</sup>Turner, *Matthew*, 407.

<sup>22</sup>In Job 38:31, God binds and looses by arranging and disassembling cosmic constellations. In Jewish literature, these terms range in use from the context of declaring acceptable behavior, causing or lifting magic spells, enforcing or lifting a ban or exclusion from a community, as well as keeping or absolving vows. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 678.

<sup>23</sup>Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009), 430.

the allowing and disallowing certain conduct [which] concerns the issue of whether or not one is in proper relationship to the will of God.”<sup>24</sup> Heaven’s authority is enacted by declaring judgments or affirmations of “beliefs and actions” in regard to sin and righteousness; the implications concern “the good standing, or lack of good standing, of church members.”<sup>25</sup>

The only related reference to binding and loosing occurs two chapters later in the context of church discipline. Jesus’s teaching on the kingdom keys in Matthew 16 is exemplified by the church in Matthew 18. A clarifying shift occurs in Matthew 18 whereby it is not the apostles (who lead in the right use of the kingdom keys), but the local church which holds the authority of the kingdom keys and exercises them together as a congregation. The church assembled in Jesus’ name has the authority to affirm (and disaffirm) which confessors align with Peter’s confession of Christ. Insofar as this judgment is based on God’s Word and in line with a right confession of Christ, it stands in Heaven. Yet, the church is certainly fallible in judgment. John 20:23 promises God’s forgiveness of sin for those whom the disciples forgive as well as the withholding of God’s forgiveness from those whom the disciples withhold. Only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, 10), but God charged the church to discern and declare who bears the fruit of God’s forgiveness.<sup>26</sup> The church affirms those who display a credible confession of Christ (with lips and life) as loosed from sin. However, the church affirms those who profess Christ but live in persistent unrepentance as unbelievers bound in sin. John Calvin explained that binding refers to excommunication and loosing as reception into church membership: “The church binds whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into

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<sup>24</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, 473.

<sup>25</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 651.

<sup>26</sup>Also see Acts 5:1-11, 8:20-24; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1; 1 Tim 1:20, 5:24; 2 Tim 2:24-25; Tit 3:10; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 15; cf. 1 John 2:19.

everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him whom it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> God promises his presence during such experiences of church discipline.

Matthew 18 demonstrates the church’s use of the keys.<sup>28</sup> The church opens the kingdom to those who share Peter’s confession (by affirming and including them) and closes it to those who do not (by denying and excluding them; cf. Matt 10:14-15). When church discipline is exercised according to God’s will, it receives heaven’s blessing.<sup>29</sup> D. A. Carson remarks, “The church of Jesus Christ is more than an audience. It is a group with confessional standards.”<sup>30</sup> Wayne Grudem explains, “Jesus promises to give not only the authority to open the door of entrance into the kingdom, but also some administrative authority to regulate conduct of people once they are inside.”<sup>31</sup> Soberingly, to be outside the church ordinarily pictures being outside Christ.<sup>32</sup> Individuals are initially

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<sup>27</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 4.11.2, 1214. Reformation theology recovered church discipline as a mark of a true church. Martin Luther said, “God’s people, or holy Christians, are recognized by the office of the keys exercised publicly. That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew, if a Christian sins, he should be reproved. If he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved. That is the office of the keys.” Martin Luther, *On the Councils of the Church*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 41, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 153.

<sup>28</sup>Matt 18:15-20 is directed to the church (not the apostles or leaders alone) gathered in Jesus’ name. When the keys are enacted, it is “to the church” that the matter must be told. It is the “you” and “two or three gathered in my name” who are entrusted with the keys. Later, most of the New Testament letters are addressed to local church bodies who are responsible as a local assembly for doctrine, installing qualified leaders, receiving and disciplining members, sending out missionaries, ordering their own affairs, judging matters of members, and spreading true worship of God through global disciple-making.

<sup>29</sup>Matt 16:19 is debated as “will have been bound/loosed” or “will be bound/loosed.” There is theological concern to preserve God as initial actor which the church reflects rather than vice versa.

<sup>30</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 374.

<sup>31</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 890-91.

<sup>32</sup>Certainly, there are unbelievers in the local church and believers outside the local church, but the expectation in Scripture is that Christians are church members and church members are Christians.

affirmed by the church as believers and counted as church members upon their baptism. Church members are then continually affirmed through the Lord's Supper as a body of regenerate believers.

After the climax of revelation, Matthew unexpectedly records Jesus silencing the disciples from telling anyone that Jesus "was the Christ" (Matt 16:20). Thereby, Jesus protected against premature messianic proclamation in an age when "Christ" or "Messiah" often carried misleading connotations. As redemptive history continued to unfold, Jesus would be further distinguished not simply as a political deliverer, but as the Son of God who would defeat sin and establish God's righteousness among creation. Jesus ensured that faith and repentance, not political or selfish gain, were the grounds of conversion. After the resurrection, the keys are enacted in the commission to proclaim Christ to all nations (28:16-20). This mission, like discipline (18:20), includes the promise of God's presence. The church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets is authorized to represent heaven in proclaiming Christ and affirming into membership those confessing Christ with regenerated lives. Thereby, God promises to build and bless his church in kingdom work.

### **The Priorities of a Biblically Ordered Church: The Pastoral Epistles**

"Since the church is God's creation," John Hammett says, "it must be ordered and operated according to his instructions."<sup>33</sup> In the Pastoral Epistles, the priorities of a biblically-ordered church are clarified. Paul was likely released from his Roman imprisonment in Acts 28 and revisited cities from his missionary journeys.<sup>34</sup> He charged

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Exclusion from the church and its ordinances signifies exclusion from Christ himself and vice versa.

<sup>33</sup>John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 15.

<sup>34</sup>George Knight generally summarizes the dating ranges attested by many conservative evangelical scholars stating that "1 Timothy and Titus fall somewhere between Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome (as early as 61 or as late as 63) and the date of 2 Timothy (as early as 64 and as late



Timothy with ministry in Ephesus, which was a significant cultural center in Asia (Acts 18:19-21; 20:17-38; Rev 2:1-7). Paul also charged Titus with ministry in Crete, which was one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean. By addressing leaders, Paul instructs the entire church. The true church is a family and foundation centered upon truth which must prioritize sound doctrine, biblical regeneration, healthy membership, and qualified leadership.

### **The Church: Family and Foundation of Truth (1 Tim 3:14-16)**

Donald Guthrie concludes of 1 Timothy 3:14-16, “This section marks a pause in the apostle’s instructions in order to put them in a right perspective, to give the reason for them, and to give a reminder of the wonder of the Christian revelation which must never be divorced from practical arrangements.”<sup>35</sup> These verses, sandwiched in the middle of 1 Timothy, indicate the heart of the church’s ministry (v.15) and message (v.16). Paul expressed his hope to come to Timothy soon but wrote during the delay to teach Timothy how church members must “behave” or “conduct” themselves. Philip Towner explains that this refers to “a prescribed manner of living (i.e., Christian living) in which ‘conduct’ is to assume a specific shape because of theological realities.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1 Timothy 3:15, the church is expressed as the family of God, place of God’s presence, and guardian of truth. I. Howard Marshall notes, “Two further descriptions of the church will elaborate on the primary one: ‘the household of God.’”<sup>37</sup>

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as 67), i.e., from the latter part of the early 60s to the mid-60s.” George W. Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2013), 54.

<sup>35</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 101.

<sup>36</sup>Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 273.

<sup>37</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T

In this phrase, Paul may be referring to a “house” with implications of the church as the New Testament fulfillment of the temple where God manifests his presence, especially since the following imagery of “pillar” and “buttress” indicate imagery of a building.<sup>38</sup> However, the prevalent image in the Pastorals of relationships in an intimate family and conduct in an ordered household is more fitting. Christians are members of God’s house bearing mutual responsibility, submitting to authority, and behaving in accordance with the gospel as faithful stewards of the truth. Church leaders must prove faithful as caretakers in their own household before caring for God’s household (1 Tim 3:5-6; 12). Members of the church are to be treated and cared for as family (1 Tim 5:1-2; cf. Titus 2; Gal 6:10).

First Timothy 3:15 shifts from “the household of God” to “the church of the living God.” Marshall explains, “On the one hand, within God’s household there is a standard of behavior and responsibilities which must be acknowledged. On the other hand, where God dwells there is salvation.”<sup>39</sup> George Knight summarizes such implications stating,

The seriousness concerning the conduct is determined by the fact that the place of such conduct is the church, which is the possession and dwelling place of the living God (3:15c). The living God has established his church to display the embodiment of his truth (3:15d). The truth that the church publicly acknowledges and from which its godliness derives is manifested in the revelation of Christ Jesus (3:16).<sup>40</sup>

Paul refers to local churches, each of which is a visible manifestation of the universal church while being “part of a larger whole,” according to William Mounce.<sup>41</sup> Those who

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& T Clark, 2006), 273.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; Heb 3:6, 10:21; 1 Pet 2:5, 4:17.

<sup>39</sup>Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 509-10.

<sup>40</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 178.

<sup>41</sup>Mounce notes, “The lack of an expressed subject for . . . ‘to conduct,’ the anarthrous constructions, and the central role of the paragraph in the corpus suggest that Paul is stating a general truth applicable to all churches.” William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 221. In addition, all three uses of *ekklesia* in the Pastorals (1 Tim 3:5,

make up the church are assembled not based on similar preferences, but as those called to be the possession and dwelling place of God. Throughout redemptive history, the sovereign King of Heaven is the “living God” in contrast to dead idols (Isa 40:18-21; Jer 10:5). He is “the originator and sustainer of life.”<sup>42</sup> As Jesus is “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), Jesus’ covenant community is “the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15; cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 3:12, 9:14, 10:31). This designation highlights “the sense of God’s reality and presence in the community” and “stresses the church’s unique identity as that assembly of people who enjoy the presence of God in its midst.”<sup>43</sup> God’s presence possessing and indwelling his church indicates a living, spiritual union whereby God’s people belong to him and God identifies himself with them. As a concrete realization of the universal church, the local church is called to be “worthy of [God’s] name” as “a living community of saints pervaded by the presence of the living God.”<sup>44</sup> David Platt proclaims,

The church . . . is the place where God lives and dwells and manifests His presence. Consider how significant this makes our weekly gatherings: the church gathers and the Lord, the living God, is among us. We are His house, worshipping in His presence, listening to His Word, and partaking of the elements at His table. How awesome is the privilege of being the dwelling place of God’s presence!<sup>45</sup>

The church not only has the attention of God but is also the very dwelling place of God.

Finally, the church is not only the “household of God,” and “the church of the living God,” but is also pictured in architectural terms as “a pillar and buttress of the truth.” In the Pastorals, the “truth” refers to the objective content of Christianity and often

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15, 5:16) refer to the order and behavior of God’s people.

<sup>42</sup>Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 509.

<sup>43</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 274.

<sup>44</sup>Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace, 2001), 155-56.

<sup>45</sup>David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 68.

more specifically, the gospel. The word for “pillar” or “column” was used figuratively of the cloud of God’s presence (Exod 13:21-22) as well as literally of Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 7:15). “Pillar” or “column” is used in the New Testament only figuratively expressing strength and permanence. Founded on truth (Matt 16:13-20), the chief concern of the church is upholding the truth by preserving and proclaiming it and conducting itself in accordance with it. The word for “buttress” expresses “firmness and steadfastness.”<sup>46</sup> The Ephesian church, like every true local church, is a guardian and steward of truth. The Protestant Reformers understood the church as not the creator, but a creation of the Word of God. This “living community of saints pervaded by the presence of the living God,” Patrick Fairburn asserts, “holds and bears up in the world, that with which His name and glory are peculiarly identified—the truth as it is in Jesus.”<sup>47</sup>

A healthy church purely holding to undiluted truth is a clear window for the world to hear the gospel and see its effects (1 Tim 1:5; Titus 1:1, 3:8). Remarkably, the local church (and no other organization or ministry) is entrusted with preserving and proclaiming the truth. Knight concludes, “Timothy and the church will conduct their lives appropriately if they remember that they are the home built and owned by God and indwelt by him as the living one, and also remember that they are called on to undergird and hold aloft God’s truth in word and deed.”<sup>48</sup> Local churches are often under fire (Titus 1:10), yet the foundation stands firm (2 Tim 2:19).

First Timothy 3:16 shifts from the significance of the church to a confession of

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<sup>46</sup>Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 510. The word is used only here in the New Testament (with a related word in 1 Cor 7:37, 15:58; Col 1:23) and other later Christian writings. It is difficult to clarify whether the intended idea is more of an underlying foundation or a protective wall.

<sup>47</sup>Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 156. Fairburn warns lest the church supplant rather than support the truth: “For the truth is not of the church’s making, but of God’s revealing: she has it, not as of her own, but from above; and has it not to alter or modify at her own will, but to keep as a sacred treasure for the glory of God and the good of men. And if she should anyhow corrupt or lose hold of this truth, she so far ceases to be the house of God” (157).

<sup>48</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 182.

the supremacy of Christ upon which the church stands. Peter's confession of Christ is now further expounded (Matt 16:13-20).<sup>49</sup> In his letter to Timothy, Paul summarizes the true gospel in six brief stanzas from the revelation of Christ's life, proclamation and belief upon Him in the world, and exaltation in glory. Marshall explains, "This piece is a celebration of Christ in six balanced lines" with majestic, rhythmic parallelism.<sup>50</sup> The impressive poetic structure indicates an early church hymn or confession. The mystery of redemptive history has been revealed, namely Christ in union with His church and the inclusion of Gentiles.<sup>51</sup> The "mystery" must be held by qualified deacons (3:9). "Godliness" is prevalent in the pastorals—God-exalting behavior produced by doctrine. Knight declares, "It is this great mystery of godliness that the church confesses, . . . holds aloft, and that shapes the church's conduct before the living God. The preceding (and following) instructions have as their theological basis this great truth concerning the cosmic Christ who is the Lord and Savior of his church."<sup>52</sup> This confession celebrates Christ who was exhibited on earth and exalted in glory; therefore, "a Hebrew Christ had become a Christ for the nations."<sup>53</sup>

Mounce summarizes, "These rules and instructions are to be followed not for their sake along but because there is a greater reality at stake: the health of the gospel."<sup>54</sup> God has his name on the church and his Spirit in the church. Therefore, Paul highlights

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<sup>49</sup>Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Timothy and Titus*, 66.

<sup>50</sup>Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 499. Though several options are proposed, many scholars lean toward a structure of three sets of couplets with a correlation between heaven and earth. It seems to present a chronological arrangement of the historical and theological implications of Christ. Paul may have contrasted the Ephesian confession "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28, 34; cf. 19:27, 35) with this confession of the one and true Sovereign Savior. The missing cross and resurrection are assumed.

<sup>51</sup>1 Tim 3:9; cf. Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7, 4:1; Eph 3:4-13, 5:32, 6:19; Col 1:26-27, 2:2, 4:3.

<sup>52</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 186.

<sup>53</sup>Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 103.

<sup>54</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 219.

vital areas throughout the Pastorals in which the church is to reflect these truths in how it is ordered.

### **Sound Doctrine: Scripture and the Gospel (1 Tim 1:3-11; 2 Tim 3)**

Paul previously warned of wolves ravaging the church that Christ purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:17-38). By the writing of 1 Timothy, false doctrine and mythical speculations gave way to dissension (1 Tim 1:3-4; cf. 6:3-4).<sup>55</sup> Sound doctrine, however, produces love from a pure heart and good conscience (1 Tim 1:5). Though the church in Ephesus would hold fast to sound doctrine, ironically, they would have to be called back to this love which should spring from truth as so permeated throughout the letter of Ephesians (Rev 2:1-7; cf. Eph 4:15-16). Yet, false teachers wandered into “vain discussions” as those arrogant while ignorant (1:6-7). They misused God’s law, which is meant to reveal God’s holiness and convict of sin “contrary to sound doctrine” (1:8-11).

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul diagnoses depravity (3:1-9). The weak are led away by various pleasures, and despite their learning, never come to the knowledge of truth (3:7). The heart of man is indulged in sin and amused by superficiality while maintaining an illusion of godliness (3:5). Though wickedness prevails in popular culture, righteousness is to be the banner of the church. Scripture, divinely inspired and inerrant, will “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:13). Scripture is sufficient to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness, completing God’s people for God’s work (3:16-17); it is sufficient to conform us to what God intended, namely Christ.

The depth and truthfulness of the doctrine that is taught (whether implicitly or explicitly) will manifest itself in the health of the church. Not only the *bene esse* (well-being), but the very *esse* (being) of a local church depends upon a biblical understanding

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<sup>55</sup>Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31) in the early 50s AD, then wrote 1 Timothy approximately ten years later.

and proclamation of sound doctrine. From the midst of the contemporary cultural moment when sound doctrine is minimized, accused of being in opposition to love, and traded for innovative schemes to grow the church, Scripture is sufficient to grow the church. The truth of God arouses depravity, but it produces life in God's people.

**Biblical Regeneration: Salvation and Sanctification (1 Tim 1:12-20; Titus 3)**

Biblical regeneration is the aim of doctrine. Paul magnifies the twin themes of truth and godliness as an interwoven scarlet thread throughout the Pastorals (Titus 3:8). If salvation is found anywhere, it reigns among the household and church of the living God, the pillar and buttress of truth. And salvation leads to a life of sanctification.

In extending sovereign grace to sinners through Christ, God is magnified as worthy of all glory (1 Tim 1:13-17). However, Paul cast those who rejected God's truth and grace outside the church, God's realm of spiritual protection and nourishment (1 Tim 1:20; Titus 3:10-11). Until they give credible profession of the truth, Paul's only affirmation of these men is that they are bound in their sins and living outside kingdom life. Therefore, a rightly ordered church chiefly prioritizes credible professions of faith, which is obtained by God's grace and demonstrated in sanctification.

In Titus 3, Paul expounds the testimony of church members. They "were once" slaves to sin (3:3) until God in "goodness and loving kindness" (3:4), "saved" them by his mercy apart from any human merit or work (3:5). Believers are "justified," which is God's act of legally declaring the rebel sinner a righteous saint (3:7). Yet, sinners need regeneration. This awakening to spiritual life by the Holy Spirit is promised in the New Covenant; believers would be indwelt by the Spirit, renewed with love for God, and moved to gladly obey him (Ezek 36:26-27). The new birth is essential for entrance into the kingdom (John 3:5). Consequently, those who have "believed in God" are to "devote themselves to good works" (Titus 3:8, 14). God's people, knowing slavery to sin and God's gracious rescue of undeserving sinners (3:2-7), must speak truthfully, act

graciously, submit humbly, respond caringly, and live fruitfully (3:1-2, 14).

A biblically-ordered church strives for purity so that God's holiness reflects to the world through sanctified lives. A fundamental understanding of the gospel, credible profession of faith, and commitment to truth are essential for affirmation into local church fellowship. God's glory is therefore at stake in regenerate church membership.

### **Healthy Membership: Discipleship and Discipline (1 Tim 2, 5, 6:1-2; Titus 2)**

Separated from error, the church unites in truth by discipleship and discipline. Rather than devising small group ministries segregated by age and life status, Scripture provides the blueprint for organic ministry. The men of the church are urged to pray with pure hearts (1 Tim 1:8-15). Not only proclaiming Christ (1 Tim 2:4-7), but prayer for all people is essential. Women adorn themselves with modesty, self-control, good works, and submissiveness. Rather than exercise authority over the church (1 Tim 2:12-14; cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35), they teach other women (Titus 2:4) and children (2 Tim 1:5).

Church members should treat older men respectfully as fathers, younger men courteously as brothers, older women honorably as mothers, and younger women graciously as sisters (5:1). Widows are to be appropriately cared for, honored and encouraged in fruitful ministry (5:3-16). Exemplary widows are those who have given their lives to raising children, showing hospitality, and caring for saints and the afflicted. Believers must provide for their own relatives (5:4, 8, 16). Elders are to be carefully selected, and those exemplary should be honored as well as protected from unverified charges (5:17-25).

Older men must "be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness" (3:2). They teach younger men to be self-controlled. Older women must "be reverent . . . not slanderers or slaves to much wine" (2:3). They disciple younger women "to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands" (2:4-5). Servants submit to their



masters (2:9-10; cf. 1 Tim 6:1-2). Older men (1 Tim 5:1), elders (1 Tim 5:20), and all members are rebuked appropriately. The kingdom keys are exercised by the church to put the unrepentant outside the visible contours of the faith (church) to sustain the purity of the church and to provoke repentance. The gospel is pictured and proclaimed through such healthy church life.

**Qualified Leadership: Elders and Deacons (1 Tim 3-4, 6, 2 Tim 1-2, 4; Titus 1)**

After an extensive treatment of theological tragedy and spiritual anemia, Paul highlights the need for leadership, namely elders and deacons. Elders are men with a well-ordered mind, disciplined life, teachable disposition, caring heart, and heavenly orientation (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). They open their lives to others. As “God’s steward” (Titus 1:7), he must exemplify godly care of those under his provision. He must not be a “recent convert,” but “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim 3:6-7). He must hold the truth firmly with ability to teach and graciously correct his opponents (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim 2:24-25).

Elders are to be disciplined in godliness, trained in truth, anchored in hope set upon the Savior, and continually putting such before the church (1 Tim 4:1-10). At the center of the elder’s work is Scripture (1 Tim 4:11-16; 2 Tim 4:1-5). He must persevere under persecution as an evangelist proclaiming Christ (2 Tim 4:5) and a warrior pleasing his master (2 Tim 2:1-7). Timothy was to remain faithful before God to his call (1 Tim 6:11-16) as he guarded not only his own heart, but the gospel itself (1 Tim 4:16, 6:20-21; 2 Tim 1:12, 14). The man of God must be content with godliness (1 Tim 3:6-10), rich in good works, and charge others to do the same (1 Tim 6:3-5, 6:17-19). Paul warns that as multitudes abandon the faith (2 Tim 1:15-18), the man of God is to employ his giftedness without fear or shame (2 Tim 1:3-12). Such men should be honored with emulation, support and submission (1 Cor 9:3-11; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17).

Proto-deacons were chosen by the church to promote unity (Acts 6:1-7).<sup>56</sup> They freed the apostles to focus on preaching and prayer. Titus does not mention deacons presumably since the young Cretan churches first needed elders. Deacons must exercise dignity, self-control, and leadership over their own homes. Though not required to teach, they must firmly hold the gospel with a lifestyle that reflects it (1 Tim 3:8-13). Scripture gives no teaching or governing authority to deacons. Yet, deacons serving well “gain a good standing [with] great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:13).

As John Stott notes, “The church must organize itself in such a way as to express its understanding of itself. Its structures must reflect its theology.”<sup>57</sup> May the church’s worship and discipleship overflow in global witness for the One worthy of all glory.

**Responsibilities of Members and Leaders for  
Unified Maturity in a Healthy Church:  
Ephesians 4:1-16**

With the foundation and authority of the church established in Matthew and the priorities of a healthy church clarified in the Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians is a general letter summarizing the doctrine of salvation that Paul then applies to the church.<sup>58</sup> Ephesians relates the believer’s union with Christ through the communion of the church.

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<sup>56</sup>These men seem to have served in a manner that prefigured the later office of deacon.

<sup>57</sup>John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 55.

<sup>58</sup>Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (more than any other single place) evangelizing the community, suffering persecution, and shepherding the church (Acts 20:31). Later in Acts 28, Paul is imprisoned in Rome with freedom to receive visitors. It is traditionally held that Paul wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) during this time; Ephesians was likely circulated to local churches around the general area of Ephesus.

## **Ephesians and the Church**

Ephesians presents the church as a universal household of adopted sons (1:3, 5, 17, 4:6, 5:8, 20, 6:23), an embassy of kingdom citizens (2:19; 5:5), a body over which Christ prevails as head with individual members maturing together in love (1:22-23, 2:15-16, 3:6, 4:4, 12-16, 5:23-24, 30), the submissive bride of Christ which is sacrificially sanctified by him (5:23-33), and God's temple radiating his glory (2:21-22). Christians therefore are "members one of another" (4:25). The church is built on the foundation of Christ and apostolic ministry (2:20); it is comprised of those indwelt and joined together by the Holy Spirit. As a result, Ephesians 2:11-22 has been called "perhaps the single most significant ecclesiological text in the NT."<sup>59</sup> Christ destroyed all hostility not only between the believer and God, but among all believers (Jew and Gentile). These "citizens" and family members are growing into God's "holy temple." Through the church, God demonstrates his manifold wisdom to heavenly powers (Eph 3:10). Paul prays for God's glory in the church throughout all nations as well as all generations (3:21). In Ephesians 5, the truth and beauty of Christ's relationship to the church is practically proclaimed through the covenant of marriage (5:22-23). The church then must be holy in all aspects of its members' hearts, homes, work and communities.

From the privileges of sovereign grace (Eph 1-3) flow gospel responsibilities. In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul expounds responsibilities of members and leaders for unified maturity in a healthy local church. Healthy church members pursue holy unity as a covenant community (vv.1-6), are equipped for gospel ministry under biblical authority (vv.7-12), and grow in Christian maturity through mutual accountability (vv.13-16).

### **Pursue Holy Unity as a Covenant Community (Eph 4:1-6)**

Paul urges believers to pursue holy unity as a covenant community (vv. 1-6).

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<sup>59</sup>Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 123.

They should conduct themselves consistently with who they are in Christ as the Apostles' Creed puts it, "one holy and catholic church." Diversity and differences must not divide them, but rather magnify their commonality in Christ and the glory of the one uniting them together.

First of all, the church must walk in humility recognizing their own position before God. Humility sacrifices one's own gain for others' good. Paul also highlights gentleness with the modification of "all." This term "does not imply weakness, but self-control and a tempered spirit," as Clinton Arnold explains.<sup>60</sup> Given God's patience with them, Christians must also be patient with one another. Patience refers to a "long temper," can have "the sense of steadfastness or forbearance," and makes allowance for the shortcomings of others.<sup>61</sup> Finally, believers must bear with one another in love by "tolerating the faults and the sometimes grating personality quirks of others in the church" (Eph 1:4, 3:17-19; Col 3:12-15; 1 Pet 4:8).<sup>62</sup> Hoehner explains, "This kind of love seeks the highest good . . . [and] the will of God in the one loved."<sup>63</sup> Paul moves toward the summation of these virtues in verse three: "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (cf. Col 3:12-15) which expresses intentional effort. This unity (cf. Eph 4:13) is a spiritual reality in Christ (Eph 2:14-18; cf. 4:13) through the Spirit, but they have a responsibility to display it. Jesus prayed for the elect to know Christ, thereby being bound in unity in him as a reflection of Trinitarian unity (John 17:3, 11, 21-24). The word translated "bond" refers to a fastener. As sin (in hostility) divided

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<sup>60</sup>Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 230.

<sup>61</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 236.

<sup>62</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 231.

<sup>63</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 510.

them, so now in Christ, the Spirit (in peace) has united them. By living at peace through the gracious treatment of one another (humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance), believers protect the unity established by the Holy Spirit.

Paul continues with a Trinitarian confession that provides the theological basis for unified covenant community (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-31). “One body” refers not to a theoretical possibility, but the reality of the universal church, which is expressed in the local church. Having renounced all further religious allegiances, all Christians have one and the same Spirit indwelling them, authorizing them before God, sealing them, and uniting them in the body (Eph 1:13-14, 2:18, 22, 4:3; cf. Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). The Spirit alone creates the unity (4:3) of “one body” by which believers are bound to one another through participation in “one Spirit” (4:4). Christ is not divided and neither should the local church (cf. 1 Cor 1:12, 3:4-6). Once hopeless (2:12), believers “were called to one hope” (1:12, 18; cf. Col 1:23, 27) of fully receiving Christ and Christ fully receiving them. The hope of Ephesians is the submission of all things before Christ; the present unity of the church under Christ’s rule is a visible reminder of this future reality.<sup>64</sup>

Completing the previous reference to the Spirit (4:3) and the following reference to the Father (4:6), Jesus is our “one Lord” in verse 5. Christians live under the lordship of only one; they are united in trusting and treasuring the rule of their King who “stands at the center of God’s purposes for the universe (3:11).<sup>65</sup> Believers are bound by truth centered in Christ that they affirm (4:13) in “one faith.” All Christians are singularly identified with Christ and baptized by one Spirit into the church (1 Cor 1:13-15, 12:13; Gal 3:27-28). Paul does not speak of elaborate organizational unity, but the spiritual unity permeating all true believers.

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<sup>64</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 239.

<sup>65</sup>Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 257.

Finally, there is “one God and Father of all” (cf. 1 Cor 8:5-6). William Klein explains, “If there is only one God who is Father of all things, and the one whose presence nothing eludes, then, of all people, Christians, who readily acknowledge his supremacy, ought to submit to his will and reflect in their relationships with each other their unity under his regal Fatherhood.”<sup>66</sup> United in such essentials, Christians preserve this unity in reflection of what has bound them (cf. 1 Cor 14:24-25). Lincoln summarizes, “The Church is not a chance collection of individuals; it has a unity already given by God’s Spirit, and the top priority on its agenda must be to preserve this.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Equipped for Gospel Ministry under Biblical Authority (Eph 4:7-12)**

In Ephesians 4:7-12, healthy church members are equipped for gospel ministry under biblical authority. Having emphasized unity, Paul transitions to highlight diversity of the body with each part in his own role collectively promoting the growth and unity of the whole (cf. Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12-14; 1 Pet 4:10-11). Christ gave (or “the Spirit gave,” per 1 Cor 12:11) each within the body a measure of grace in giftedness, which is variously (though not randomly) and sufficiently assigned (Rom 12:3-6; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 14-20; 1 Pet 4:10). As Klein asserts, “Unity does not mean uniformity—that the church consists of a cadre of clones.”<sup>68</sup> Far from provoking either pride or jealousy, God’s sovereign assignment of the gifts should provoke gratitude that each has a meaningful contribution in a different way for the glory of God, growth of the church, and witness to the nations.

Referring to Scripture (“it says”) as recounted in Psalm 68:18, Paul likens Christ to a triumphant warrior parading in a procession of conquest after defeating the

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<sup>66</sup>Klein, *Ephesians*, 109.

<sup>67</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 267.

<sup>68</sup>Klein, *Ephesians*, 110.

odious enemy, taking captives, strengthening his people, and sharing the spoils of victory (vv. 8-10; cf. Col 2:15).<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, Christ is “extending His reign over all His enemies” through the “extension of the church.”<sup>70</sup> Toward this end, the reigning Savior gifts the church with leaders in distinctive roles. Apostles and prophets (4:11; cf. Eph 2:20, 3:5; 1 Cor 12:28) are the foundation of the church. With the foundation laid and canon closed, these roles were no longer necessary and ceased. More formally, “evangelists” proclaim Christ where he is not named and establish the church (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). Paul also lists “shepherds” or “pastors” and “teachers” which likely indicates “overlapping functions;” all pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors with shepherding responsibilities.<sup>71</sup> Pastors give themselves to teaching and preaching, prayer, leading corporate worship (including the ordinances), disciple-making and shepherding the church. “Teachers” give instruction in sound doctrine and godliness. As disciples are made, they must be taught to observe all Christ commanded (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 20:27).

The aim of the leaders’ work is “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (v. 12). Klein explains that “the second phrase modifies the first (i.e., the job of these gifted leaders, especially local pastors, is to prepare the saints to serve) and the third results from this preparation so that the body can be edified.”<sup>72</sup> This is the only specific New Testament use of the word for “equip.” In this context, “equip” simply means to fully furnish or sufficiently prepare.<sup>73</sup> The closest reference is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 of the “man of God” who is “equipped for every good work” through scriptural instruction and

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<sup>69</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1984), 342.

<sup>70</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 255.

<sup>71</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250. This marks the only use of “shepherd” or “pastor” in the formal sense of church leadership, but the concept is pervasive.

<sup>72</sup>Klein, *Ephesians*, 116.

<sup>73</sup>Klein, *Ephesians*, 116; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 263.

application. All church members are charged with “ministry,” which is a general reference to serving. John MacArthur stresses,

No pastor, or even a large group of pastors, can do everything a church needs to do. No matter how gifted, talented, and dedicated a pastor may be, the work to be done where he is called to minister will always vastly exceed his time and abilities. His purpose in God’s plan is not to try to meet all those needs himself but to equip the people given into his care to meet those needs.<sup>74</sup>

Leaders therefore equip members to minister in and through the church. Christians in a healthy church are not entertained consumers, but equipped servants. No one individual receives all of the gifts. God designed the church to be dependent upon him through mutual dependence upon one another so that together they grow in knowledge of the truth and conformity to Christ.

### **Grow in Christian Maturity through Mutual Accountability (Eph 4:13-16)**

Paul continues in Ephesians 4:13-16 teaching that healthy church members grow in Christian maturity through mutual accountability. Paul specifies what the church is to attain (v. 13), grow out of (v. 14), and grow into together (vv. 15-16).

Verse 13 highlights the central goal: corporate maturity in Christ (“we all attain”). The church is *already* bound in “one faith” (v. 5), but the full, practical manifestation of their “unity of the faith” (v. 13) is *not yet*. The church is to know Christ, the only true God (John 17:3; Phil 3:10) and grow in “the knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13; cf. Eph 4:20) with all its accompanying implications. As “one new man” (2:15), the church aims to become a “mature man” (v. 13b) through the applied wisdom of God’s word (cf. Matt 5:48; Col 1:28; 1 Cor 3:1, 13:11; Heb 5:13-14).

Paul continues to show what they should grow out of and how maturity leads to stability. The imagery transitions from human development to windy waters to crafty

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<sup>74</sup>John MacArthur, *Ephesians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 154. He adds, “The growth of the church is not a result of clever methods, but of every member of the Body fully using his spiritual gift in close contact with other believers” (155).



schemes. The singularly-unified mature man (v. 13b) is contrasted with the plural immature infants (v. 14a). Frank Thielman explains, “A church moving toward full unity with Christ is leaving behind immaturity, with its intertwined characteristics of ignorance (cf. 1 Cor 13:11, 14:20; Rom 2:20; Col 1:28), gullibility (cf. Heb 5:12-14), and individualism (cf. 1 Cor 2:6, 3:1-4; Phil 3:15).”<sup>75</sup> Shifting metaphors, Paul conveys that apart from maturity in Christ reflected in unity as a church, Christians are left open to the reckless assault of relentless winds and waves. Undeveloped children and undirected waves are susceptible to exploitation (shifting metaphors again) “by the teaching of fakes who are playing dishonest games with serious religious matters.”<sup>76</sup> The artillery for maturity consists of “speaking the truth in love.” No longer deluded by error, they are to be a truthfully confessing church. As Arnold explains, the idea here is “accepting the truth of the gospel, speaking it out loud in the corporate gatherings of worship, talking about it with fellow believers, and upholding it firmly” (2 Tim 2:24-25).<sup>77</sup> Believers are to uphold God’s Word with sacrificial concern for the well-being of others (Rom 12:9-21; 1 Thess 3:12-13).<sup>78</sup> Like a properly developing child, the healthy church progressively matures in every aspect of its body; it increasingly reflects the fullness of Christ, whom is the essence of both truth and love (v. 13c, 15; cf. 1:10, 23; 3:19, 4:13).

Finally, Lincoln explains that “ecclesiology remains determined and measured by Christology . . . . The Church’s growth is not being thought of in terms of quantity, a numerical expansion of its membership, but in terms of quality, an increasing

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<sup>75</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283.

<sup>76</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283.

<sup>77</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 269.

<sup>78</sup>Arnold warns that “believers can be so passionate about ensuring fidelity to right doctrine that they develop a critical and mean spirit that is destructive to community life” or “so committed to loving one another that they forget that the Christian community is founded on a common set of convictions that ardently need to be maintained and confessed.” Arnold, *Ephesians*, 276.

approximation of believers to Christ.”<sup>79</sup> Enabled by the grace of God to each member (v. 7) along with the equipping ministry of God-gifted leaders (v. 11), all working together in unison as a whole, the church takes active responsibility “to build itself up in love.” Christ is the one who provides such means to make the body grow (v. 16). Every member has a distinct role with grace from God to carry it out; yet, none of them matter apart from holding fast to the head and the increase that he alone provides (Col 2:19).

Paul refers to “love with truth that enables individual believers to grow harmoniously with other members of the body with the resulting growth of the whole body.”<sup>80</sup> God intends for Christians to grow in covenantal Christian community. The very essence of love requires commitment to others. As the members of the physical body must grow in proper proportion to one another, so in the spiritual body of Christ, each part must mature to its intended size and needs the other parts to do so. Each part must grow and take its proper place not only for its own sake but for the benefit of the whole.<sup>81</sup> Paul takes the pulse of the local church and measures its health based on its union with Christ and communion with one another in truth and love.

In summary, healthy church members pursue holy unity as a covenant community, are equipped for gospel ministry under biblical authority, and grow in Christian maturity through mutual accountability. Klyne Snodgrass vividly explains, “Our world is fractured by racism, individualism, and classicism, and all of us know the pain and the enormity of these problems. Ephesians . . . tells of God’s providing a wholeness that binds us together. Our churches need to recover their identity as corporate representations of people being joined together in Christ.”<sup>82</sup> Together in Christ, the

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<sup>79</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 261.

<sup>80</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 565.

<sup>81</sup>Arnold, *Ephesians*, 272.

<sup>82</sup>Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 19.

church then serves as a banner of the gospel depicting the character and call of God before the world.

### **Faithfulness to God through Devotion to One Another: Hebrews 10:19-25**

Not only does Scripture teach that a Christian's union with Christ intrinsically involves covenantal communion with other Christians, but Scripture also practically teaches that faithfulness to God ordinarily hinges upon local church accountability. In Hebrews 10:19-25, the church is urged toward faithfulness to God through devotion to one another. Christians enter the holy places with blood-bought confidence (vv. 19-20), and the church has a high priest in the final fulfillment of Christ (v. 21). Therefore, the church is enabled to respond in three distinct ways: together in faith, drawing near to God with confidence having pure hearts (v. 22); together in hope, holding fast to the confession knowing God is faithful (v. 23); and together in love, gathering continually as a church encouraging one another (vv. 24-25).

### **The Realization: We Have Confidence as a Church through Christ (Heb 10:19-21)**

Hebrews 10:19 serves as a culminating transition in the book which rests upon a Christ-centered exposition of the Old Testament. Christ is the supreme, New Covenant priest to which all other priestly figures pointed. The author addresses the readers corporately and endearingly as a faith family (cf. 3:1, 12, 6:9, 13:22). Together, according to Philip Hughes, "he seeks to lead them into the full enjoyment of the blessings of the new covenant."<sup>83</sup>

First of all, Christians enter the holy places with blood-bought confidence (vv. 19-20). The word for "confidence" or "boldness" refers to authorization. The holy place

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<sup>83</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1977), 405.

of the tabernacle and later the temple pictured the very dwelling place of God. It represented his untouchable holiness with unseen glory (9:3-12, 9:24-26). No man dared presume upon such quarters (9:8) except the High Priest on the Day of Atonement in a purely prescribed manner. He sprinkled the blood of sacrifices over the mercy seat of the ark for forgiveness of sin. Sin makes God's presence a frightening reality of wrath justly deserved. Thomas Schreiner explains that "the tent where God meets his people points to a heavenly sanctuary where there is access to God's presence" (9:24).<sup>84</sup> Through the righteous life and penal, substitutionary death of Christ, the old dead end becomes a new living entry (6:19-20). As one scholar notes, "God's own enter freely and continuously in prayer, repentance, and supplication to receive the 'mercy' of needed forgiveness plus the 'grace' for victorious living and perseverance (4:16)."<sup>85</sup> This "awe-inspiring privilege" into the presence of God is the privilege of every member of God's house who corporately comprise a priestly people (Eph 2:18-19, 3:12; 1 Pet 2:5, 9); they directly intercede for one another and the world, hence the priesthood of all believers.<sup>86</sup> The sacrifices of such priestly-believers is prayer, praise, good works, surrendered lives, and the proclamation of God's glory to one another and to the nations, all through his temple, the church (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 2:17; Heb 13:15-16).

Secondly, the church has a high priest in the final fulfillment of Christ (v. 21). Philip Hughes points out, "He is a great high priest [over the house of God] because of his dignity as the eternal son of God, the unique worth of the sacrifice he offered, and the

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<sup>84</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 315.

<sup>85</sup>Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012), 466.

<sup>86</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 163-64.

supreme glory to which he has been exalted (1:2-4, etc.).”<sup>87</sup> Since the enjoyment of God’s presence is secured through the mediation of Christ, believers are urged to persevere to the end. Christ is worthy, and he empowers endurance (2:14-17, 7:23-25, 8:1).

The “house of God” demonstrates the very presence of God. For Christians, union with Christ is displayed through their communion as a church and more specifically in their assembly of worship together. As the holy place of the tabernacle was God’s “house” and represented his resting place (and later the temple through David), so now God’s presence rests upon and radiates through his familial people who represent him (3:5-6). The church is therefore a “house” (v. 21) personally cared for by Christ; and now through Christ, believers are assured that their worship is welcomed before God.<sup>88</sup>

### **The Response: We Must Persevere as a Church in Faithfulness (Heb 10:22-25)**

Paul Ellingworth states, “The readers are to seize the opportunity of access to God which Christ’s priesthood and sacrifice have made possible.”<sup>89</sup> The certainty of the work of Christ leads to the urgency of the church. As Gareth Cockerill summarizes,

It is only as part of God’s household and in union with its other members that God’s people can draw near and persevere. Therefore, it is both the natural expression of their filial bond in Christ and vital for the well-being of the whole that each be concerned for the perseverance of the others . . . . If participation in God’s house entails the privileges of 10:19-25, separation exposes one to the dire consequences of 10:26-31.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Hughes, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 410.

<sup>88</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 285. As Simon J. Kistemaker notes, “The great high priest never loses sight of those who belong to the house of God, for he and they belong to the same family (2:11).” William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 7.

<sup>89</sup>Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1993), 522.

<sup>90</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 472.

With such eternal consequences at stake, the community of faith is urged to draw near with faith in confidence (v. 22), hold fast in hope to their confession (v. 23), and gather together in love as a church (vv. 24-25).

**Together in faith: Draw near to God in confidence having pure hearts.**

The New Covenant (8:10-12, 10:16; cf. Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26-27) promised the fulfilled cleansing of sin in the heart, something only anticipated through ritual washing of the body (9:10-14). God appointed physical cleansings for a time to alert his people to divine holiness sinful humanity. What was pictured outwardly through washings pointed toward what would come inwardly in regeneration of heart leading to truly holy lives (which baptism looks back upon). No longer plagued with doubt and guilt as those who shrink back, believers must lay hold of their privilege to draw near to God in prayer and all other appropriate expressions of worship as a church (6:11, 9:14, 10:10).<sup>91</sup> Christians draw near to God both corporately as God's assembly while they also "cultivate lives in which [to] practice the daily presence of God."<sup>92</sup>

**Together in hope: Hold fast to the confession knowing God is faithful.** Not

only is the church urged to draw near to God, but they must also hold fast to their confession (3:6, 14; 4:14). Beginning with Peter's great confession (Matt 16:13-20), this confession is a growing summary of scriptural faith professed by the believer and the church who then lives in light of that profession.<sup>93</sup> The confession of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ and sufficiency of his sacrifice for the saints. Cockerill asserts, "Such people live with a robust confidence in God's promise for the future and sturdy

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<sup>91</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 286.

<sup>92</sup>George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 318.

<sup>93</sup>Heb 3:1, 4:14; cf. Rom 10:9-10, 14:11; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 9:13; Phil 2:11; 1 Tim 3:16, 6:12-13; 1 John 2:23, 4:2-3, 15; 2 John 1:7.

reliance on his power for sustenance in the present . . . [which is] based on the proven faithfulness of God and results in obedient surrender to his gracious purposes.”<sup>94</sup> The supreme basis of the church’s hope is the unchanging character of God (Heb 6:18; cf. 2 Tim 2:11-13). Christians hold fast because God is faithful. As Cockerill concludes, “They hold it ‘firmly’ not merely by verbal affirmation but by drawing daily on Christ’s provision and by conducting themselves as those expecting to enjoy the final ‘hope.’”<sup>95</sup>

**Together in love: Gather continually as a church encouraging one**

**another.** Believers draw near to God and hold fast to their confession of Christ through gathering as a church to encourage one another. Christians are to exhort one another daily against the deceitfulness of sin (3:12-13), serve the saints (6:10), and guard against bitterness in the church (12:15). They are urged to pay attention to how they may stir one another to “love” and “good works.” The word for “stir up” refers to intense emotion.<sup>96</sup>

“Love” is the cardinal virtue of the church (Matt 22:34-40; John 13:34-35; 1 Cor 13:1-13). Believers, as the household of God (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 3:6), are to love one another with brotherly affection (Rom 12:10; 1 Pet 4:8). Love is demonstrated in a variety of Christ-exalting works which evidence God’s grace in their lives. “Good works” are “tangible expressions of caring love,” in contrast to dead works (6:1, 9:14).<sup>97</sup> Many of the blessings and responsibilities that Scripture places upon Christians can only occur in a local church community. How can one “love God whom he has not seen” if he “does not love his brother whom he has seen” (1 John 4:20)? Love is both expressed and stirred in Christian community. These believers of Hebrews had once

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<sup>94</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 473.

<sup>95</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 477. He also writes, “Faithful obedience is the only appropriate response to divine faithfulness” (478).

<sup>96</sup>Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 527.

<sup>97</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 289.

suffered faithfully and cared for others in their persecution (10:32-36). In Hebrews 13, such brotherly love and good works take the form of hospitality, sexual purity in marriage, generosity, guarding against materialism, submitting to church leadership that they may oversee the souls of church members in joy, imitating their leaders' faith, suffering well, standing firm in sound doctrine, caring for the persecuted, and offering up praise to God with prayer for others. In the words of F. F. Bruce, "This will never happen, however, if they keep one another at a distance."<sup>98</sup>

All of life is worship (Rom 12:1). Yet, local churches also set aside the Lord's Day to gather for corporate worship. In its corporate gathering, the church is charged chiefly to read God's Word (1 Tim 4:13); preach, teach, and confess the truths of God's Word (Acts 20:27; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 4:2:1-2); see the truth of God's Word in rightly administering the ordinances to the believing members of the local church (Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 10:17); pray (1 Tim 2:1); and sing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) together. All things should be done with order (1 Cor 14:40). The elements of the worship gathering are to reflect the whole range of God's character (both transcendent and immanent) and the whole counsel of his Word. The local church therefore becomes a concrete demonstration of the universal church. We gather locally anticipating and reflecting the universal church triumphant yet to come with those from every tribe around the throne (Heb 12:23).

Believers in Hebrews may have neglected gathering together for fear of persecution, disappointment in Christ's delay, allurements by the world, or temptation to return to Judaism (or even paganism). William Lane points out what is still common today: "It is sobering to discover that in the early second century in Rome it was simply preoccupation with business affairs that accounted for the neglect of the meetings of a

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<sup>98</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 15 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1975), 253.



house church.”<sup>99</sup> Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection, was the day Christians assembled in worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). However, as Schreiner notes,

Those who abandon the fellowship of the Christian church by failing to attend are in danger of the final judgment. Perseverance is not merely a private matter. It is also reflected in whether believers meet corporately with one another. Refusing and failing to meet regularly with other believers corporately calls into question whether someone truly belongs to God. It is not simply a nice thing for Christians to do. It is necessary preparation for the day of judgment.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, in warning against “neglecting meeting together,” Lane warns,

[T]he writer regarded the desertion of the communal meetings as utterly serious. It threatened the corporate life of the congregation and almost certainly was a prelude to apostasy . . . The neglect of worship and fellowship was symptomatic of a catastrophic failure to appreciate the significance of Christ’s priestly ministry and the access to God it provided . . . [These meetings] provide a communal setting where mutual encouragement and admonition may occur.<sup>101</sup>

Believers’ regular commitment to corporate worship is essential for maturity in faith.

In addition to the corporate gathering, communal living is also vital.

“Encouragement” (v. 25) can range from rebuke to comfort. In other words, “They must encourage and warn each other by reminding each other of the sufficiency of Christ and the magnitude of the privileges to be gained or lost by drawing near to God through him.”<sup>102</sup> “The day drawing near” is the day of judgment and Christ’s return. Christians need one another more than they realize, and given Christ’s coming, urgency is thus amplified. In summary, neglect for the gathering of the church jeopardizes faith.

Faith is certainly personal, but it is clearly not private. Faithfulness to Christ is a community concern. Those outside the covenant community of both Old and New Testaments would have hardly been considered believers. Christians must covenantally

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<sup>99</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 290.

<sup>100</sup>Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 322. In summary, “Refusing to meet with other believers in this context signifies apostasy, the renunciation of the Christian faith” (321).

<sup>101</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 290.

<sup>102</sup>Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 481.

care for one another in light of the coming of Christ.<sup>103</sup> David deSilva soberly notes,

As the author urges them to take advantage of their access to God by drawing near to him in assembling themselves together for worship, he establishes the Christian assembly as the hub or center of their lives in this world. Motion away from this hub (i.e., defection or ‘shrinking back’) signals motion away from the divine center of the cosmos.<sup>104</sup>

With the gospel at stake, believers resolve to hold to their confession of faith by covenanting with one another. They persevere together in faith, hope, and love.<sup>105</sup> The church local and militant, anticipating the church universal and triumphant, is therefore urged toward persevering faithfulness to God through devotion to one another.

### **Conclusion**

A biblical understanding of the church and church practice is essential for healthy Christian disciple-making. The church is built on the confession of Christ as Son of the living God; thereby the church is authorized to represent that confession (Matt 16:13-20, 18:15-20). The Pastoral Epistles clarify the priorities of the church as the foundation and family of the living God: sound doctrine, biblical regeneration, healthy membership, and qualified leadership. In Ephesians 4:1-16, the church is exhorted to pursue holy unity as a covenant community, be equipped for gospel ministry under biblical authority, and grow in Christian maturity through mutual accountability. Finally, in Hebrews 10:19-25, the church is called to draw near in faith, hold fast in hope, and

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<sup>103</sup>One to another, Scripture calls Christians to bear burdens, confess sin, pray, show honor, instruct, welcome, give, forgive, greet, comfort, live in harmony, rebuke, exhort, show kindness, bear with, serve, submit, be truthful, admonish, encourage, show humility, do good, build up, encourage, sing to, and walk in fellowship, all with one another together as believers. Early believers lived communally in devotion to doctrine and prayer, growing in fellowship, breaking bread, sharing together, praising God in awe, and watching God add daily to the church (Acts 2:42-47).

<sup>104</sup>David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 333.

<sup>105</sup>As Lane points out, “The triad of Christian qualities to which the writer alludes in 10:22-25 anticipates the development of the remainder of the sermon: faith (10:22) is celebrated in 11:1-40; hope (10:23) is expressed through perseverance in 12:1-13; and love (10:24-25) furnishes the key to the conclusion of the sermon in 12:14-13:21.” Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 280.

gather continually in love. The healthy church will then rightly portray and proclaim the glory of God before the world through biblical disciple-making.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL  
ISSUES RELATED TO BIBLICAL CHURCH  
MEMBERSHIP

Faith in Christ is fundamentally displayed through membership in the church. This chapter considers theoretical, practical, and historical issues related to the church and healthy church membership. In order to practice healthy church membership, church members need a biblical understanding of the church's theological foundation and practical function. This chapter is based upon, and continues to build upon, the doctrinal exposition of the previous chapter. It considers the doctrinal foundation of the church (as established in the previous chapter) in light of its practical outworking, ranging from church history to the current cultural moment. This chapter seeks to topically summarize, progressively unpack, and practically apply the exposition of chapter 2.

Before the church and its members can function in health, they must first have a right understanding of the church. Conversely, the need for commitment to a local church is often challenged by even professing Christians. For example, many professing Christians see no need for dedicating themselves to a local church so long as they consider themselves to be part of the universal church. Christians must know why they should join a church and what healthy church life looks like. Therefore, church members need to discern the implications of theology upon ecclesiology in order to overcome common challenges to church membership. Disregard for the significance of the local church often reveals more fundamental theological fissures; yet, faithfulness within a local church is fruit of a proper theological understanding. Given a biblical understanding of the church's theological foundation and practical function, church members are increasingly equipped to enjoy the blessings and exercise the responsibilities of church

membership in healthy church membership.

### **Forming a Fundamental Ecclesiology**

“Once upon a time,” Bobby Jamieson recalls, “evangelicals wrestled long and hard over the biblical grounds of church polity and practice . . . . If we make the center [primary doctrines] everything and everything else nothing, we set ourselves up to lose the center itself”; therefore, he asserts the need “to shore up some border territories in an effort, ultimately, to make the capital city a little more secure.”<sup>1</sup> The gospel is central. Yet, the primary need for theology (and union with Christ) is intrinsically related to ecclesiology (and communion with the church). As Mark Dever summarizes, “It’s impossible to answer the question ‘*What is a Christian?*’ without ending up in a conversation about the church; at least in the Bible it is.”<sup>2</sup> Christians need a biblical ecclesiology to increasingly preserve, proclaim, and picture forth the gospel and make mature disciples. A fundamental understanding of ecclesiology answers three questions: What is the church? How is the church ordered? Why does the church exist? The *esse* (essence or being) of the church, which concerns the definition and defining distinctives of a church, must first be established. Then, the *bene esse* (or well-being) of the church, which relates to the distinctives of a healthy church as well as a Baptist church, must then be considered.

### **What Is the Church?**

Common misunderstandings of the church abound. Is the church a people united under a common board, budget, and vision? Is the church a building, denomination, worship service, social humanitarian group, or simply any group of

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<sup>1</sup>Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 26.

professing Christians who affiliate? The church has been despised as a crutch for the weak, displaced as an unnecessary attachment, and dismissed as a gathering for radical Christians. Others have disdained the church as a hindrance to individual or social advancement. None of these responses adequately describe the church. The essence of the church may be considered from various angles including its origin, nature, metaphors, attributes, marks, constitution, definition and membership.

The church is the beautiful blossom of God's work throughout redemptive history in calling out a people to enjoy his grace and reveal his glory. What was foreshadowed among God's Old Covenant people would be fulfilled in his New Covenant people, namely a people united together in Christ by the Holy Spirit to worship God truthfully and witness to the truth through disciple-making.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, the church has been considered from various viewpoints. The invisible church consists of the church as God sees it, which consists solely of true believers.<sup>4</sup> The visible church, however, is the church as man sees it, which will include unbelievers who appear to be believers. The church is universal in that it consists of all true Christians of all times and places.<sup>5</sup> The local church however is a concrete realization of the universal church in a particular time and place.<sup>6</sup> In one sense, the church is an

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<sup>3</sup>It is beyond the scope of this work to consider the relationship between Israel and the church. In summary, throughout redemptive history, God is progressively calling out a people for himself, culminating in the revelation of Christ and the church.

<sup>4</sup>Visible and invisible distinctions are helpful only in so far as it is understood that the true church essentially consists solely of true believers, not a mixed assembly like Israel. Only those demonstrating a credible profession of saving faith should be affirmed into church membership of any type.

<sup>5</sup>Referring to the universal church, Wayne Grudem explains, "The church is the community of all true believers for all time." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 853.

<sup>6</sup>John Hammett summarizes the New Testament use of *ekklēsia* stating, ". . . 2 times *ekklēsia* is used with reference to the Old Testament congregation. 3 times it is used for a secular assembly. 6 times it is used in a general or nonspecific sense. 13 times it is used for the universal church. 90 times it is used with reference to a local church or churches, assemblies that have a degree of order and purposefulness in their gatherings." Of the overwhelming 90 uses of *ekklēsia* as local churches, Hammett notes that "40 times it is found in the singular, for a local church. 14 times it is used for all the Christians in a city, who

organization with order. Yet, this structural framework (and polity) provides a biblical context for the church to flourish as a relational, living organism. In addition, the church militant is valiantly at spiritual war on earth while the church triumphant is the victorious assembly of heaven.<sup>7</sup> Though the kingdom is not the church, the church is a vivid expression of the rule of God advancing and imaging forth the Adamic cultural mandate (Gen 1:28) through Christ-centered disciple-making (Matt 28:16-20). The church serves as evidence that the kingdom is extending.<sup>8</sup> Yet, these categories do not present different churches but different aspects of the church.

Scripture provides a wealth of biblical metaphors to express the church.<sup>9</sup> Chiefly, the church is the people and family of God (1 Tim 5:1-2), the body of Christ (1 Cor 12), and the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:19-22) as well as the pillar and buttress of truth (1 Tim 3:14-16). The Apostles' Creed affirms "the holy catholic church" and "the communion of saints." Through the Niceno-Constantinople Creed (AD 381), the early church confessed "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." As Jesus prayed in John 17, the church is "one" as a people united in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The church is set apart and sanctified by God as "holy" and should increasingly reflect that holiness. The church is "catholic" encompassing all true Christians. Finally, the church is "apostolic" in that it is built upon the ministry of the apostles and should be devoted to the apostle's doctrine, or holy Scripture. However, the reformers protested that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, and that the church is not defined by pope, bishop, or priest, which

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apparently met and acted together. 36 times *ekklēsia* is used in the plural for local churches." John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 31.

<sup>7</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 96-97.

<sup>8</sup>Bloesch, *The Church*, 97.

<sup>9</sup>For an extensive survey of the biblical images of the church, see Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

presented a need to further define the church. The true church is marked by the preaching of the gospel and right administration of the ordinances, therefore implying use of church discipline.<sup>10</sup> Fundamentally, the church is a creation of the Word of God.<sup>11</sup> Where these marks are found, there one finds the universal church actualized in a local church.<sup>12</sup>

Gregg Allison asserts that “the church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup> Locally, they come together in agreement upon their confession of Christ, and they covenant to hold one another accountable to the implications of it (Matt 16:13-20; 18:15-20).<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer insisted, “Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>John Calvin asserts, “Wherever you see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God exists.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 4.1.9, 1214. He adds, “For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments. He so esteems the authority of the church that when it is violated he believes his own diminished. . . . From this it follows that separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ” (4.1.10, 1024).

<sup>11</sup>Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 37-98.

<sup>12</sup>D. A. Carson asserts that “each church is the full manifestation in space and time of the one, true, heavenly, eschatological, new covenant church. Local churches should see themselves as outcroppings of heaven, analogies of ‘the Jerusalem that is above,’ indeed colonies of the new Jerusalem, providing on earth a corporate and visible expression of ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God.’” D. A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1990), 366.

<sup>13</sup>Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

<sup>14</sup>Jamieson clarifies, “This solemn commitment is what invests a group of believers with the keys of the kingdom . . . . When they covenant, they assume responsibility for one another’s lives and doctrine, and they create a new embassy of Christ’s kingdom on earth.” Jamieson, *Going Public*, 92. He argues, “A church is born when gospel people form a gospel polity, and the ordinances are the effective signs of that polity. They give the church visible, institutional form and order. They knit many into one” (144).

<sup>15</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row,



They covenant to care for one another in Christian community as a holy people set apart by God's grace and for God's glory. As a locally assembled body in Christ's name, they exercise the keys of the kingdom in the reception and release of members in covenantal fellowship.

Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman articulate a local church's peculiarity:

The difference between what people call "community" and what the Bible calls the "church" comes down to the question of authority. Jesus actually gave authority to the local assembly called a church . . . [I]t preaches the gospel and possesses the keys of the kingdom for binding and loosing through the ordinances. It declares who does and does not belong to the kingdom. It exercises oversight. And exercising such affirmation and oversight *meaningfully* means gathering regularly and getting involved in one another's lives.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, Christians constitute a local church by covenanting together around a confession of Christ that is visualized initially through believer's baptism and continually through the Lord's Supper. The covenant community that the church enjoys together is solely based on the work of Christ in their lives.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the local church is a Spirit-filled, baptized people who gather in Christ's name to proclaim the gospel through Scripture, worship, make disciples, and exercise the keys of the kingdom through the ordinances as a covenant people.<sup>18</sup>

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1954), 107.

<sup>16</sup>Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, preface to *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti Institutional Age* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), xviii. Jonathan Leeman further clarifies, "The keys are the authority to judge and declare on a *what* (doctrines, laws, confessions, practices) as well as a *who* (the people who speak those confessions) on behalf of heaven. They deputize their holder to pronounce a judgment concerning the *who* and the *what* of the gospel: *What* is the right confession and practice of the gospel, and *who* is a right confessor. To bind or loose is to render a judgment or verdict in heaven's name." Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 77.

<sup>17</sup>Bonhoeffer contended, "Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us." Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25. In addition, "He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial. . . . We enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients" (27-28).

<sup>18</sup>My understanding of this section has been significantly shaped through the ministry of 9 Marks as well as extended Baptist works on ecclesiology, such as these by John L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990); Edwin Charles Dargan, *Ecclesiology: A Study of*

## How Is the Church Ordered?

The Bible outlines the contours of a prescribed polity, which correlates with both what a church is and how it accomplishes its mission. Jamieson vividly states, “Polity isn’t the gospel, but it protects and preserves the gospel. Polity isn’t the diamond, but it is one of the prongs which hold the diamond in place for all to see.”<sup>19</sup> The organization of a church serves as the skeletal system to protect and promote the growth of the body’s organs and life as an organism.<sup>20</sup> The essence of any community or family requires organizational framework and governing structure. The church’s polity should emerge from and reflect its theology. The church is properly ordered with regenerate membership, qualified leadership, and elder-led congregationalism.

Regenerate church membership concerns the *esse* (essence) of a church. At the heart of the definition of the church, both universal and local, is regenerate church membership. When a sinner is converted to Christ, he is born again and adopted into God’s universal Church, and therefore ordinarily shows evidence of submitting his life to Christ by submitting to the ministry and governance of a local church. The New Covenant promised that every member of the covenant community would have God’s Spirit and personally know the Lord (Jer 31:31-34). According to Scripture, every church member should be a Christian, and every Christian should be a church member.

In the Old Testament, God set apart a people for his glory and (in numerous

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*the Churches*, Classic Reprint Series (London: Forgotten Books, 2017); Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches: A Guide to the Administration of Baptist Churches*, 9th ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980); J. M. Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman, 1966); <sup>18</sup>Jeremiah B. Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset: Consisting of Articles on Distinctive Baptist Principles*, Classic Reprint Series (London: Forgotten Books, 2012); and Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, Baptist Distinctives 28 (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 199. See also Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B & H, 2012); Mark Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001); Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*.

<sup>19</sup>Jamieson, *Going Public*, 11.

<sup>20</sup>Jonathan Leeman, “Church Membership: Holding the Body Together,” *9 Marks Journal* (May/June 2011): 5.

ways) distinguished them from the world. No one living apart from the covenant community of faith in either the Old or New Testament would have ordinarily been counted as a believer. John Hammett explains, “The dominant New Testament idea of the church is a concrete assembly, one with a recognizable membership, marked out by a distinctive, disciplined lifestyle.”<sup>21</sup> First, the biblical concept of the church implies the membership of Christians. The vast majority of New Testament references to the church signify specific local gatherings of believers.<sup>22</sup> Second, early church directories consist of the membership of Christians in churches.<sup>23</sup> Finally, obedience to God’s commands in Scripture require the membership of Christians in local churches.<sup>24</sup> R. B. Kuiper concludes, “The Scriptural rule is that, while membership in the church is not a

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<sup>21</sup>Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, 12-13.

<sup>22</sup>They were aware of each other’s sin (Acts 5:1-11), gathered together as a clearly defined group (Acts 8:3, 11:19, 22, 26; 14:27, 15:3, 23), met as members to address concerns (Acts 6:3, 15:4), and devoted themselves to lifelong worship and disciple making together (Acts 2:42-47). They biblically confessed their faith together (1 Tim 3:16) and reoriented their entire lives around one another (Acts 11:32; Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 5:11; 1 Tim 5:9-10; 1 Pet 4:8-11). They gathered regularly as a church for orderly, corporate worship (1 Cor 14:40; Heb 10:26) and began to meet on the first day of the week following the resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). They affirmed one another’s faith through observing the Lord’s Supper together (1 Cor 10:16-17, 11:26). Local churches also sacrificially gave to other clearly defined local churches (Acts 11:29-30; Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8-9). Paul’s mission was to plant and disciple specific groups of Christians in local churches, and it is through local churches that missionaries were sent out to proclaim Christ and gather those converted into local churches (Acts 13:1-3). Many New Testament letters were addressed to individual local churches.

<sup>23</sup>Christians are clearly identifying faces and keeping records of those legitimately affirmed as Christians into a local fellowship. Upon conversion, Christians were added to a distinct number of other Christians (Acts 2:41, 47, 4:4, 32, 5:12-14, 6:5-7, 8:1, 9:26, 14:23). There was awareness of other members (Rom 16:1-16). A list of widows was kept denoting church members (1 Tim 5:9-10). Recommendation letters were sent when Christians entered a church in another city (Acts 18:27; Rom 16:1-2).

<sup>24</sup>Christians are commanded to submit to their leaders (Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Thess 5:12). Leaders are called to shepherd those under their care as those whom will give an account to God (Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-5). Clearly identified groups of Christians were responsible for one another as a family (1 Tim 5:1-2). The exercise of the keys of the kingdom fundamentally signify the membership of Christians together. To be put out of the fellowship can only mean that one was first within it (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; 1 Tim 1:20; Titus 3:10-11). Paul himself was not accepted into the church until evidence of a credible profession of faith was provided (Acts 9:26-31; Gal 2:9). The numerous “one another” commands and use of spiritual gifts are impossible apart from church membership of covenanted Christians. The many metaphors of the church are also meaningless apart from church membership.

prerequisite of salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation. Outside the visible church ‘there is no ordinary possibility of salvation’ (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXV, Section II).<sup>25</sup> Throughout the New Testament, to be added to Christ is to be counted among a local church.<sup>26</sup> Regenerate church membership entails professing Christians providing a fundamental understanding of the gospel and central doctrines, credible profession of faith and repentance expressed in baptism, and willingness to covenant with other specified Christians while giving assent to the government of the church. Communion in church membership pictures union with Christ to one another in the church and before the world.

A church is also properly ordered by qualified leadership, which concerns the *bene esse* (well-being) of the church.<sup>27</sup> The New Testament pattern for church leadership consists of a plurality of elders leading the church with deacons as leading servants.<sup>28</sup> A plurality of elders aids in the highest levels of shared responsibility, accountability in character, compilation of wisdom, and complementary giftedness in ability. Elders preach and teach God’s word and shepherd the church toward Christ-likeness in their worship, ministry to one another, and disciple-making of all nations. They oversee the ministry of

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<sup>25</sup>R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 112.

<sup>26</sup>The case for biblical church membership is clearly laid out in the following works: Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Benjamin L. Merkle, “The Biblical Basis for Church Membership,” in Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Discipline*, ed. John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 31-52.

<sup>27</sup>A church without leadership may still be a church, albeit an unhealthy one. Paul charged Titus to oversee appointment of elders in disordered churches that lacked them (Titus 1:5).

<sup>28</sup>The Greek words used to translate *pastor* or *shepherd* (indicating a care-taking function), *elder* (signifying maturity), and *overseer* or *bishop* (specifying leadership responsibility) are used in Scripture interchangeably of the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet 5:1-2) with *elder* as the most common designation. Almost without exception in reference to the office in a local church, the word is used in the plural, thus denoting the normality of a plurality of qualified elders leading each local church. For a more thorough treatment, consult Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995).

the church. They instruct and lead the church in the use of the keys of the kingdom. The only qualification that relates to an elder's function (other than as a faithful shepherd of his family) is that he is "able to teach" in some beneficial capacity over the church. He must hold the truth firm with ability to instruct as well as rebuke with sound doctrine and graciously correct his opponents (Titus 1:9; cf. 2 Tim 2:24-25). Specifically, pastors lead the church by exhorting with Scripture (2 Tim 4:1-2; Titus 1:9), engaging in oversight (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13), encouraging as a caretaking shepherd (Acts 20:28; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-2), establishing beneficial policy (Acts 15), equipping the church for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12-16), emulating the example of Christ (1 Pet 5:3-5), and enriching the church by raising up other leaders (2 Tim 2:2). Samuel Waldron clarifies both the distinction and relation between the authority of the church and elders,

The real authority of the elders over the church is very practical . . . [A] specific church government and form of worship are given the church by God. Neither the church nor its elders are permitted to alter these forms. Thus, the authority of the eldership is not a legislative power to add to the laws of God. [However,] [t]he regulative principle of the church does not legislate the circumstances or application of church government or worship. With regard to these things, the elders have authority to arrange the circumstances of the church's life.<sup>29</sup>

These two streams of authority are designed to harmonize for fruitful ministry.

Churches should be ordered not only with regenerate membership and qualified leadership, but also with elder-led congregationalism. Elder-led congregationalism is a form of church government in which the gathered members of a local church acting in Jesus' name hold the final authority (under God's Word and in

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<sup>29</sup>Samuel E. Waldron, "Plural-Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church: Four Views on Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 220. He continues, "Only if elders recommend something contrary to the Scriptures or that transgresses the boundaries of another human authority's jurisdiction should members of the church feel at liberty to oppose their recommendations. Of course, constructive suggestions and helpful comments should always be welcome" (220). The church has authority over the essential elements that constitute a church (the 'who' and 'what' of the gospel). The elders have authority to instruct the church in those essential elements along with authority over the specific forms and circumstances in which those elements are expressed (the 'how'). Elders make proposals for the church to practically carry out its authority and responsibility through the kingdom keys. Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members*, 5, 67, 125-26.

conjunction with the leadership of the elders) for all essential matters of their local congregation as it pertains to doctrine, membership, leadership, and discipline. New Testament churches were responsible for preserving and proclaiming sound doctrine, receiving and disciplining members, choosing qualified leaders, sending missionaries, ordering their own affairs, judging matters of members, and extending true worship through global disciple-making.<sup>30</sup> Though elders lead in the use of the keys of the kingdom, the keys rest with the church, hence the necessity of regenerate church membership where every member is Spirit-indwelt and biblically instructed by qualified leaders. Each church holds the final authority over its own matters without interference from state, other churches, or leadership above the local church. Though independent in authority, local churches are not to be isolated in ministry. Like-minded local churches should minister to one another by providing wisdom, accountability, care, and combined efforts in missions.<sup>31</sup>

As Leeman concludes, “Polity, rightly practiced, guards the gospel, matures the Christian disciple, strengthens the whole church, fortifies its holy integrity and witness, and equips the congregation to better love their neighbors in word and deed.”<sup>32</sup> A biblically-ordered church is then a ministry-oriented church.

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<sup>30</sup>James White concludes that “the Scriptures do in fact show us locally autonomous congregations functioning directly under the headship of Christ, his rule expressing itself through the preaching of the Word, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the divinely instituted guidance of the elders.” James R. White, “The Plural-Elder Led Church: Sufficient as Established—The Plurality of Elders as Christ’s Ordained Means of Church Governance,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B & H, 2004), 260.

<sup>31</sup>New Testament churches ministered to one another without exercising authority over one another. Though members of separate churches are not in the same type of covenantal union, New Testament churches shared love and greetings, preachers and missionaries, financial support and encouragement, worthy examples to emulate, caution about teachers, and prayer. Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations*, 374-75. The degree of confessional agreement in theology, however, will be the determinant of the level of covenantal ministry enjoyed together.

<sup>32</sup>Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, viii.

## Why Does the Church Exist?

The essence of the church must first be established, and from that foundation the church then derives its purpose and function. As the people of God united together in Christ by the Holy Spirit, the church exists because God created it to broadcast his glory. More specifically, the church exists for the worship of God, discipleship of one another, and witness to the world.<sup>33</sup>

The purpose of the church begins not with what man needs, but with what God is supremely worthy of, namely worship.<sup>34</sup> First of all, the purpose of the church is to rightly worship God as he is, as he desires, and as he deserves. The church is to be the place where the pure worship of God is found because the church is his dwelling place bought with the blood of Christ. God elected and redeemed the church for himself. What God originally created in the garden will be redeemed and consummated in the new creation, namely that God will be their God and his people will finally belong fully to him (Rev 21:3). He is worthy of the church's worship in holy joy. Corresponding to its foundation, the church therefore rightly confesses Christ and worships accordingly.

A direct indication of rightly worshipping God is loving others (Exod 20:1-17; Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31). As they are able, Christians must "do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). The church exists then also for the discipleship of believers. The Bible intricately connects rightly worshipping and loving God with loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:20). Much of the New Testament's attention upon the love of Christians for others is in the context of covenantal care for believers in local churches. Christians are to be

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<sup>33</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 867.

<sup>34</sup>John Piper writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. . . . Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. . . . Missions begins and ends in worship." John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 17.

continual witnesses to one another of the transforming and sustaining power of God through the gospel. They obligate themselves through the numerous “one another” commands of the New Testament to affirm one another’s salvation and disciple one another in sanctification. Christians worship God and disciple one another through the ordinary means of grace such as the preaching of God’s Word, the gathering of God’s people in worship, the ordinances, and prayer.<sup>35</sup> God preserves and nurtures his people in faith through their care for one another in local churches.

Finally, the biblical worship of the healthy church overflows into a witness of God’s glory not only to one another, but to the world. God called Adam and Eve to fill the earth with image bearers to represent his rule (Gen 1:28). By Genesis 6:11, the earth was filled with sin, and God called Noah to fill the earth in a representative re-creation. With one failing representative after another, God insisted that he would fill the earth with knowledge of his glory (Num 14:21; Ps 72:19; Hab 2:14). This promise climaxes as Christ perfectly displays the glory of God. The church then exercises Christ’s spiritual dominion throughout the nations (Matt 16:18-29, 28:18-20; cf. Eph 1:10-11, 22, 3:9-10, 4:10). Through disciple-making the church fills the earth with regenerated image bearers of God re-created in Christ’s image (Eph 4:23-24).

In all of this, God is redeeming and uniting rebel people (who are hostile to God and to one another) as one in Christ so “that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). God displays his multi-faceted wisdom to the astonishment of cosmic creatures. He does this by decreeing and enacting a seemingly impossible plan to restore the sinful world to its rightful place under the lordship of Christ; and what God is doing through the church is a living illustration of what he is doing throughout creation in

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<sup>35</sup>Grudem lists the specific means of grace through the church as teaching of the Word, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, worship, church discipline, giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship, evangelism, and personal ministry to individuals. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 950-63.



bringing all things under his lordship. Christians are conformed to the image of Christ through the church and as a church demonstrate the character and work of God (Eph 2:19-22; cf. John 13:35). As Charles Bridges asserts, “The Church is the mirror, that reflects the whole effulgence of the Divine character. It is the grand scene, in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe.”<sup>36</sup> Church membership is therefore the biblical arena for Christians to witness to the rule of Christ. By legitimately acknowledging those who give evidence of belonging to Christ and living in communion as a church, the world may rightly—and redemptively—know God.

Allison explains the church’s dual relationship with the world:

Accordingly, the church is *for* the world—encouraging its members to faithfully obey the culture mandate to build civilization while loving neighbors and making disciples—and *against* the world, helping its members to be compassionately critical of and justly opposed to all that in this fallen world is tainted by sin and in rebellion against Jesus Christ, head of the world and head of the church.<sup>37</sup>

The Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) is an exercise of the keys of the kingdom given to the church (Matt 16:13-20). The church is then a visible and verbal expression of the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>38</sup> John Stott asserts, “The church is supposed to be God’s new society, the living embodiment of the gospel, a sign of the kingdom of God, a demonstration of what human community looks like when it comes under his gracious rule.”<sup>39</sup> The local church witnesses to the kingdom rule of Christ and the world’s need for

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<sup>36</sup>Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 1. Robert Saucy writes, “The church as the assembly of undeserving sinners redeemed in Christ is therefore the crowing display of God’s grace for all eternity. The church is also the display of God’s wisdom in bringing Jew and Gentile together in one body in Christ” (Eph 3:10). Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 90.

<sup>37</sup>Allison, *The Church*, 463.

<sup>38</sup>Some argue that “the church not only points to the kingdom (witness) and opens the door to the kingdom (doorway) but also brings the blessings of the kingdom, not only to its own members, but to the world as well.” Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 64.

<sup>39</sup>John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 66.

faith in him. Therefore, it is rightly concluded, “Ecclesiology and missiology are intrinsically related to one another. The only way to do biblical missions is through a biblical church, and the only way to be a biblical church is to pursue faithfully God’s mission for the church as revealed in Holy Scripture.”<sup>40</sup>

In separating clearly from the sin and stain of the world, the church can proclaim and portray Christ to the world. The church becomes a clear window through which the world may see God. Bruce Ashford and Danny Akin explain,

Church membership and discipline make the gospel visible by fostering a God-centered and supernatural view of salvation, gospel-shaped disciples, a gospel-shaped community, and a clear and unconfused gospel testimony. In these ways, membership and discipline are profoundly connected to the church’s ability to provide a clear and unobstructed window to God and His gospel.<sup>41</sup>

Early twentieth-century Baptist Edwin Dargan asserts, “The church is in the divine hand a means for reaching man with the overtures of the gospel and with the means of grace, that is, it is God’s way of calling and saving men, and then of training them for the duties of earth and the glories of heaven.”<sup>42</sup> The church has a “duty to hold fast to the intention of her Lord, and not lower herself to become a mere social club, or guild for humanitarian reform . . . . The church has a glorious mission in this world.”<sup>43</sup> However, the church also

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<sup>40</sup>Bruce Riley Ashford and Danny Akin, “The Missional Implications of Church Membership and Church Discipline,” in *Those Who Must Give an Account*, 189. The church is both the product and the agent of God’s mission; “the church is redeemed by God and for God” and therefore “called to live her life in light of the gospel of God” (191).

<sup>41</sup>Ashford and Akin, “Missional Implications,” 203. They state,

When the church does not practice covenant membership with regenerate people, the church becomes a testimony to something else, a testimony perhaps to the quality of the programming, the skill of the leadership, the common interests of the people, or to social and moral conformity. Whatever it is, it is not a testimony to what God has done in someone’s life to convert them. Because regenerate church membership entails that there is a clear and unconfused testimony in the gospel before one joins the church, therefore every new member joined to the church is a witness to the church that God, through the gospel, continues to call people to salvation. (Ashford and Akin, “Missional Implications,” 202)

<sup>42</sup>Edwin Charles Dargan, *Ecclesiology: A Study of the Churches*, Classic Reprint Series (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 541-42.

<sup>43</sup>Dargan, *Ecclesiology*, 543. Francis Wayland concluded that believers “unite together in

has a responsibility to pray and act against injustice which compromises human flourishing.<sup>44</sup> The church should therefore care for all suffering, but especially spiritual suffering that eternally separates men from God.<sup>45</sup>

The church exists for the glory of God and is Christ's centerpiece for displaying his glory through gospel-centered worship and witness. Michael Horton argues, "Everything that the church is called to do as a visible institution—not only its ministry of preaching, but its public services of prayers, singing, sacraments, fellowship, government and discipline—is to be a means of delivering this gospel to the whole creation."<sup>46</sup> The church is at the center of God's purpose in creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The gospel is thereby biblically portrayed and joyfully proclaimed to the world through the ministry of healthy local churches.

### **Distinctives of a Healthy Church**

Churches should strive not only to exist but to be healthy.<sup>47</sup> The healthy church

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churches for the sake of promoting holiness in each other, and subduing the world to obedience to Christ." Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, Baptist Distinctives 28 (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 179.

<sup>44</sup>Grudem rightly adds that "the church should also pray and—as it has opportunity—speak against [systematic] injustice . . . [and so] supplement its evangelistic ministry to the world and indeed adorn the gospel that it professes." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 868. He also states,

This evangelistic work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world. Yet accompanying the work of evangelism is also a ministry of mercy, a ministry that includes caring for the poor and needy in the name of the Lord. Although the emphasis of the New Testament is on giving material help to those who are part of the church (Acts 11:29; 2 Cor 8:4; 1 John 3:17), there is still an affirmation that it is right to help unbelievers even if they do not respond with gratitude or acceptance of the gospel message (867-68).

He adds, "But such ministries of mercy to the world should never become a substitute for genuine evangelism or for the other areas of ministry to God and to believers" (868).

<sup>45</sup>John Piper, "Abortion and the Narrow Way that Leads to Life," *Desiring God* (sermon), January 23, 2011, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/abortion-and-the-narrow-way-that-leads-to-life>.

<sup>46</sup>Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 88.

<sup>47</sup>Truly healthy organisms naturally grow. However since "church members tend to perpetuate

continually conforms to Christ. God provides means for health through sound doctrine, expositional preaching, saving faith, biblical worship, covenantal membership, church discipline, spiritual unity, prayer dependency, and local and global disciple-making.<sup>48</sup>

First, the healthy church is marked by sound doctrine. Theology forms the worldview and shapes the practices of the church. Sound doctrine is chiefly taught through expository preaching whereby the Bible (and a proper trinitarian understanding thereof) drives every sermon. The healthy church is also marked by saving faith. The natural response then of supernaturally regenerated people is biblical worship. The healthy church gathers regularly for worship shaped by Scripture, which also urges their worship as a lifestyle. The healthy church is also marked by covenantal membership whereby Christians live together as a faith family. Therefore, church discipline marks the healthy church not only formatively (as believers are formed by the ordinary means of grace), but also in a corrective sense according to Matthew 18:15-19. In addition, the healthy church is marked by shepherding leadership that is both qualified and carries out its biblical responsibilities. The healthy church is built up then in spiritual unity.<sup>49</sup>

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Christians of their own kind,” it is vital that churches seek increasing spiritual health according to biblical standards and means to perpetuate further strength not sickness. Charles Deweese, *A Community of Believers: Making Church Membership More Meaningful* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1978), 83.

<sup>48</sup>My understanding of this section has been shaped by works such as Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>49</sup>James Montgomery Boice pleaded that “the only true unity—is the unity built on the revealed truth of God centering in the person and work of Jesus.” James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 92. Murray (*Evangelicalism Divided*, 309) argues that one should deduce

. . . not that all opinions on beliefs not essential to salvation are to be laid aside as of small importance. On the contrary Paul warns strongly against any such minimalist attitude to truth (1 Cor. 3:10-17). What may be called secondary differences among Christians are not of no consequence and they may be sufficiently important to prevent the formal unity of Christians in the same denomination. Freedom of conscience to interpret Scripture is far better than an external unity imposed on all. At the same time, it is essential to recognize, as evangelicalism has sought to do, that differences of understanding among Christians are never to be allowed to transcend the truth which makes them one in Christ. God would use our defective understandings and mistakes to humble us and to make us the more diligent in seeking to know the truth.

Another mark of the healthy church is dependency on prayer. The church's life and growth depend upon its relationship with God. Finally, the healthy church is marked by local and global disciple-making. The healthy church makes fully devoted followers of Jesus who are taught to observe all that God commanded among their neighbors and all nations.

Revelation 2-3 provides a case study in symptoms of spiritual sickness and strength in the local church. The Ephesian church (2:1-7) had doctrine without delight. The church at Smyrna (2:8-11) was materially poor yet spiritually rich. They persevered under persecution. The church at Pergamum (2:12-17) had devotion that was mixed with deception. The church of Thyatira (2:18-29) exemplified faithful love and endurance yet tolerated heresy. The church in Sardis (3:1-6) gained a reputation for life with the reality of illness. The church of Philadelphia (3:7-13) was weak, but they had patient endurance with hopeful opportunity before them. The church at Laodicea (3:14-22) was worldly rich, yet spiritually poor and in need of discipline. Therefore, the healthy church chiefly pursues biblical wisdom, corporate holiness as the unspoiled bride of Christ, Christ-exalting love and joy, and faithful perseverance in the gospel.

### **Distinctives of a Baptist Church**

Moving more specifically from distinctives of a healthy church to distinctives of a Baptist church, early Particular Baptists “believed that they had taken the principles of the Reformation to their proper conclusion. The recovery of the gospel and all of the related truths was finalized in the ordering of the church according to the Scriptural pattern.”<sup>50</sup> This pattern for Baptists includes particular emphasis upon regenerate church membership, believer's baptism, redemptive church discipline, priesthood of all

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<sup>50</sup>James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 17 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 17.

believers, congregational polity, local church autonomy, and religious freedom.

J. B. Jeter stressed that “a spiritual, or regenerate, church membership . . . lies at the foundation of all Baptist peculiarities.”<sup>51</sup> Candidates for church membership among early Baptists were required to give testimony of their conversion before the church so that the church could raise any concerns and discern a credible profession of faith before voting them into membership.<sup>52</sup> The hallmark of Baptists consists also of believer’s baptism. Historians note that, “Every Baptist confession affirms believer’s baptism, and nearly every confession from the 1640s onward has specified immersion as the proper mode of baptism. . . . Historically, most Baptists considered baptism a prerequisite to both church membership and participation in communion.”<sup>53</sup> Baptism publicly identifies Christians with Christ and the church. Directly related to membership and baptism, Baptists have historically upheld redemptive church discipline. As Gregory Wills asserts, “To an antebellum Baptist, a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church.”<sup>54</sup> A loving faith family commits to pursue those who stray from the faith.

Another key distinctive of Baptists is the priesthood of all believers, meaning

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<sup>51</sup>Jeremiah B. Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset: Consisting of Articles on Distinctive Baptist Principles*, Classic Reprint Series (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 23. More fundamentally, he states, “Underlying our denominational position . . . is one great cardinal, basal principle, the bed-rock of Baptist faith and practice. That principle is that the sacred Scriptures are the only and the absolute authority in religion” (267). Jason G. Duesing considers the implications of such in that “the preservation and right articulation of the gospel can be accomplished only through the preservation and right articulation of the church. A church comprised of an unregenerate membership several generations removed will no longer care about proclaiming such essentials as the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the way to salvation.” Jason G. Duesing, “Conclusion: Maintaining the Integrity of the Church,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 250.

<sup>52</sup>Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, 52-53, 72. Renihan writes, “In every case, membership was a serious process, entered with caution. The necessity of regeneration and the attending visible fruits required scrutiny of potential members. When admitted, expectations were high” (54).

<sup>53</sup>Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 335-36.

<sup>54</sup>Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

that all Christians are authorized by God for interceding ministry to one another and the world as “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). This doctrine provided the backbone for congregational polity. Baptists believe that, “Congregationalism is a corporate expression of the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers. . . . For Baptists congregational polity is simply living out the priesthood of all believers in the context of the local church.”<sup>55</sup> Under the lordship of Christ and leadership of pastors, a Baptist church as a whole is responsible to exercise authority over their doctrine, membership, discipline, and leadership as they discern the will of God together.<sup>56</sup>

Baptists also distinctly prize local church autonomy through self-government apart from earthly spiritual governance above itself.<sup>57</sup> And finally, as Stanton Norman states, “Baptists have always believed that a free people in a free state is the best context for the faith and practice of Christians in a New Testament church.”<sup>58</sup> Religious freedom is a key distinctive of Baptist conviction. Baptists have historically stood for religious rights through the uncoerced conscience in relation to the state. Saving faith cannot be coerced and should not be oppressed. Every man will give account of his soul before God and should be free to related to God according to his conscience. The primary distinctives

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<sup>55</sup>Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *The Baptist Story*, 337-38.

<sup>56</sup>As J. L. Reynolds asserts, “If churches are composed only of such as give credible evidence of having been taught by the Spirit of God, they may be safely entrusted with the management of their own interests.” J. L. Reynolds, “Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christ, in Its Internal and External Development,” in Dever, *Polity*, 345.

<sup>57</sup>Though independent in government, local churches were not to be isolated from one another. Renihan notes of early particular Baptists in inter-church ministry. They expressed covenantal communion with one another while both fiercely guarding their independent polity and charitably partnering in ministry with mutual responsibilities that exceeded a simple friendship. As Christians were expected to join churches, churches were then expected to be in communion with one another. Many agreed to give and receive affirmation to one another as true churches to extend fellowship in Christ; guidance on various matters; counsel in church discipline or disputes; assistance in establishing churches; material gifts in time of need; pastoral leadership and pulpit assistance; accountability in doctrine and purity; care for one another; and partnership in providing financial provision for pastors; education for prospective pastors; and evangelism and church planting unto the world. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, 154-83.

<sup>58</sup>Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way* (Nashville: B & H, 2005), 159.

of Baptists rest in this careful articulation of the biblical church as a reflection of Christ.

### **Fundamental Ecclesiology: Conclusion**

Local churches proclaim God's Word, agree as Christians upon a confession of faith, covenant for worship and disciple-making as displayed through the ordinances, and exercise the kingdom keys. The local church should be ordered according to both its essence and purpose. It is aptly concluded, "[T]he church of Jesus Christ is the preeminent institution in all this world. The church is God's gift to his children for provision, protection, and growth. The church is the vessel for the display of God's glory, not only on earth but also in the heavenly realm. To love Christ is necessarily to love his church."<sup>59</sup> May the church continue to be reformed according to Scripture. May those who are in Christ follow him in healthy local churches. May those without Christ hear and see the power of the gospel through the church.

### **Challenges to Church Membership**

Though Scripture binds Christianity to local church membership, many professing believers challenge the need for commitment to a local church. However, a fundamental misunderstanding of the church calls into question one's understanding of Christianity.<sup>60</sup> A person's understanding and practice of ecclesiology develops from an underlying view of theology and Christianity. The way one views God, man, and the gospel directly informs the way one thinks about the church. Consequently, individualism and consumerism present common challenges to church membership among professing

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<sup>59</sup>Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark E. Dever, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), x.

<sup>60</sup>Leeman writes, "A proper doctrine of the church should be informed by everything else we know about God, his love, and his plan of salvation. It should reflect everything we know about God's love and holiness; about humanity as created in God's image but fallen into guilt and corruption; about Christ's sinless life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, and the imputation of his own righteousness to sinners; and about life beneath his inaugurated rule through repentance and faith." Leeman, *Surprising Offense*, 17. Therefore, soteriology void of ecclesiology reveals a deficient theology.



Christians (particularly in the western world). These challenges often both result from and promote misunderstandings of Christianity but are overcome by understanding the implications of theology upon ecclesiology.

### **Common Challenges: Individualism**

Since the fall (Gen 3), mankind has often taken God's gift of individual dignity and turned it into sinful autonomy. Leeman describes individualism stating, "I am principally obligated to myself and maximizing my life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness . . . I may choose to identify with another party, but only so long as doing so is demonstrably conducive to my personal advantage;" therefore, "every attachment is negotiable" as men are self-authorized "free agents."<sup>61</sup> Professing believers then divorce salvation and Christian growth from covenant community and spiritual authority within the local church. The church becomes merely an impediment to personal growth and self-realization.<sup>62</sup> Such individualism plagues the church and perverts the truth of Christianity.

Autonomy reveals an aversion to external authority. Good authority, however, reflects God by producing and nurturing life; casting off such necessary restraints proves "shortsighted and self-destructive."<sup>63</sup> Nathan Hatch argues that early nineteenth-century movements in America "challenged common people to take religious destiny into their own hands, to think for themselves, [and] to oppose centralized authority."<sup>64</sup> They "came

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<sup>61</sup>Leeman, *Surprising Offense*, 44. Scripture warns of such individualism (Prov 18:21).

<sup>62</sup>Albert Mohler says, "No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other." R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," in Dever, *Polity*, 43. Quite simply, individualism is upheld by autonomy whereby one becomes a law to oneself.

<sup>63</sup>Dever and Leeman, preface to *Baptist Foundations*, xviii.

<sup>64</sup>Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 58. Wills laments,

In 1850, Southern Baptists understood democracy largely in terms of ecclesiastical authority. In 1950, they understood it primarily in terms of individual freedom. . . . The church-oriented

to scorn tradition, relish novelty and experimentation, grope for fresh sources of authority, and champion an array of millennial schemes, each in its own way dethroning hierarchy and static religious forms.”<sup>65</sup> In the church, closely held doctrines were progressively redefined in light of an individualistic worldview that more closely reflected American ideals than biblical doctrines. Contrary to the individualistic idea of “The Priesthood of *the* Believer,” Timothy George explains what was initially “The Priesthood of *all* Believers”:

Of course, Luther did believe that all Christians had direct access to God . . . [but] the priesthood of all believers did not mean, “I am my own priest.” It meant rather: In the community of saints, God has so tempered the body that we are all priests to each other. We stand before God and intercede for one another, we proclaim God’s Word to one another and we celebrate his presence among us in worship, praise, and fellowship. Moreover, our priestly ministry does not terminate upon ourselves. It propels us into the world in service and witness.<sup>66</sup>

Rather than excluding the need for others in a Christian’s life since one can approach God on his own, this doctrine buttresses the need for and blessing of Christians in one another’s lives. Another confused doctrine, soul competency, refers to the Baptist conviction that every person bears personal responsibility for rightly relating to God. Albert Mohler, Jr. summarizes the legacy of soul competency, “The concept does underscore the necessity of personal religious experience – including repentance and faith – to the Christian life. But soul competency also serves as an acid dissolving religious

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evangelicalism of early nineteenth century American Protestantism continued the Puritan pursuit of the pure, primitive church. Twentieth-century American evangelicalism preferred pietism’s tradition approach: the promotion of an individual spirituality that was loosely connected to the institutional churches. Evangelicals were no longer convinced that there was a divine mandate to establish pure churches as the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom was within. (Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 139)

<sup>65</sup>Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 80-81.

<sup>66</sup>Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” First Things First Blog, October 31, 2016, accessed December 28, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>. He continues, “The priesthood of all believers is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of the life of God’s people in the body of Christ and of the coherence of our witness in the world, the world for which Christ died.”

authority, congregationalism, confessionalism, and mutual theological accountability.”<sup>67</sup>

Personal experience and the right of individual judgment often replace the need for other Christians in the name of one’s own personal relationship with God.

However, as Joseph Hellerman asserts,

We cannot compromise biblical truth in one area without affecting other doctrines. . . . God has now been recast in the role of a divine therapist who aids the individual Christian in his or her personal quest for spiritual enlightenment and self-discovery. And Jesus . . . has become little more than a ‘personal Savior.’ Such a truncated image of God does little to encourage us to stay, to embrace the pain, and to grow with one another.<sup>68</sup>

Individualism undermines God’s glory. God is not merely a personal caterer to the individualistic whims of a man, but the sovereign king who rules over all creation. He especially redeems and rules his church in his plan to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10) and universally display his multi-faceted wisdom (Eph 3:10). God not only saves individuals but unites those once in rebellion to him and hostile to each other as one new man in Christ (Eph 2:16). God is worthy not merely of the worship of autonomous individuals but corporately of all peoples (Eph 1:20-23). The church reflects the holy and loving God who is himself a trinitarian community of three distinct persons as one God. The very nature of God in trinitarian unity as one, though diverse as three, expressing communal love is the fountainhead of committed, loving community in the church.<sup>69</sup>

Contrary to the truncated soteriology at the heart of individualism, salvation is personal yet also inherently communal.<sup>70</sup> The good news of the gospel that God

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<sup>67</sup>R. Albert Mohler Jr., introduction to *The Axioms of Religion*, by E. Y. Mullins, ed. Timothy George and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 15.

<sup>68</sup>Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 152-53. He says, “As children of a heavenly Father, we related to God in an intimate and personal way. But preoccupation with individual spirituality remains an incomplete and inadequate picture of the Christian life” (132).

<sup>69</sup>Gregg Allison further asserts, “This eternal trinitarian reality of unity in diversity is the source and template of ecclesial unity” (John 17:11, 21-22). Allison, *The Church*, 169. The very expression of love for another (which Scripture commands) requires the context of committed community life.

<sup>70</sup>Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 220-21. David Wells elaborates,

sovereignly saves sinners also means that those justified-saints not only have union with Christ, but communion with the church. Their adoption by God consequently puts them into a familial relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

Individualism not only undermines God's glory and misunderstands salvation but ignores the means God uses in salvation and sanctification. Christians submit to Jesus by submitting to one another in healthy local churches (Eph 5:21).<sup>71</sup> Professing Christians who refuse to join a local church assume an authority that does not belong to them.<sup>72</sup> However, a biblical understanding and love for the absolute sovereignty of God frees one to joyfully submit to his authority through his chosen means, the church. In covenanting and gathering with the church, Christians deny self-sovereignty, celebrate mutual submission in Christ, and anticipate the full glory of their eternal union to come.<sup>73</sup>

Though the Holy Spirit indwells all true believers, the church corporately constitutes the

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"Enlightenment thinkers demanded to be freed from all external authority in order to make up their own minds." David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 61. Similarly, post-modernism cast off rational thought and objective truth, then replaced it with the subjective preferences of the individual (61, 68, 107-9). Also see Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 228.

<sup>71</sup>Leeman summarizes, "Submitting to a local church: 1) Identifies us with Christ. 2) Distinguishes us from the world. 3) Guides us into the righteousness of Christ by presenting a standard of personal and corporate righteousness. 4) Acts as a witness to non-Christians. 5) Glorifies God and enables us to enjoy his glory. 6) Identifies us with Christ's people. 7) Assists us in living the Christian life through the accountability of brothers and sisters in the faith. 8) Makes us responsible for specific believers. 9) Protects us from the world, the flesh, and the Devil." Leeman, *Surprising Offense*, 267. He writes, "Entering the kingdom of God means submitting oneself and all of one's resources to the rule of God and trusting his provision of salvation. If Christ then hands aspects of his rule over to the church to function as his proxy, . . . the converted one is immediately ushered under the authority of the church" (199). However, as authority increasingly rests within the individual, accountability to others naturally diminishes.

<sup>72</sup>They attempt to snatch the keys of the kingdom from the church into their own hands. However, there are circumstances which legitimately hinder a professing Christian from joining a local church; yet, these are exceptions not the rule of Scripture. In addition, self-sovereign individualism has unsurprisingly also been expressed through the shift from the centrality of the local church for ministry to the work of the parachurch ministry. Rather than serving the church with complementing spiritual benefits, parachurch ministries often attempt to replace the work and authority that God gave to the local church.

<sup>73</sup>Jared Wilson, "Attending Corporate Worship," *Tabletalk* 42, no. 4 (April 2018): 66-67.

dwelling place of God in a sense that the individual cannot claim for himself (Eph 2:19-22). As head, father, shepherd, and bridegroom, God has a body, family, sheep, and bride. The church has also historically been viewed as a mother birthing and nurturing believers in faith. Through the church, God sanctifies his people and displays his glory. Therefore, the church is inherently intertwined with the plan of salvation whereby God saves a people for himself.<sup>74</sup>

John Stott says, “The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. . . . For his purpose . . . is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is to call out of the world a people for his own glory.”<sup>75</sup> A Christian who refuses to covenant with a local church is living outside the bounds of biblical Christianity. A church that either allows non-members to act as members or members to live as non-members distorts the gospel and character of God which the church exists to reflect. Membership in the church therefore is the fundamental display of biblical Christianity.

### **Common Challenges: Consumerism**

Another common challenge to church membership is consumerism. David Wells asserts, “The constant cultural bombardment of individualism, in the absence of a robust theology, meant that faith that had rightly been understood as personal now easily

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<sup>74</sup>Edmund Clowney boldly asserts, “To ignore his purpose (that Jesus will build his church) is to deny his lordship. The good news of Christ’s coming includes the good news of what he came to do: to join us to himself and to one another as his body, the new people of God.” Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 15. In addition, Clinton Arnold explains how in the early centuries, professing believers committed to extensive time and training in the church to prepare for baptism and incorporation into the church. Clinton Arnold, “Early Church Catechesis and New Christians’ Classes in Contemporary Evangelicalism,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (March 2004): 39-54. To be a Christian was to be deeply devoted to God through the authority of the church.

<sup>75</sup>Stott, *The Living Church*, 19. He acknowledges “that grotesque anomaly, [namely] an un-churched Christian” stating that “the New Testament knows nothing of such a person” (19). Jay Adams argues, “People who are not members of a church should be treated like unbelievers, because they are treating themselves as unbelievers.” Jay Adams, quoted in Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely, *Life in the Father’s House: A Members Guide to the Local Church*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 37.

became faith that was individualistic, self-focused, and consumer oriented.”<sup>76</sup> Such consumerism centered around the comfort and entertainment of the individual has distorted not only the biblical teaching of the church, but the very foundation of what it means to be a Christian.<sup>77</sup> Professing Christians who begin theology with who they are and what they want as individuals soon seek ways to satisfy themselves without sufficient regard for the truth of who God is and what he desires. A consumeristic approach to the church often reveals an underlying view of God as merely a self-selected benefit to be enjoyed on one’s own terms. The consumer is king in a market-based worldview. Individuals proceed to build churches around themselves or even become a church unto themselves based on their own consumeristic impulses and personal preferences. However, in their quest to keep in step with the world, they become out of step with the truth of God.<sup>78</sup>

Ian Murray summarizes the charges of a pastor against revivalism and the new measures ushered in by Charles Finney in the early to middle nineteenth century: “People had acquired ‘a craving for effect’ and a desire for speedy results which made everything else subordinate to that end. ‘The gospel is not attractive enough for people now-a-days. Ministers must bait their trap with something else. The old fashioned topics are seldom

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<sup>76</sup>Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 11.

<sup>77</sup>Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 11. He further explains,

“Gone is the older model of the scholar-saint, one who was as comfortable with books and learning as with the aches of the soul. This was the shepherd who knew the flock, knew how to tend it, and Sunday by Sunday took the flock into the treasures of God’s Word. This has changed. In its place is the new ‘celebrity’ style . . . leader who works by manipulating the feelings of the audience, enhancing his own image with personal anecdotes, modeling himself after the CEO, and adopting a domineering management style. He (usually) is completely results-oriented, pragmatic, happy to employ any technique from the secular world that will produce the desired results. And this leader has to be magnetic, entertaining, and light on the screen up front” (40).

<sup>78</sup>Harper and Metzger suggest, “Consumerism keeps us in bondage to our fleshly desires. Just when we think it is time to die to our selfish desires, the consumer gospel tells us that we should get whatever we want, and as much of it as possible.” Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 269.

heard.”<sup>79</sup> Hammett recalls the massive ecclesiological shift, “In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the practice of covenanting declined”; he attributes this to “the sacrifice of the ideal of regenerate church membership to the ideal of numerical growth, the general secularization of American society, and the unwillingness of church members to hold one another accountable.”<sup>80</sup> Covenant membership in the church therefore gave way to consumeristic marketing. Wills contends that though Baptists once staked the church on sound doctrine with a proper use of the ordinances and church discipline, post-Civil War churches profoundly shifted. He states, “Many Baptists shared a new vision of the church, replacing the pursuit of purity with the quest for efficiency.”<sup>81</sup> Every member equipped as a minister was gradually replaced with ministry relegated to professional staff. The slow and strenuous work of accountable covenant community gave way to the fast and flashy work of results-oriented productivity.

Christian consumerism reveals a wrong view of God, the condition of man, God’s provision in Christ, and the measure of true church health and growth. In summary, the diminishing of a high view of God inevitably leads to a distortion of the

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<sup>79</sup>Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750—1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 337. The extraordinary and outlandish means of immediately visible spirituality quickly overtook the ordinary means of grace for deeply rooted faith (397). David Benedict recorded, “At present, the modes and manners, and the eloquence of their ministers, engage more of the attention of our people, than their doctrinal expositions; and most of all, they look for those attractions which are pleasing to young people, and which will collect large assemblies, and enable them to compete with their neighbors in numbers and style. With this in view, nothing that will sound harsh or unpleasant to very sensitive ears must come from preachers; the old-fashioned doctrines of Predestination, Total Depravity, Divine Sovereignty, etc., if referred to at all, must be by way of circumlocution and implication.” David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 143.

<sup>80</sup>Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 117.

<sup>81</sup>Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 9. William Moore asserts that “a reliance upon methods in order to achieve observable results, an achievement which characterizes to a great extent the modern conception of an effective church and pastor, would have been a foreign notion to Baptists until the late nineteenth century.” William Gene Moore, “From Biblical Fidelity to Organizational Efficiency: The Gospel Ministry from English Separatism of the Late Sixteenth Century to the Southern Baptist Convention of the Early Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 8.

church. As focus upon the depths of the doctrines of Scripture diminishes, the church begins to see itself primarily in terms of what it does while forgetting who it is as God's people. Yet, when the church knows God as supremely glorious and soul satisfying and man as utterly depraved and incapable of salvation apart from sovereign grace in Christ, God is no longer pursued as a means to an end or as one who caters to the whims of mankind as self-appointed sovereigns. God is the worthy one whom the entirety of the church revolves around, depends upon, and points to for life. Scripture (not the market) then directs the church.

A church that undermines the truth of God and believes that salvation ultimately depends upon the work of man is prey to any worldly means that could coerce the appearance of conversion despite the truthfulness of the message or appropriateness of the means. John MacArthur argues,

The philosophy that marries marketing technique with church growth theory is the result of bad theology. It assumes that if you package the gospel right, people will get saved. It is rooted in Arminianism, which views conversion as nothing more than an act of the human will. Its goal is an instantaneous human decision, rather than a radical transformation of the heart wrought by almighty God through the Holy Spirit's convicting work and the truth of His Word. An honest belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation would bring an end to a lot of the nonsense that is going on in the church.<sup>82</sup>

A church believing that God alone gives faith, but he uses the church as his means for doing so in a biblical manner is positioned to rightly convey the truth of God. Rather than catering to self-expressed desires of the world, the church is to express the true need of the world, namely treasuring Christ, denying oneself, and conforming to godliness.

Christian consumerism is undergirded by secular pragmatism, which teaches that whatever works to accomplish observable, quantifiable results is what most matters.

*What is true?* is answered by *What works?*<sup>83</sup> A wrong view of what the church is and

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<sup>82</sup>John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 96.

<sup>83</sup>MacArthur articulates, "Pragmatism is the notion that meaning or worth is determined by practical consequences [or results]. . . . Pragmatism ultimately defines truth as that which is useful, meaningful, and helpful. Ideas that don't seem workable or relevant are rejected as false." MacArthur,



why it exists results in a perversion of the goal of the church, the means to attain it, and the measurement used to gauge growth. Respectable acceptance by the culture along with numerical increase and enthusiasm in the church become central tenets. Murray points out, “The health of the church has always been in proportion to the extent to which, in her teaching, the difference between Christian and non-Christian has been kept sharp and clear. Once the line is blurred spiritual decline is a certainty.”<sup>84</sup> It is not the church’s becoming like the world, but the church’s distinction from the world while engaging the world that has historically been the key to holy health.

When the authority and sufficiency of Scripture is subtly diluted or sidelined, the void may be filled with any form of pragmatism. The gospel is then packaged as minimally as possible to appeal as massively as possible. However, the gospel is not a product to be produced and marketed to please consumers; the gospel is the truth of God to be submitted to as it is in Scripture. Christian consumerism undermines the gospel of grace.<sup>85</sup> Wells asserts, “The gospel cannot be a product that the church sells because there are no consumers for it. When we find consumers, we will find that what they are

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*Ashamed of the Gospel*, 26.

<sup>84</sup>Ian Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 296. At the turn of the twentieth century, Edwin Dargan declared of such consumeristic impulses, “It is surely a mistake to resort to sensational methods to attract the people . . . For the members of the church to need the attraction of mere novelty, and the device of excitement to bring them to the house of God for his worship, is surely wrong in principle and can only have an unhealthy reaction. . . . The true remedy is to make the worship what it ought to be as worship. . . . To obscure that with unseemly attempts to rival worldly amusements in attractiveness is one of the most deplorable and ruinous of all mistakes.” Dargan, *Ecclesiology*, 662-62.

<sup>85</sup>Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop write that “consumerism is the antithesis of the gospel of grace.” Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 31. They also note, “All Christians are to be meaningfully and self-consciously committed to a particular body of believers, acting as providers rather than as consumers. And this behavior doesn’t exist to indicate that they are *mature* Christians, but that they *are* Christians” (60). They argue that what should make a church attractive (contrary to many modern consumeristic schemes) is the power of God displayed through covenant community with one another as believers, which would otherwise never occur if the gospel were not true.

interested in buying, on their own terms, is not the gospel.”<sup>86</sup> What man most needs is not what he naturally wants in his depravity, namely the truth. Therefore, the gospel cannot be purchased or picked as one option among many; it is sovereignly provided by God according to the truth of Scripture and must be supremely treasured in Christ alone.

The success of the biblical church is in direct proportion to its faithfulness to the truth of God’s Word and conformity to Christ through the ministry of the word, ordinances, prayer, discipline and disciple-making, which may or may not include numerical increase. The means used to convey the message that saves and sanctifies affects the message itself. Only biblical means can convey the biblical message. God is sovereign to save sinners. He alone adds them to the church, but he uses the sharing of the gospel to do so (Jas 1:10). The ordinary means of grace are the biblical means for nurturing health and growth in the church toward Christ-likeness.<sup>87</sup> The church is not an innovative industry to attract and amuse unbelievers. The church gathers to worship as believers and be equipped for ministry. The church is a place of truth, and Christians are ambassadors on behalf of God. A church of believers gathered to rightly worship God and be equipped by Scripture for ministry portrays the truth of God (1 Cor 14:24-25).

### **Common Challenges: Conclusion**

Individualism and consumerism are inconsistent with the character of God and the truth of the gospel. Yet, a biblical understanding of God, man, and salvation provide a foundation for a right view of the church. God is inherently loving and worthy of utmost affection and allegiance. The basis of the gospel is grace in Christ toward depraved

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<sup>86</sup>Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 53.

<sup>87</sup>Benjamin Keach’s catechism (1693) reads, “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are His ordinances, especially the Word, baptism, the Lord’s supper, and prayer; all which means are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” Timothy George and Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 252.

sinner. The church then must reflect the covenantal love and grace of God and treasure his rule by graciously submitting to one another as Christians. God-centered and others-focused community (not individualism) and commitment (not consumerism) should therefore characterize Christians and the church. Therefore, when Christians understand the harmony between basic theology and ecclesiology, they are positioned to function together as members in healthy local churches.

### **Conclusion**

The church is to gather regularly and live communally as a diverse community of believers in covenantal unity, expressing their underlying commonality in Christ. Christians prove their membership in the universal church by joining a local church, and the local church previews the triumphant church yet to be completed, all to the demonstration of the glory of God before all creation. As Martyn Lloyd Jones asserts, “We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man’s way in the world.”<sup>88</sup> Church members with a basic ecclesiology and a biblical understanding of the implications of theology upon ecclesiology are equipped to practice healthy church membership.

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<sup>88</sup>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 30.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

Having established the biblical and theological basis for healthy church membership, as well as the theoretical, practical, and historical issues related to ecclesiology, this chapter now details the process of equipping the saints at Reformation Baptist Church in Wetumpka, Alabama through the implementation of this ministry project. The concern for this project started many years ago as I (along with others) began to slowly realize how unhealthy our church was despite increasing numerical attendance. Unfortunately, efforts to lead in change over a period of a couple of years ended in a church split. In the beginning stages of walking through this painful church split, which centered upon both theology and differing views of church life, our newly-formed church was in desperate need of teaching about healthy church membership. During our initial Sunday gathering (on February 26, 2017) of those showing interest in forming a church, our other vocational pastor laid out the DNA of a biblically healthy church life.

After six months, the church spent a Sunday morning looking at an overview of healthy church life in order to establish membership and constitute the church.<sup>1</sup> Before

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<sup>1</sup>On Sunday, August 27, 2017, leaders worked together to teach four sessions regarding the essence and practices of healthy church life. We taught a church-wide Sunday School class on an overview of ecclesiology and healthy church membership, then the vision for RBC during the main worship gathering. After a lunch fellowship, we then taught a summary of our proposed confession of faith (the *1689 London Baptist Confession*) in one session and went through our proposed governing documents (including our constitution, bylaws, and church covenant) in the last session. We continued to teach on the essence and practices of healthy church life over the next two weeks as we worked to establish the church. On Sunday, September 17, everyone who had listened to the four sessions on healthy church life petitioned our team of leaders for membership so that they could be considered for membership in our leadership meeting. Those affirmed were then invited to sign the church covenant and bring it forward during a special service on Sunday, September 17, 2017 as we partook of the Lord's Supper and constituted RBC.

this time, I had taught a two-part series on the church, and afterwards taught a two-part series both on Matthew 16:13-20 (September 2017) and Hebrews 10:19-25 (December 2017). From April 2017 until April 2019, I was also teaching expositionally through Ephesians in a church-wide Sunday School class about the nature of union with Christ and communion with the Church. As I studied to write chapters 2 and 3 of this project, I was simultaneously inserting these truths into my public teaching and personal discipling. I continued to learn about the biblical essence and practices of the church and what it meant for the congregation to shift from a non-denominational church to a reformed Baptist church. In the spring of 2018 the church offered a seven-week class on Sunday nights for additional prospective members seeking to join RBC. I was unsure as to where we really were as a church at this point regarding our overall ecclesiological understanding since we had experienced so much change together so quickly. To assess and further instruct our church (as well as that of prospective members at the time), I dedicated twenty-one weeks from the week of Monday, June 4 through the week of Monday, October 22, 2018 to prepare and implement this project.

The purpose of this project was to teach biblical church membership for increasingly healthy church life at RBC. The discipleship of current and prospective members was guided by three goals. The first goal was to assess biblical knowledge and practice of church membership in a church-wide Sunday School class. The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum to teach biblical ecclesiology and healthy church membership. The third goal was to change knowledge and practice of church membership among participants of the church-wide class by teaching the curriculum.

These goals were carried out through a plan broken down into four distinct phases over a period of twenty-one weeks (though the phases overlapped at times). Phase 1 included developing curriculum, which occurred during weeks 1 through 9 (as well as weeks 13 through 15). Phase 2 included preparing and promoting the pre-assessment of the church, which occurred during weeks 9 through 13 (as well as weeks 4 and 6). Phase

3 included teaching the church by using the developed curriculum, which occurred during weeks 14 through 20. Phase 4 included administering and recording a post-assessment of the church, which occurred during weeks 20 and 21.

### **Phase 1**

Phase 1 began on Monday, June 4 with curriculum development. During week 1, I finalized the outline for the overall series, developed the thesis for each message, and wrote the first message. During week 2, I wrote the second and third messages. Throughout week 3, I reviewed the first three messages and prepared to write the fourth and fifth messages. However, a family emergency suspended further progress at the time. During week 4, I wrote the fourth message. During our church-wide Sunday school hour, I also began to let the church know (briefly announcing every other Sunday) about an upcoming series to be ready for including existing members, potential members, and curious visitors. In addition, I began working with four other core church members (including my dear wife) to finalize the pre-survey, which I started developing through a doctoral seminar in July 2017. These church members worked individually with me to edit unclear wording, delete unhelpful aspects, and add other necessary parts. They also pilot-tested the survey to gauge how long it would take to complete and made suggestions regarding the promotion of this project to the church. During week 5, I wrote the fifth message. During week 6, I wrote the sixth and final message that would be taught in two parts bringing the series to a total of seven messages; though I had originally planned to teach the series in six sessions. I also conducted a final edit of the curriculum to increase its clarity and reduce the amount of content.

On Wednesday, July 11, I emailed my supervisor with ethical forms for approval of the project. I also emailed carefully selected pastors and requested for them

to serve as an expert panel by individually evaluating the material.<sup>2</sup> During week 7, my supervisor approved me to proceed, so I submitted ethics forms to the Professional Doctoral Studies (PDS) office at SBTS, but further progress was prohibited during this week due to attendance at the July doctoral seminar. During week 8, I received three curriculum evaluations. I reviewed these evaluations and used them to begin editing the curriculum. During week 9, I received the final two curriculum evaluations and continued editing the material based on the evaluations.<sup>3</sup> Later, upon a final review of the curriculum, I created handouts for the church to use during the series during week 13. The ninth week concluded the first phase of the project in curriculum development.

## **Phase 2**

The second phase of the project also began during week 9. Phase 2 occurred during weeks 9 through 13 (as well as weeks 4 and 6). This phase was dedicated to preparing and promoting the pre-assessment of the church. During week 9, I began notifying the church with more detail regarding the upcoming survey and series through a weekly church-wide email and our church members' social media page.<sup>4</sup> During week 10 (beginning on Monday, August 6), I received ethical approval for the project through the PDS office. The elders met to discuss the series, membership class, and membership

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<sup>2</sup>The experts consisted of five Baptist pastors with at least ten years of experience in pastoral ministry as well as training on the doctoral level. Four of these pastors have earned a Ph.D. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Another pastor is a very faithful brother who has pastored in our local area for over ten years and has been pursuing professional doctoral studies in a Southern Baptist seminary. They were asked to respond by July 31. I am sincerely grateful for the helpful evaluations of Matthew Haste, Shawn Merithew, Tom Hicks, Jon English Lee, and Billy Reinhardt. For the evaluation form used, see appendix 2, "Basic Ecclesiology and Church Membership Series Evaluation." For a copy of the email I wrote to solicit this evaluative feedback, see appendix 3, "Expert Panel Request."

<sup>3</sup>See chap. 5 for a review of the expert panel's evaluations of the curriculum.

<sup>4</sup>For a copy of the announcement, see appendix 4, "Survey and Series Promotion." I am thankful for several church members (including my wife) who kindly provided feedback in helping me craft appropriate wording to encourage our church's eager participation in this project.

process for prospective members.<sup>5</sup> We decided that it would be best for me to begin the series after Labor Day to ensure the highest level of participation without members being away on vacation. Therefore, I decided to give the pre-survey on Sunday, August 26 (before Labor Day weekend) to allow time to review the results and begin the series two weeks later on Sunday, September 9. During weeks 11 and 12, I wrote a plan with instructions to help prepare the participants before taking the survey. I also gathered pens and printed 80 paper surveys (three front and back pages stapled) to hand out. This pre-survey initially consisted of collecting background information along with indicating one's level of agreement with 42 statements through a six-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree, strongly agree). However, not all statements were designed to elicit the same response. The first twenty-seven statements dealt with the church's knowledge while the last fifteen questions dealt with the church's practice.<sup>6</sup> I also gathered a small team to be ready to pass the pens and surveys out, then collect them afterwards. I made sure that a final announcement was made about the upcoming survey and series both in Sunday School and in the Sunday corporate gathering.

On Sunday, August 26, I preached a shorter sermon than normal during our church's corporate Sunday School hour (from 8:45-9:45am) and took about five minutes to explain the pre-survey. I told the participants that the pre-survey (along with a post-survey after the teaching series) would help the elders shepherd the church and would serve as part of my doctoral studies. I attempted to engage interest by letting them know

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<sup>5</sup>Prospective members were invited (and required) to hear the series in Sunday school, and in addition, they attended three one-hour Sunday night sessions to learn about the confession of faith, personal spiritual disciplines, and the governing documents (Sunday, September 30; Sunday, October 7; and Sunday, October 14 at 5 pm). Some prospective members were not able to hear every teaching in person, but they were allowed to listen to a recording which was discussed during their elder interview prior to being voted into membership by the church. Of our prospective members, eleven completed the class, two began the class without completing it, and ten were proposed to the church for membership.

<sup>6</sup>See appendix 1 for the pre-survey "Biblical and Healthy Church Survey."



that this work could potentially serve to help other local churches in the future. I emphasized the importance of being honest in marking their level of agreement with each statement, and to fill it out entirely. I encouraged them not to overthink the questions since they are intended to be straightforward. I let them know that the first half of the survey covered concerns of doctrine and the second half covered personal practice. I also instructed them that the survey would be kept in confidence. They were not to put their names on them, but in order to match their pre-survey with their post-survey (and so measure any difference in responses later), they needed to write a four-digit code consisting of their birthday month and date. They were highly encouraged to remain seated while music softly played and take the survey on the spot, then to return it immediately.

Participants were then given about fifteen minutes to complete the survey and return it to a designated leader at the front or back of the sanctuary before the main service began. Leaders (consisting of those who helped evaluate the survey and therefore were not eligible to take it) were appointed to stand at the front and back of the sanctuary to take up completed surveys and offer assistance as needed. However, the only help that leaders were permitted to give participants regarding the survey was either to re-read a question that they did not understand or direct me to come to them. Only two participants requested additional help understanding a question, but I politely reread the question with very minimum help so as not to direct their response. My wife also collected a few more surveys that Sunday night prior to our members' meeting, but no more were collected after that Sunday. Sixty-three pre-surveys were adequately filled out and returned.<sup>7</sup>

During week 13, I made the sermon handouts. I also recorded and reviewed the pre-surveys. I made a master key with a scoring system so that each question was

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<sup>7</sup>Eight additional surveys were returned, but they were discarded because they did not properly include an identification number or because at least three-fourths of the survey was not completed.

assigned a numerical value ranging from one (lowest score) to six (highest score) in order to rank each response.<sup>8</sup> Then, I recorded the data from each participant in a spreadsheet. I made notes of commonly missed questions so that I could spend more time in those particular areas during the sermon series and less time in the areas where the church responded well. I matched each question from the survey with the lesson that would most appropriately cover that question. I noted how much time would be necessary to spend covering the theology and implications behind each question based on how well the church responded.

### **Phase 3**

Phase 3 included teaching the church by using the developed curriculum. This phase occurred during weeks 14 through 20. During week 14, I emailed the church again (with a reminder email the following week) regarding the upcoming series with an attached copy of the message handouts.<sup>9</sup> Throughout each week in this phase, I continued to review the surveys to know which aspects of the curriculum needed more attention. At the beginning of each week, I began working through final preparations on the upcoming message in order to teach, illustrate, and apply the main truths in each lesson, particularly in light of the helpful evaluations given by the expert panel and responses from church members regarding the previous week's message.

I entitled our new series "The Church: An Overview of Basic Ecclesiology and Healthy Church Life," whereby we would study the centrality of the church in God's redemptive plan. I taught the messages in one-hour sessions on seven consecutive Sunday

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<sup>8</sup>For the key with the scoring system, see appendix 5, "Survey Key."

<sup>9</sup>For the curriculum handouts, see appendix 6, "The Church Series Notes." The original document included a total of thirteen pages that covered the entire series. Prospective new members were provided a printed notebook with the lessons, along with other materials for the additional three Sunday night sessions that they were required to attend (or listen to online if they were prohibited from attending a session).

mornings. I framed this curriculum as a series of messages that provide biblical responses to basic questions about the church.

On Sunday, September 9, I taught lesson 1, “What is the Church?” I began by emphasizing the general decline of church health among the cradle of post-Reformation Christianity in Europe, which has now plagued America. This general decline is then brought to bear on our own lives through the painful past from which RBC was birthed. I wanted our current members, new members, and prospective members to be on the same page and grow together before moving forward.<sup>10</sup> I illustrated various common attitudes toward the church through seven fictitious people whom represent fundamental misunderstandings of what it means to be a Christian. I then explained that the gospel is the core of our concern, but the church preserves and proclaims the gospel while picturing the implications of the gospel.

We considered modern misunderstandings of the church, then we took up the biblical constitution of the church (as explained in chap. 2 of this project). I overviewed the origin of the church in Scripture along with the nature, metaphors, attributes, and marks of the church. We then studied the definition of the church (Matt 16:13-20, 18:15-

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<sup>10</sup>The membership process at RBC ordinarily begins after one has attended on Sunday morning and expressed interest in Christ and/or the church. They then must complete the membership class (which is offered twice a year or as needed). Then, prospective members must successfully complete an elder interview whereby they express a basic understanding of the gospel, credible profession of faith, and an affirmation of our church confession, covenant, and governing documents; in addition, they can discuss any questions or concerns with one of the pastors (along with a pastoral intern or another member who may attend the meeting). Our elders intend to graciously get to know these men and women on a personal level and discuss what it means to know Christ and live in relationship to the church. Our elders also call the prospective member’s previous church (if they previously joined or regularly attended another local church) to see if they were in good standing. Next, the elders determine which prospective members are eligible for membership and send the church a copy of their testimonies for review. In our next scheduled member meeting (held on five Sunday evenings each year), the elders summarize each prospective member’s testimony and background before the church, call for any further questions or concerns, and ask the church to vote on accepting each candidate into membership. Upon a majority vote, affirmed members are invited to sign the church covenant. They are then welcomed into membership through baptism (or upon profession through a previous valid baptism) and a time of covenanting together during a Sunday morning service. For a copy of the liturgy which guided this covenanting portion of the service for new members, see appendix 7, “Reformation Baptist Church Covenant Affirmation.”

20; Eph 2:19-22) and a brief biblical theology of the church. I concluded by calling the church to proclaim the whole counsel of God and reflect the full range of God's character through both our worship and witness. I called unbelievers to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, to treasure him supremely, and to demonstrate a love for his lordship by committing their lives to worship through the local church.

On Sunday, September 16, I taught lesson 2, "How is the Church Ordered?" A properly ordered church consists of regenerate church membership, qualified leadership, and elder-led congregationalism (as informed by chaps. 2 and 3 of this project). The organization of the church in its government serves as a framework to enable the church's life as an organism of members as a family. Our theology informs our polity, and Scripture is sufficient to order the church.

I began with regenerate church membership. Every church member should be a Christian, and every Christian should be a church member. We walked through biblical evidence for church membership beginning with an Old Testament background and continuing throughout the New Testament. Prospective church members should present a credible profession of faith before the elders and church, a fundamental understanding of the gospel, a desire for baptism, and a willingness to covenant with a local church. I outlined the practical significance of membership as identifying us with Christ, distinguishing us from the world, marking us off as a corporate witness before the world, and promoting our spiritual growth.

I then moved on to various passages (such as 1 Timothy) regarding qualified leadership. I explained the qualifications and job descriptions of both elders and deacons as well as the difference between the two. A plurality of elders should oversee, shepherd, and equip the church with the Word of God. Deacons serve the church in leading roles as deemed necessary by the church and its elders to build up the body.

I then briefly concluded with the third concern of a properly ordered church: elder-led congregationalism. I pointed to numerous passages which teach that local

churches are responsible to exercise the keys of the kingdom with the direction of their elders. I concluded by asserting that a biblically-ordered church is a ministry-oriented church which verbally and visually represents the glory of Christ. We desire to see the saints equipped for ministry and our Savior exalted as sovereign Lord over all.

On Sunday, September 23, I taught lesson 3, “Why Does the Church Exist?” First, we studied the purpose of the church from numerous passages. The church foremost exists to worship God as supremely worthy. We are to worship God continually, and we are also to set aside time weekly on the Lord’s Day to worship God corporately. Worship must be centered upon and consumed with God’s Word. The church also exists to disciple one another as believers. We considered the numerous “one another” passages of Scripture that call believers to take responsibility for one another’s welfare (see Heb 10:19-25). Finally, the church exists to witness to the world of God’s glory. The biblical worship of the healthy church overflows into a witness of God’s glory not only to one another, but to the world (Matt 28:16-20; Eph 3:10).

Next, I taught on the blessings and responsibilities of church membership as modeled by the example of selected early Baptists. Church members covenant to gather in worship with the church, submit their discipleship to the church, preserve the sound doctrine of the church, edify other members, live in holiness, exercise the kingdom keys, and serve in the ministry of the church. In summary, Christ calls us to love the church. We enjoy the blessings of giving and receiving care to one another while seeking to extend those blessings to all outside of Christ through the proclamation of the gospel and planting of other healthy churches.

On Sunday, September 30, I taught lesson 4, “Distinctives of a True Church, Part One.” I explained that the Reformation understanding of the church is that of a people marked off by the preaching of the gospel, rightly administering the ordinances, and properly practicing church discipline.

We began by walking through the biblical truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ

(Rom 3:21-26). Scripture teaches that God is holy, man is sinful, Christ is sufficient, and faith and repentance are commanded. Having called those in attendance to come to Christ and live in light of the gospel of Christ, I illustrated how the various practices of a local church often reflect its theology and understanding of the gospel. We must be careful to understand the fullness of God in the gospel because such understanding will yield either sweet or sour implications in our attitudes and practices as a church.

Then I moved to studying a right administration of the ordinances, beginning with baptism. Local churches exercise the keys of the kingdom by administering the ordinances to those who belong to the church and by withholding the ordinances from those who do not rightly belong to the church. We began with six basic questions about baptism: the what, who, why, when, why, and where of biblical baptism. Biblical baptism is the immersing of a believer in water upon a credible profession of faith through a local church. Numerous passages of Scripture teach that baptism indicates an identification with the triune God (Matt 3:15-17, 28:18), distinction from the world, regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), purification from sin (1 Pet 3:21; Ezek 36:25; Heb 9:13-14, 10:19-22), participation in the body of Christ (Eph 4:4-5; 1 Cor 12:13), and proclamation of the gospel (Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26; 2 Cor 5:15-17).

On Sunday, October 7, I taught lesson 5, “Distinctives of a True Church, Part Two.” We continued by studying the right administration of the Lord’s Supper as well as the third mark, which is the proper practice of church discipline.

As with baptism, I framed this lesson by the why, who, where, when and how of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is a meal that unites believers, distinguishes them from the world, identifies them with Christ, nourishes them spiritually as a church, and pictures the realities of the gospel (Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). The Supper is designated in Scripture for baptized believers who are local church members in good standing. The Lord’s Supper should be observed in the context of the main worship gathering of a local church with regularity. I reminded the church that just as Adam

partook of the tree in the garden to his death, Christ tasted death on our behalf that we may eat and partake of Christ unto eternal life.

Finally, just as the Lord's Supper indicates communion as a church, church discipline indicates the dissolution of a professed believer's spiritual fellowship with the church. The third mark of a true church (or, the implication of the first two marks) is the proper use of church discipline. Church discipline is intended for the purity of the church (Acts 5:4-5, 14; 1 Cor 5:12), the restoration of the Christian (Heb 12:7, 10; Gal 6:1), and for the glory of God in Christ (Lev 19:2). We then studied through Matthew 18:15-20 (along with numerous other passages) in the biblical pattern for church discipline moving from private correction, personal clarification, church exhortation, and finally in church excommunication. Churches that truthfully and graciously practice discipline as a reflection of the loving character of God make it easier for the world to hear the gospel and see the implications of the gospel.

On Sunday, October 14, I taught lesson 6, "Distinctives of a Healthy Church and a Baptist Church, Part One." We moved from studying what marks the being of a church to what marks the well-being of a church. As informed by chapter 3 in this project, I began by teaching through Ephesians 4:1-16 as a biblical blueprint for true church growth. First, we are to pursue holy unity as a covenant community (Eph 4:1-6; cf. Col 3:12-16). Next, we are to be equipped for gospel ministry under biblical authority (Eph 4:7-12; cf. Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:10-11; 1 Cor 12:4-7, 18-20, 24-26). Finally, we are to grow in Christian maturity through mutual accountability (Eph 4:13-16). The measure of a church's health is its unity in the truth, maturity in ministry, and conformity to Christ. Next, we explored numerous passages in a survey of distinctives of healthy church life including sound doctrine, expositional preaching, saving faith, biblical worship, covenantal membership, church discipline, spiritual unity, prayer dependency, and local and global disciple-making. I ended by urging the church to realize that every member has a vital role as we proclaim the gospel, gather converts, and plant and nurture

churches around the world.

On Sunday, October 21, I taught lesson 7, “Distinctives of a Healthy Church and a Baptist Church, Part Two.” Originally, I planned for a seven-week series, but I later decided to only write six messages in hopes of condensing the series to six weeks. However, I ran out of time in the sixth message to outline the distinctives of a Baptist church. Therefore, the final lesson turned out to be a continuation of the previous message and a time to cover parts of the curriculum that I had skipped over.

I outlined a brief history of Baptists and introduced the fundamental conviction of historic Baptist life, namely that Scripture is sufficient for the organization and growth of the church. The first distinctive of a Baptist church that we considered is confessional theology. Many Baptists have produced summaries of what they believe the Bible teaches and what church members must believe for membership. Baptists also hold to regenerate church membership expressed through believer’s baptism. Third, Baptists hold to the priesthood of all believers whereby believers are priests to one another in the body of Christ. Next, Baptists uphold elder-led congregationalism. I illustrated from Baptist history that although Baptist churches are independent in authority, they are not isolated in ministry. Earlier Baptist churches eagerly and voluntarily cooperated together in ministry. Finally, Baptists uphold religious freedom. Each person is responsible before God and that true faith cannot be coerced and should not be suppressed.

I then addressed the role of parachurch ministries, as well as when a person should consider leaving a church. Finally, we looked at the first scriptural snapshot of the church in Acts 2 and ended with symptoms of strength and sickness in Revelation 2-3.

#### **Phase 4**

Phase 4 included administering and recording a post-assessment of the church, which occurred during weeks 20 and 21. Having reminded everyone through our church email and social media page the previous week, I expected most to be intentional about



listening online to any messages in the series that they missed and to come prepared to take the final survey at the end of the last lesson. On Sunday, October 21 after teaching the seventh and final message in this series, I concluded by giving similar instructions as were provided in preparation for the pre-survey in order to prepare the church to take the post-survey. The post-survey included the same questions from the pre-survey. I also thanked the church for eagerly leaning into this time of growth and for their help in this project as part of my doctoral studies. I allowed for about five additional minutes for the church to complete and return the post-survey than was allowed for the pre-survey. They were given a total of fifteen minutes with an additional ten minutes to spare before the main worship gathering began.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, sickness swept through our church the previous week, so I expected attendance to be low. Yet, we were only about five people below normal attendance. I was also concerned about participation with a second survey since the church was not accustomed to this practice. Forty-six post-surveys were adequately completed and returned.<sup>12</sup> Almost all were returned immediately at the end of Sunday school, but a few were returned within the next week. The average attendance of those in the sanctuary hearing this series each week was 79 people.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The main difference between the pre-survey and post-survey is that the latter included a question regarding how many of the messages that the participant had heard and how many of those were in person (rather than online). I also edited question 3 in the background information section since it proved to be confusing for many in the pre-survey. I also changed the final question at the end in the comments section from the aspects one needs more knowledge and better practice in to which aspects of the series were most helpful.

<sup>12</sup>Four additional surveys were returned, but they were discarded since they either did not properly include an identification number or because at least three-fourths of the survey was not completed. The higher attendance (96) on the Sunday of the pre-survey as compared to the lower attendance (75) on the Sunday of the post-survey likely helps explain why 63 people adequately filled out and returned the pre-survey while 46 adequately filled out and returned the post-survey. In addition, curiosity was possibly higher initially about the survey and upcoming series.

<sup>13</sup>On Sunday, August 26, we had 96 in attendance for the pre-survey. On Sunday, September 9, we had 81 people in attendance. On Sunday, September 16, we had 80 people. On Sunday, September 23, we had 74 people. On Sunday, September 30, we had 90 people. On Sunday, October 7, we had 81 people. On Sunday, October 14, we had 74 people. On Sunday, October 21, we had 75 people (also the day of the post-survey). Several children and youth were present during this time, but only those at least 18 years of age were eligible to take the surveys. Although I did not announce it to the church, I expected members to

During week 21, after having been so focused on preparing for and teaching the series itself, I began to plan more directly about how to record the data. My wife helped me to begin noting initial observations, but I did not finish recording the data until Friday, November 23. I progressively recorded the scores for each pre-survey and post-survey in a spreadsheet so that I could come back and analyze the data.

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complete the pre-survey, hear at least four sessions in person (and listen online to the sessions they missed in person), and then complete the post-survey in order to be eligible to be counted in the research.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an evaluation of the effectiveness of the project, beginning with an explanation of how this project fulfilled its purpose. Each of the three goals that guided this project were successfully fulfilled, including assessing the church, developing curriculum, and teaching the material so that participants demonstrated a statistically significant increase in knowledge and practice of healthy church life. I then offer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of this project so that it may be increasingly helpful in future implementations in a local church. Finally, I conclude with personal and theological reflections regarding the extensive impact that this project has had upon myself, my family, and our church.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to teach biblical church membership for increasingly healthy church life at Reformation Baptist Church (RBC) in Wetumpka, Alabama. The first part of this purpose proved to be effective since I taught a seven-week course to the majority of our church members as well as visitors and those who were in the process of becoming members. However, the aim of this teaching (as the purpose statement indicates) is not only to accumulate knowledge, but to equip the church with understanding and practices in order to shepherd them toward healthier church life. There are myriads of ideas regarding what health is and how to achieve health or growth in the life of a local church. However, I chose an overview of Scripture along with many individual passages to teach what the Bible says about healthy church life. During this

time, I have witnessed growth in our church not only through engaging in personal conversations and observations, but through statistically significant and meaningful research that demonstrates an increase in knowledge and practice of church life. Despite my own many personal weaknesses as a Christian and as a pastor, God continues to use his Word to grow his church.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The discipleship of current and prospective members at RBC was guided by three goals which included an initial assessment of the church's knowledge and practice regarding healthy church life, the development of a seven-week curriculum, and the change of knowledge and practice at RBC through teaching the curriculum. These goals were based on a study of ecclesiology from the exposition of Scripture along with the use of biblical, systematic, and historical theology. A defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success was used to assess the achievement of each goal.

#### **Goal 1: Assess**

The first goal was to assess biblical knowledge and practice of church membership in a church-wide Sunday School class. This goal was measured by administering the Biblical and Healthy Church Survey (BHCS) concerning ecclesiological knowledge and practice during the RBC Sunday school hour. This goal was successfully met with over 25 individuals completing the BHCS.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the survey yields a clearer picture of the biblical knowledge and practice of healthy church life among individuals at RBC.

Twelve males and fifteen females completed both the pre- and post-surveys,

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<sup>1</sup>Sixty-three participants adequately filled out and completed the pre-survey. Of those, 27 respondents also heard all of the messages in the following teaching series and adequately filled out and returned the post-survey. I focus my analysis of the pre-survey on these 27 respondents since they displayed a higher commitment in attendance to the ministry of RBC during this time and will also be the focus of the pre-survey analysis.

and also listened to all of the messages. They ranged from age eighteen to those in their seventies, but the largest age bracket represented was the 20s, then the 30s and 50s respectively. Nine respondents marked that they had been a Christian for five years or less, and only five respondents professed to be a Christian for longer than fifteen years. Every respondent but one indicated that they either currently were or had been a church member.

The survey included forty-two statements that were arranged into two sections consisting of twenty-seven statements which engage knowledge and fifteen statements which engage practice.<sup>2</sup> Though there are many more knowledge questions than practice questions, there are almost as many low scoring questions in the practice section as there are in the knowledge section. In addition, the highest scoring questions are almost exclusively concentrated in the knowledge section. I expected that the practice section would be lower since it is typically easier to know more than is put into practice.

In the knowledge section, there were nine different categories of statements including one on Scripture (Q1), one on the gospel (Q2), six on the necessity of church membership (Q3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 23), four on the responsibility of membership (Q15, 18, 19, 27), five on the nature of the church (Q4, 7, 9, 10, 26), three on the ordinances (Q8, 14, 24), three on church leadership (Q11, 16, 25), two on church discipline (Q20, 21), and two on missions (Q17, 22). In the practice section of the survey, there were seven different categories of statements including two on service in the church (Q35, 38), four on relationships with other members (Q31, 32, 33, 40), one on the ordinances (Q29), two on evangelism (Q36-37), one on preparation for Sunday worship (Q34), one on family worship (Q41), and four on commitment to membership (Q28, 30, 39, 42).

Two of the four questions related to the ordinances (Q14, 24) were among the

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<sup>2</sup>I use the terms *statements* and *questions* synonymously in reference to the content of the survey. In the most direct sense, they are statements. However, indirectly, they are questions because participants are questioned regarding their level of agreement with these statements.

lowest scoring questions. Two of the highest scoring questions were in the category of church leadership (Q11, 25). However, for the most part, the questions with both the highest and lowest scores were not concentrated in any particular category but were spread out across most all of the various categories.

With 252 being a perfect score, the average score was 201 and the median score was 207. The scores of participants ranged from 115 to 246. Nine participants scored 220 or higher. Table 1 displays the questions that received the highest scores of over 145 out of a maximum of 162 points (Q1, 10, 11, 23, 25, 33).

Table 1. Pre-survey highest scoring questions

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Score</i>
10. It is necessary for churches to state a summary of beliefs that members must adhere to.	153
11. Churches should formally recognize elders to rule and deacons to serve in leadership.	153
1. The Bible provides everything a church needs to know about church growth.	152
25. The most important thing about a preacher is that he is engaging to the congregation.	147
23. Watching a church service on a screen can be as effective as attending in person.	146
33. I need other church members to know and encourage me outside church gatherings.	146

I was not surprised that the church did well on these questions since we have often emphasized the sufficiency of Scripture for church growth (Q1), the dangers of relying solely on a screen in place of attendance and personal relationships in the church (Q23), the most important aspect of a preacher being that he exposit's God's Word (Q25),

and the significance of covenantal relationships as church members outside of our weekly gatherings (Q33). However, I was surprised that among the highest scoring questions were those that pertained to two of our most significant transitions as a church, which consist of becoming more richly confessional in our doctrine (Q10) and the change in our church leadership to formally recognized elders and deacons (Q11). Our former church context displayed much resistance to these two changes, but our newly planted church seemed to understand them.

Since we had only recently begun having meetings for members only and most of our church had little to no experience with this practice, it is also somewhat surprising that they revealed a higher level of understanding in this area (Q19). Interestingly, the highest scoring question in the practice question (and one of the highest overall) concerned high agreement that we need other members to know and encourage us personally. However, the lowest scoring question in the practice section (and close to the lowest overall) was the statement regarding whether respondents had given intentional care to at least three other members in the last week (Q32). Only five respondents marked “strongly agree” to this statement. I was surprised that the many questions regarding the necessity of church membership, the authority of the church, and the distinction between the church and the world were not among the higher scoring questions.

Table 2 displays the data collected on the lowest scoring questions, which received less than 115 out of 162 points (Q4, 14, 16, 17, 32, 38, 41). Seven or more respondents disagreed on various levels to six of the statements (Q4, 6, 16, 24, 32, 41). The church scored severely low on question 16, which asks the respondents their level of agreement with the statement, “The local church should have other spiritual authorities over it to hold it accountable.” However, the question proved to be quite unhelpful since several expressed to me both in person and on their surveys that they were unsure of what was meant by it. With our newly established Baptist church, I planned to teach the fundamentals of congregationalism and local church autonomy. According to the pre-

survey, our greatest weaknesses in the area of knowledge related to the nature of the church and the administration of the ordinances.

Table 2. Pre-survey lowest scoring questions

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Score</i>
16. The local church should have other spiritual authorities over it to hold it accountable.	77
14. Christians who are not members of a local church should still be able to partake of the Lord's Supper.	99
4. A church is any gathering of Christians in one place.	104
32. In the past week, I have intentionally cared for at least three other church members.	105
38. I know my spiritual gifts and regularly practice them under leadership of my pastors.	108
17. Missions are more effective through specialized ministries outside the local church.	111
41. I practice family worship in my home or in other families' homes on a regular basis.	112

The second most problematic statement revealed that many respondents are at least open to the idea of open communion whereby those who are not members of any local church are welcome at the Lord's Table (Q14). I knew we still had concerns and misunderstanding in this area but was quite surprised (and concerned) to see this response. Apart from the unhelpfully-worded question 16, this was the most problematic question. I realized the need to further explain the proper nature and practice of the ordinances. Interestingly, six females responded correctly while no males did so.

I was surprised that almost a third of respondents agreed on some level that, "The church is any gathering of Christians in one place" (Q4). There are strong



sentiments in our cultural context that the church is merely any group of Christians who happen to be in the same place at the same time. It severely undermines the fundamental nature of the church on a local level as a corporate assembly of gathered saints who are in covenantal union together, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, and are vested with divine authority to exercise the keys of the kingdom. Therefore, it is little wonder then that another low scoring question (which received 116 points) was question 6: “Christians who refuse to join and submit to a local church are in sin.” The expected response, especially after transitioning over the past couple of years to biblical church membership, was a resounding “strongly agree,” though I suspected that this strongly worded question may rouse suspicion. I intended the word “refuse” to communicate a situation whereby a professing Christian could join a biblical local church but intentionally determined not to do so. In addition, thirteen respondents indicated that they at least partially believed they can grow on their own without consistent involvement in the local church (Q30). Twelve respondents at least partially agreed that Christians can attend and participate in church(es) without need to join one local church (Q3).

In the area of the ordinances, many expressed that, “Children of all ages who continually express a desire to be baptized should be baptized” (Q24). I wanted to see what the church thought about children’s baptisms since this had been a problem for us as well. Currently many Baptist churches are eager to baptize any child of any age who will simply parrot the right theological words and sound sincere. I realized that I needed to continue to pastorally help the church think through this issue biblically and carefully, especially since our largest demographic as a church is young children. Eleven respondents did not strongly agree that people must be baptized after conversion to join a church, and four indicated disagreement (Q8).

The rest of the lowest scoring questions were in the area of practice both in the home and in the church. The fourth most problematic question concerned how the church put into practice what I expected they already knew, namely the need to practice the “one

another's" of Scripture (Q32). I wanted to urge the church to depend less on formal church programs and lean more into informally practicing hospitality with one another throughout the week as demonstrated in the Book of Acts. Many also struggled with knowing and practicing their spiritual gifts (Q38). On one hand, however, I suspect that many members were already naturally using their spiritual gifts without realizing it, but on the other hand, many were still trying to find how they could serve the body.

I was also stunned to look at hard numbers in the demographics section. We are nowhere near as young in age as many seem to think we are as a church. Close to half of respondents were in their 40s and above. However, we are younger in faith than we likely realize. Almost half (twelve of twenty-seven respondents) indicated that they had had been a Christian for ten years or less.

Finally, only five respondents strongly agreed that they were practicing family worship regularly in their home or another member's home (Q41). Of eight comments that were provided regarding areas that respondents needed more knowledge or better practice in, three asked for help in establishing family worship in their homes. The practice of family worship is a key area to address in establishing healthy churches. I also expected a higher response to question 34, which indicated how much members were preparing their hearts and homes to gather in corporate worship each Sunday. Only four respondents indicated that they strongly agree with the statement, "I take time to prepare myself (and those in my home) beforehand for worship on Sunday." We have been emphasizing the need to note the upcoming Scriptures, sermon texts, and songs and be prayerful and joyful in preparing for corporate worship; however, the elders need to continue to lead in this area.

As shown in table 3, I was also concerned to see some of the responses to questions related to evangelism and missions (Q17, 36).

Table 3. Pre-survey questions related to evangelism and missions

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>AS</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Score</i>
17. Missions are more effective through specialized ministries outside the local church.	0	2	4	5	9	5	111
36. I regularly establish relationships with non-Christians to share Christ with them.	0	2	2	7	9	6	119
22. Church membership is unnecessary for globally spreading the Gospel.	2	0	1	4	7	11	122
37. My lifestyle looks different from that of non-Christians.	0	0	0	2	14	11	144

Six respondents indicate that missions are better done through parachurch ministries. Interestingly, a very similar lower score (119 out of a possible 162) was given in the practice section to the statement, “I regularly establish relationships with non-Christians to share Christ with them” (Q36). The only five participants who strongly agree that missions are most effective through the local church (Q17) also strongly agreed that they regularly establish relationships with non-Christians to share Christ with them. Similarly, seven respondents indicated that they only agreed somewhat or even disagreed that church membership is necessary for the global spread of the gospel (Q22). As a church, we must understand our purpose in overflowing with Christ-centered worship to the point of taking it to the nations in global disciple-making. This is a task that parachurch ministries can be very helpful in, but the Great Commission is a mission biblically given to the local church and its members.

In designing the survey, I expected respondents to score so high overall that there would be almost no room for improvement. I had been increasingly teaching through many of the items on the survey as I was growing in my own understanding through my doctoral studies. Overall, respondents did perform well on the survey, but nowhere near as well as I expected. However, based on the multitude of comments in

person as well as the numerous clarifying notes made throughout the surveys, many respondents took the survey very seriously and asked to know which questions they got wrong throughout the series.

## **Goal 2: Develop Curriculum**

The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum to teach biblical ecclesiology and healthy church membership. This goal was measured by four (one more than I originally planned) expert practitioners in pastoral ministry and ecclesiology from other local churches through use of a rubric to evaluate accuracy, clarity, sufficiency, and relevancy of the teaching series.<sup>3</sup> This goal was considered successfully met as a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators exceeded the sufficiency level upon the initial reviews.

The evaluations and feedback from all four pastors were very helpful in preparing to teach this series as well as for my own personal growth. It is not easy to submit yourself and your ministry to analysis, but it is often helpful. The eternal magnitude that local church ministry serves in God's plan of redemption demands our continual growth in increasing faithfulness and fruitfulness. The reviewers praised how "well-organized," "thorough," and what "robust training for church members" that they found in the content of the training. With only one exception, I received evaluations of three ("sufficient") and four ("exemplary") in all four categories including biblical accuracy, clarity regarding overall purposes and specific terms in the lessons, sufficiency regarding the breadth covered, and relevancy concerning those who will hear it.

However, most all of the scores of three (as well as a score of two signifying that it required attention) were due to a central point of concern provided by almost all of the reviewers. They confirmed my own personal concern about the material being "very

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 2 for the rubric "Basic Ecclesiology and Church Membership Series Evaluation." See appendix 3 for a copy of the email to panel members, "Expert Panel Request."

cumbersome,” “very academic,” and “too much.” One reviewer simply stated, “I fear your density will be burdensome to some lay people.” A reviewer also encouraged me to also make the content more personal regarding the specific history, DNA, opportunities, and culture of RBC.

Reviewers also challenged me to more carefully and pastorally apply the material with illustrations and interactive questions. Rather than overwhelming members with content, a reviewer mentioned that I should consider how to make the material “more accessible” by personally addressing their “mistaken perspectives” and “attitudes.” Pastors must remember that they often think on these truths continually and not forget that many of their people do not. Though we want to teach them to be self-feeders and feed them with weighty truth, as one reviewer put it, “You want to give them steak that they can actually eat.” I expected these concerns, but the specific ways that they were presented and articulated by the reviewers to me was very helpful.

The theology of the material was highly praised, but the approach of teaching the material was considerably concerning to several. Though I left the content of the original material as it was, as I printed the manuscripts each week, I worked diligently to briefly summarize and cut out much material as well as to illustrate and better apply the content. I added thought-provoking practical questions and illustrations (particularly in the introductions). For example, I knew the second lesson on polity would be the most difficult to draw interest, but I regarded it as possibly the most important since at the center of our church split was concern over church government. Therefore, I attempted to help people personally see the need for understanding in this area by graciously addressing concerns in our previous church setting which helped us to see the impact of church polity on our daily lives in the wake of a very painful church split. I asked thought-provoking questions such as, “Have you ever noticed that some churches change pastors every couple of years while other churches have the same pastor for decades? There are fundamental reasons for that.” Upon such changes, several members mentioned

that this lesson was the most powerful in the series as well as the clearest and most compelling message that they had ever heard on the organization of the church.

Throughout the series, I was quick to encourage our church in how well they performed on the pre-survey and apologize for questions that may have been worded poorly. I also challenged our church by mentioning the questions that revealed our need for further growth, especially since some requested that I address our weak points.

After analyzing the pre-survey (as previously discussed), I was able to see where I should spend both more time and less time regarding content. Reviewers noted that the sections on baptism and the Lord's Supper were particularly helpful, and two reviewers very encouragingly requested permission to incorporate some of the material in their own church's membership class. I was also encouraged to anticipate questions and pushback from members as I went through the lessons in order to proceed by practically addressing such concerns in my explanations.

There were other areas helpfully mentioned as well. One reviewer appreciated how I tied the sections on the Lord's Supper and church discipline together since many fail to see the intimate relation of the two observances. Two reviewers were glad that I addressed the modern erroneous views of success in the church and encouraged me to clearly define biblical success for a church. Another reviewer asked for more clarity regarding the lesson on church discipline in terms of which sins biblically call for the church's public attention. A reviewer also requested giving additional attention to making a more thorough case for the biblical grounds for confessionalism and the necessity of using confessions of faith. I am exceedingly thankful for these and many other helpful comments that addressed both overall perceptions of the material. I made a large number of these revisions in my personal notes and refined my approach to teaching the material.

### **Goal 3: Change Displayed in Assessment**

The third goal was to change knowledge and practice of church membership

among participants of the church-wide class by teaching the curriculum. Upon completion of the class, this goal was measured by re-administering the BHCS to the same participants who successfully completed the pre-survey. Only the surveys of participants (eighteen years of age and older) who were present for at least four sessions in person and listened to a recording of the messages that they missed were qualified for analysis in this research.<sup>4</sup> Forty-six surveys were adequately completed and returned, but only twenty-seven were qualified for inclusion in the research.<sup>5</sup> This goal was considered successfully met as the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post assessment scores. The teaching on the doctrine of the church to a select group of adults at RBC during the Sunday school hour made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their knowledge and practice in healthy church life ( $t_{(26)} = 6.264, p < .000$ ).<sup>6</sup> Table 4 displays the results from the *t*-test. With 252 being a perfect score, the average score increased from 201 in the pre-survey to 226 in the post-survey. The median score increased from 207 in the pre-survey to 230 in the post-survey. Whereas pre-scores ranged from 115 to 246, post-scores ranged from 136 to 252.

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<sup>4</sup>Participants were asked on the post-BHCS about how many of the messages they heard in person and if they had listened to a recording of any or all messages that they had missed.

<sup>5</sup>Thirteen of the 46 surveys were completed by participants who did not complete a pre-survey. Six of the 46 participants adequately completed a pre- and post-survey, but they missed hearing one message in the series. Four additional surveys were returned, but they were discarded because they either did not properly include an identification number, indicate how many messages they heard in the series, or at least three-fourths of the survey was not completed.

<sup>6</sup>Since the *t*-stat -6.264 (or the absolute value of 6.264) is larger than the *t* critical two-tail value, then I can state that the teaching intervention made a difference. Since the *p* value is .000 and hence less than *p* = .05, then I can say that I am 95 percent certain that the difference was not by change. Therefore, the teaching made a statistically significant difference.

Table 4. *T*-test of knowledge and practice questions

	<i>Pre-survey</i>	<i>Post-survey</i>
Mean	201.1851852	226.1111111
Variance	973.8490028	574.4102564
Observations	27	27
Pearson Correlation	0.74927725	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	26	
t Stat	-6.264516457	
P(T<=) one-tail	6.2442E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.70561792	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.24884E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.055529439	

Table 5 displays that in the pre-survey, only two respondents scored 240 and above; however, in the post-survey, eight respondents did so. In the pre-survey, only four respondents scored 230 and above; however, in the post-survey, an increase of fourteen respondents did so. In the pre-survey, ten respondents scored at least 220, but after teaching the curriculum, seventeen people scored 220 or higher. Similarly, whereas ten respondents scored 200 or below in the pre-survey, only one respondent scored 200 or below in the post-survey.

Table 5. Increases in participants' scores

	<i>Before Teaching</i>	<i>After Teaching</i>
Number of participants scoring 240 or higher	2	8
Number of participants scoring 230 or higher	4	14
Number of participants scoring 220 or higher	10	17
Number of participants scoring below 220	17	10
Number of participants scoring below 200	10	1

Among the participants who demonstrated the largest increase from the pre- to



the post-survey, six were female and three were male. This is especially encouraging since four of those females (and one of the males) were among the lowest scoring respondents in the pre-survey. The second lowest scoring respondent in the pre-survey also showed the largest increase of score. The fourth lowest scoring respondent in the pre-survey showed the second largest increase of score. Even the lowest scoring respondent from the pre-survey showed a moderate increase of twenty-one points.

Only two out of the twenty-seven participants received a lower score on the post-survey (including decreases of three points and seven points), yet they were among the highest scoring respondents in the pre-survey and therefore had little opportunity to increase their score. Nine respondents increased by at least thirty points with fifteen respondents increasing by at least twenty points. Among the top nine participants with the largest increases, four indicated that they had been a Christian for less than five years. Respondents consisting of both male and female, both younger and older (in age and number of years in the faith), and both lower and higher scorers on the pre-survey demonstrated a considerable benefit from hearing the curriculum taught.

In the pre-survey, only three individual questions received a score of 150 or more (out of a perfect score of 162). Yet, in the post-survey, twenty questions received a high score of 150 or more. Also, in the pre-survey, seventeen of the forty-two questions had at least four responses that were not even close to the desired response (in that they received a score ranging from one to three). However, after teaching the curriculum, the post-survey demonstrated that only five questions received four or more responses that were not close to the desired response.

Table 6 displays the individual questions that received the most significant increases in score. These questions increased by at least twenty points from the pre-survey to the post-survey (Q3, 4, 6, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 28, 29).

Table 6. Post-survey questions with the largest increases

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Desired Response</i>	<i>Score Increase (number of points)</i>
16. The local church should have other spiritual authorities over it to hold it accountable.	Strongly Disagree	67
14. Christians who are not members of a local church should still be able to partake of the Lord's Supper.	Strongly Disagree	48
4. A church is any gathering of Christians in one place.	Strongly Disagree	44
17. Missions are more effective through specialized ministries outside the local church.	Strongly Disagree	34
28. It is beneficial to move my membership to another church if I feel that it better suits my desires.	Strongly Disagree	29
22. Church membership is unnecessary for globally spreading the Gospel.	Strongly Disagree	28
6. Christians who refuse to join and submit to a local church are in sin.	Strongly Agree	26
3. Christians can attend and participate in church(es) without need to formally join one church.	Strongly Disagree	25
21. Church members should continue Christian fellowship with excommunicated members.	Strongly Disagree	21
29. It is helpful to practice Baptism and The Lord's Supper outside the main local church gathering.	Strongly Disagree	20

The question with the largest increase of score was also the most unhelpful question (Q16). In the pre-survey, many expressed a misunderstanding of the question regarding whether a church should have other earthly authorities over it or whether each local church should be autonomous in keeping with Baptist polity (which was new to our members in the establishment of RBC). However, this question showed the largest increase demonstrating that the respondents understood the teaching from the second lesson on Baptist church government.

The second largest increase came from the response that concerned me most from the pre-survey regarding the necessary exclusion of professing Christians from the Lord's Table who refuse to covenant with a local church. In the fifth lesson, I explained from Scripture that the Lord's Supper is for baptized church members. Therefore, I was very encouraged to see this increase. Though I was disappointed to see so many respondents believe that the church is any gathering of Christians in one place (Q4), I was not surprised that this question received the third highest increase since I emphasized it. They seemed to realize that the church is a group of baptized believers who have covenanted with one another around a biblical confession of Christ and displayed their union with Christ and communion with one another through the ordinances.

I was surprised, however, that two questions regarding missions were among the highest scoring questions. Not only do individuals as well as parachurch ministries have a role in missions, our people seemed to now realize the centrality of the local church (including each member and the church corporately) in global disciple-making rather than excusing their own responsibility and sub-contracting the Great Commission task out exclusively to parachurch ministries and church leaders (Q17, 22). I was also deeply encouraged that three other questions with the greatest increase regard the serious nature of church membership in covenanting and committing to a single local church rather than simply attending church(es) or unnecessarily moving one's membership from one church to another (Q28, 6, 3).

In addition, the church seemed to increase their understanding regarding the relationship that a church member should have with an excommunicated member after the formal process of church discipline has occurred (Q21). Members seem to struggle in knowing how to relate to an excommunicated member in such a way that they do not, on one hand, come off to the disciplined member as if the state of their soul were okay, but on the other hand, continue to redemptively engage an excommunicated member as an

unbeliever.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the responses to another question receiving a significantly increased score indicated that the church had realized that the ordinances are to be biblically practiced within the main gathering of a local church (Q29).

The average score on the knowledge section increased from 130 to 149. The knowledge section displayed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-surveys ( $t_{(26)} = 5.822$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Another category consisting of multiple questions with a significant increase in the knowledge section was that of the necessity of church membership (Q3, 6). The church may have also been more prepared to wrestle with these truths since their minds had been more engaged in the area of church health through the church split. I was eager to see the responses from question 12 regarding whether participants thought churches should distinguish members from non-members and question 13 regarding whether non-members should be allowed to frequently serve in the ministries of the church. Yet, the church seemed to continue to believe that non-members should be frequently allowed to participate and serve in the ministries of the church (Q13). There was a fair increase in question 12 as I helped them realize that churches must distinguish between members and non-members. In the past, the church did not have trouble understanding Scripture's teaching on the need for Christians to join churches, but they did struggle with distinguishing members from those who were not members. However, there was reason now to believe that the church was slowly growing in understanding in this area of ecclesiology (and particularly in the need for only members to be allowed to come to the Lord's Table).

Categories of questions with the lowest amount of change were in regard to church leadership (knowledge section: Q11, 16, 25) and personal relationships with other

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<sup>7</sup>The leaders were forced to further walk through this concern within a month after the series in a very difficult discipline concern in the church. The series proved helpful and timely in this area, but it could have been much more helpful and more clarifying had I spent more time explaining the relationship of the church to an excommunicated member.

members (practice section: Q31, 32, 33, 40). However, for the most part, respondents did at least adequately in these areas on the pre-survey. Ironically, one of the categories of questions that received the most significant increase in the knowledge section was missions (Q17, 22). Both questions regarding missions received large scoring increases. However, one of the categories with the least change in the practice section was evangelism (Q36, 37). It seems that the church was more convinced of the need for church membership and the centrality of the local church in missions, but this knowledge did not translate into increased practice in personal evangelism through sharing Christ with more people.

Though I hoped to see significant increases in the frequency that members informally meet with other members to pray, discuss Scripture, show care, and be accountable to one another, these questions showed very little increase as well (Q31, 32, 40). However, the average score on the practice section increased from 71 to 77. The practice section displayed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-surveys ( $t_{(26)} = 4.260, p < .000$ ).

The questions regarding the practice of family worship (Q41) and preparation of oneself and one's family for corporate worship on Sunday did show some increase, though nowhere near as much as I hoped. Another question that received some increase but not as much as I had hoped for included the need to be careful in baptizing a child simply because he or she shows interest in baptism (Q24). In addition, the respondents increased some regarding their practice of their spiritual gifts, but I expected a higher increase (Q38).

However, on a positive note, all 27 respondents almost gave the exact desired response on fifteen questions. The scores of many of these questions increased considerably after teaching the curriculum. With one exception, all respondents answered exactly right on question 1 regarding the sufficiency of Scripture in church growth. The other nearly perfectly scored questions variously ranged to include areas of the necessity

of membership, the ordinances, leadership, covenants and confessions, the ordinances, discipline, missions, the need for personal relationships in the church, and sacrificial giving (Q1, 3, 9-12, 19-23, 29-30, 33, 35).

Respondents were also asked at the end of the post-survey about which specific aspects of the series on the church they found most helpful. One respondent was most helped by considering some commonly held beliefs among professing Christians in light of what Scripture actually teaches, such as that regarding church membership, polity, and discipline. Another was most helped to learn about the importance and purpose of the local church as well as the regulative principle of worship and the use of confessions and covenants. One remarked, “All aspects are helpful and important in our daily lives” as well as “in our present day and time.” Another mentioned being convicted about personal selfishness and apathy. I was encouraged to read a comment from the participant who displayed the highest increase from the pre- to the post-survey: “I learned many things that I had never known before.” Two respondents mentioned how helpful it was to understand the autonomy of the local church and its biblical relationship with other local churches. Most comments revolved around the helpfulness of teaching on membership and the Lord’s Supper. I was deeply encouraged by one respondent who wrote, “Thank you for all you do! So grateful for your heart and love for our church!” May we continue to grow in our love for Christ and his church.

Though I had concern that the church may do too well on the pre-survey to have room for any significant increase in the post-survey, I was quite surprised that the church performed lower than I initially expected. However, they scored much higher after than I expected at the conclusion of the series. Based on the results of the surveys, we have grown as a church during this series in our understanding of the nature, polity, mission, and ordinances of the church, as well as the necessity of church membership. However, we need to continue to strive to grow in our practices of personal care for one another, sharing Christ with unbelievers, and leading family worship in our homes. This

project has demonstrated not only statistically significant results (both overall and in each individual section of the survey), but the results are also meaningful. As the bride, body, and family of Christ, the church has eternal significance in God's plan of redemption. Scripture calls local churches to grow in sound doctrine, holiness, unity, and disciple-making. The members of RBC are maturing through the teaching of God's Word, and now our pastors have a better understanding of our apparent strengths and weaknesses to better shepherd God's people toward God's plan.

### **Strengths of the Project**

This project displayed many strengths regarding the assessment of the church, the development of the curriculum, and the teaching of the messages. First of all, this is the first time our church has been assessed in this manner on such a comprehensive scale. Overall, the church seemed to take the surveys seriously. While taking the survey, many respondents seemed very engaged and provided numerous notes throughout the surveys. It is easy for a shepherd to either assume that he already knows his sheep better than he does based on anecdotal evidence, or to refuse to assess the people possibly in fear of what one may discover. Since I recorded the pre-survey results in a way that distinguished male responses from female responses, I was able to notice helpful differences to better shepherd both the men and women of our church through my teaching. I often tend to think that we as a church (including myself) are farther along in the process of sanctification together than we actually prove to be. I was concerned that the surveys (as well as the teaching series) may be viewed by some as nothing more than "Brandon's school project," but many were very eager to both participate in my doctoral work as well as grow together during this necessary season of assessment and instruction.

The timing of the survey and series was excellent as well. Using the Sunday school hour ensured the largest attendance outside the main corporate worship hour. Beginning the project in the fall helped ensure full participation while avoiding vacation

season. Also, scheduling two weeks in between the pre-survey and the first lesson provided enough time to review the assessment as I prepared to teach the series. Involving a few other members in the development of the survey as well as helping me think through how best to present the survey and series to our church strengthened the project's overall effectiveness.

Another strength of this project was the development of the curriculum. Developing the curriculum well in advance before teaching it provided plenty of time to receive extensive evaluations from other pastors as well as time for me to focus on making edits, making sure I had an adequate handle on the material, thinking through how to most helpfully deliver the messages, and considering how to make practical applications for our church. The material itself also proved to be quite comprehensive in scope. The material itself was buttressed richly with biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral study, which was primarily taken from chapters 2 and 3 of this project.

A final strength of this project concerns the teaching of the messages. Since there was a strong intellectual bent to the material itself that could potentially be over the heads of some (as well as dry in content), I included many practical questions to draw interest in the importance of the messages in view of our recent church experiences as well as various common questions that many ask regarding the church. Our church was in a position of needing further direction about what a healthy church looks like and still had many practical questions since our church context had changed significantly. The inclusion of both members and prospective members in the class gave us an opportunity to all get on the same page regarding our understanding of healthy church life and our future direction as a church.

This class helped to prepare our church to begin having member meetings and understanding many of the transitions we have made toward health. Since the series, I have personally heard from a few additional families now visiting our church who later heard the series through our church's sermon podcast and were captivated by our



church's understanding and practice of Scripture. Two other local pastors have also asked to use portions of the material in their own membership classes, one of whom is leading a much larger and more established church than our own. Many members (including new members and those current) have provided testimonies of how God has used the series to equip them for ministry in many ways. A few members have asked that we teach the material once a year as a refresher for current members and an introduction to newer members. The material seems to have helped our church grow in many ways, including our understanding and practice of the ordinances, personal disciple-making, communion with God, and commitment both to one another and our mission as a church to the world.

### **Weaknesses of the Project and What I Would Do Differently**

This project also included many weaknesses that must be addressed, all of which are a result of my own shortcomings. These weaknesses are evident in both the surveys and the curriculum. First of all, I should have been better prepared to design the survey. Several questions may have been unclear especially since in some instances, the desired response to questions hung on the use of a single, clarifying word that may not have been closely considered by respondents. Unfortunately, I also did not give the church enough time to complete such a lengthy pre-survey. In the pre-survey, they were given about ten minutes to complete the survey before people began to stir around in preparation for the main worship gathering. However, it worked much better in the adjustments I made in the post-survey as they were given a total of fifteen minutes with an additional ten minutes to spare before the main worship gathering began. In the future, depending on the context, I would consider providing fifteen to twenty minutes for the completion of the survey. The church would also need to be better convinced of the importance of assessment and prepared to invest that amount of time into taking it.

Though I ran the survey by a few members in advance, I still should have given more attention to feedback from a pilot group in testing out the pre-survey to make

it clearer and more applicable for our people and setting. I wonder if the practice section (which came at the end of the survey) would have been completed differently by respondents if I had given them more time to complete the survey and included less questions to lessen the potential of wearying the respondent. I also should have been clearer on the wording of the practice questions since I suspect that respondents widely differed in how strict or loose they understood their personal practice of the given statements. In the future, I would work even more closely with a formalized pilot-group consisting of a diverse representation of those who would be taking the survey.

The demographics section of the survey proved to be much less helpful than I expected as well. There was confusion in the pre-survey about question 3, regarding the children of the respondent, but this was edited for more clarity on the post-survey. Also, many of the respondents indicated that they were in church leadership of some sort, likely because this question was worded too broadly to include areas of service that I did not intend to count as leadership. Also, question 5 in the demographics section should have been split into two questions to indicate separately whether one had ever been a member of a local church and then whether one was currently a church member. It would have been helpful to articulate more clearly what question 7 intended in asking whether one had been exposed to the church in childhood. In addition, the system of matching pre- and post-surveys through the use of the four digit code made up of one's birthday (minus the year) was easy enough to ensure that I could match up each respondent's surveys, but if I had found another system that would have provided increased confidentiality, some participants may have felt more comfortable in completing the assessment.

In addition, I should not have waited several months before finally learning how to analyze the results. I should have had a plan in place to record, organize, and analyze the data while it was still fresh on my mind. Although I did have enough qualified respondents, another weakness included the drop off in attendance on the final day that included completing the post-survey. There were some sick families unable to

attend on this crucial day, but there also may have been a decline in interest by this point. One church member even remarked in laughter after the post-survey, “please do not give us another survey,” which possibly indicated that a shorter survey may have been more helpful in a church not accustomed to this type of assessment. In the future, I would give more attention to helping the church to know why periodic assessment is helpful so that members can evaluate themselves and shepherds can know the state of their flock.

Another weakness of this project includes the content of the material. As a few of the curriculum evaluations indicated, the material was comprehensive but included too much content for digesting in a single sitting. At the same time, I should have given more attention to making sure that the survey questions more closely reflected the curriculum. It would have likely been helpful if I had originally split the sixth lesson into two separate lessons. I also should have extended the series by one additional week to provide time for an eighth session which included an overview of the series with a time for questions and answers. In the future, I would not only extend the time frame for the series; I would also cut down the amount of material presented in each message by at least one page of notes per lesson.

I should have initially thought more about how to engage the people through illustration and application, especially given the range of those hearing the material (ranging from older and new believers, unbelievers, and both current and prospective members). Though the evaluations of the material received high scores in biblical faithfulness, in the future, I would also include more time reading specific passages of Scripture during the messages. Taking the time to read more verses and passages straight from Scripture rather than summarizing Scripture in my own explanations may more strongly reinforce the content. Though this material has since been very helpful in our ongoing new members’ classes, it may need to be further adapted in such a setting so that it is more closely tailored to the history, ministry, direction, expectations, blessings, relationships, and opportunities within our specific local church.

## **Theological Reflections**

Our pastors have sought to lead our people over many years toward a recovery of the gospel in our daily lives and a reformation of healthy local church life in a time when both have often been marginalized. The overall theological impact of this project has helped our church to not only better understand the gospel, but to also see the implications of the gospel in our lives as Christians. Ecclesiology is a central area where we learn how theology shapes life as we grow in what Christ has done for us as Christians. An individual's union with Christ means that he enjoys communion with the church, which is the ordinary means for how God intended for us to worship him rightly, grow in sanctification, and serve as a witness to Christ.

I had hoped to be at a point in my doctoral program to teach this curriculum earlier for RBC's first membership class. However, the timing of this series still proved to be quite helpful as it occurred during a vital transition for our church. At the time, we needed to be more established in ecclesiology as a church before we began to receive even more new members. Our prospective members at the time were also able to be part of this series. We had just recently moved from meeting in a temporary location outside our community to buying property in the geographic center of the community where most of our members live. We were finally in a better position to reach out to our community with the intent of seeing the Lord add to our church. Therefore, the series proved timely since we as a church needed more time with extended focus on what a healthy church is and does before beginning to incorporate others into the life of our church.

Several visiting non-members have since begun attending our church after hearing the series online. A couple of the prospective new members who were part of this series have since joined our church and expressed how they had never heard or considered much of the material. They have since expressed how much their understanding of the church has impacted their spiritual growth. A couple specific issues regarding the church seem to have been clarified as well. There seems to have been more

clarity about the Lord's Supper regarding who should observe it, how to observe it, and on what terms we are to come to the Lord's Table. These questions have been expected since many of our people have moved from observing the Lord's Supper about four times a year to about ten times a year. Whereas before, many of our members were asking questions about why only members of a local church were to partake of the Supper, since this series, I have not heard any questions or concerns regarding this ordinance but have only seen increased appreciation for its truth and beauty. This series seems to have providentially served as a foundation for working through other concerns as well. Our church has since used this foundation to think through other related concerns, some of which have significantly shaped our church. Since this series, we have had to walk through a very difficult church discipline concern; in addition, we have had more questions about what we should and should not vote on and how that works in member meetings, reflected on various aspects of who we should or should not accept as new members, considered how more specifically we should engage in outreach, examined the relationship between the church and the home, studied the importance and elements of our Sunday morning liturgy, and contemplated how much formal ministry structure is necessary to grow and evangelize versus how much informal ministry can be done through simple and organic church life. Sanctification is certainly a process requiring pastoral patience in the life of a church, but I am thankful for the patience that God has and continues to show to me. I am grateful to see how God's Word is powerful not only to save unbelievers, but to shape the growth of believers together in every aspect of our lives through the local church.

### **Personal Reflections**

God has providentially provided for my own personal growth in the area of ecclesiology during a season when it was desperately needed, even before I realized such need. I originally intended to carry out my project in another context to strengthen

existing membership. Yet, in God's mercy despite the multitude of my own weaknesses, he has helped us to establish the beginning of a church plant aimed toward increasing health with new membership and a transition in polity. My own study and teaching of ecclesiology coupled with walking through the effects of ecclesiology (including the good, bad, and ugly) in life has not only impacted our church, it has first deeply impacted my own spiritual growth. Realizing the biblical blueprint for the bride and body of Christ as God's means for redemption has increased my love and commitment to God's people. I have also increasingly seen the importance of how biblical church structure enables us to form transparent relationships where we truly carry out the "one anothers" of Scripture. Church polity may seem like a dry study for ivory tower academics to some people, but for me and my family, it has drastically affected our daily lives for both better and worse. I have seen how what we believe about God impacts how we live as a church. I have also seen how the way we live as a church impacts not only our relationship with God but how others view God. Our own children not only hear the gospel, but they continue to see the implications of the gospel through supernatural community life. In that manner, the diverse relationships of Christ-exalting love within the church serves as an apologetic for the gospel.

Amidst sin that continues to be displayed in my own heart, along with the messiness that often pervades life in the local church, God demonstrates his kindness during our family's lowest moments through sacrificial love that reflects Christ. Sin is often exhibited in surprising places. Yet, God's grace is often shown in surprising places as well, particularly through a people called the church which is seen as weak and insignificant by this world, but are proved to be a people whom God will one day present in brilliant beauty as a reflection of the glory of his Son.

### **Conclusion**

The development of this project has included far more work than I originally

realized, but it has also already produced far more fruit than I ever anticipated. This project has far exceeded my expectations not only in its final results, but also in the tremendous work of grace that God has done in my own heart and through our church throughout the process of preparing and implementing it. As I studied, prayed, meditated, discussed, taught, and evaluated the various aspects of ecclesiology in our local setting, the Lord has been kind to bring genuine life change through his covenant community. I hope to see this project used by other pastors and churches in a way that helps bring increasing health to the body and bride of Christ in other local contexts. With the completion of this project, I intend to give more of myself, first, in shepherding my family and also our local church. I am thankful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for helping to equip me at deeper levels toward this end. May we see another Reformation whereby not only the gospel is increasingly recovered, but also whereby local churches are revived with health so that they display, preserve, and proclaim the gospel in such a way that extends God's glory to all peoples.

## APPENDIX 1

### BIBLICAL AND HEALTHY CHURCH SURVEY

The following instrument is the Biblical and Healthy Church Survey (BHCS). General questions were followed by a survey of forty-two questions with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument assessed each participants' current level of knowledge and practice in basic ecclesiology and church membership. When presented, the survey was printed on two pages (front and back) and stapled.



BIBLICAL AND HEALTHY CHURCH  
PRE-SURVEY (BHCS)

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess knowledge and practice of church membership. Brandon Scroggins is conducting this research to collect data for a doctoral ministry project. In this research, you will be asked your level of agreement with aspects of your knowledge and practice of church membership. You will also be asked to complete a final survey at the conclusion of this project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly* confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.*

You will only be identified through the use of a four-digit number that consists of your birthdate. **Numerical Code** (month/month - day/day): \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

**Section 1:** Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate space provided.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ gender? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Check all that currently apply.

\_\_\_single \_\_\_married \_\_\_divorced \_\_\_widowed

3. Do you have any children age 18 or younger living in your home?

\_\_\_ A. Yes \_\_\_ B. No How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you a Christian?

A.) Yes      If so, how long have you been a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

B.) No

5. Are you currently or have you ever formally been a member of a local church?

A. Yes

B. No

6. Do you currently serve in a church leadership role by teaching (children and/or adults), leading a ministry (or as an assistant leader), or helping make decisions that affect the church?

A.) Yes

B.) No

7. Were you raised with personal exposure within a local church?

A.) Yes

B.) No

**Section 2:**

Using the following scale, circle the answer that best corresponds to your opinion.

**SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA**  
strongly disagree   disagree   disagree somewhat   agree somewhat   agree   strongly agree

---

**Biblical Knowledge: These statements are designed to engage your personal knowledge and viewpoint.**

1. The Bible provides everything a church needs to know about church growth.

SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

2. The gospel refers to the good news of how to become a better person.

SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
strongly disagree	disagree	disagree somewhat	agree somewhat	agree	strongly agree

---

3. Christians can attend and participate in church(es) without need to formally join one church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

4. A church is any gathering of Christians in one place.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

5. There is no evidence in the Bible that Christians actually joined churches.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

6. Christians who refuse to join and submit to a local church are in sin.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

7. The local church has the authority to affirm or deny a person's profession of faith.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

8. It should be required that a person be baptized after true conversion to join a church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

9. A person who does not sign a church covenant should be denied membership in the church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
strongly disagree	disagree	disagree somewhat	agree somewhat	agree	strongly agree

---

10. It is necessary for churches to state a summary of beliefs that members must adhere to.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

11. Churches should formally recognize elders to rule and deacons to serve in leadership.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

12. The Bible teaches that churches must distinguish between members and non-members.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

13. The church should frequently allow non-members to get involved and serve in its ministries.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

14. Christians who are not members of a local church should still be able to partake of the Lord's Supper.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

15. A member who refuses to attend church regularly should be removed from membership.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

16. The local church should have other spiritual authorities over it to hold it accountable.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
strongly disagree	disagree	disagree somewhat	agree somewhat	agree	strongly agree

---

17. Missions are more effective through specialized ministries outside the local church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

18. You should consider using your regularly designated financial giving to help other ministries in need rather than giving it to your own local church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

19. Local churches should expect members to attend meetings to discuss church concerns and dismiss non-members from attendance.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

20. Churches should publicly remove members who persist in sin without repentance.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

21. Church members should continue Christian fellowship with excommunicated members.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

22. Church membership is unnecessary for globally spreading the Gospel.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

23. Watching a church service on a screen can be as effective as attending in person.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

24. Children of all ages who continually express desire to be baptized should be baptized.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

---

25. The most important thing about a preacher is that he is engaging to the congregation.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
strongly disagree	disagree	disagree somewhat	agree somewhat	agree	strongly agree

---

26. The primary purpose of the church is to reach out and care for other people.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

27. If a person is not actively serving in their local church, they are breaking the covenant that they made with the church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

**Personal Practice: These statements are designed to engage your personal practice.**

28. It is beneficial to move my membership to another church if I feel that it better suits my desires.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

29. It is helpful to practice Baptism and The Lord's Supper outside the main local church gathering.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

30. I can grow as a Christian without consistent participation in the same local church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

**SD**                      **D**                      **DS**                      **AS**                      **A**                      **SA**  
strongly disagree   disagree   disagree somewhat   agree somewhat   agree   strongly agree

---

31. I have at least one other church member to whom I am personally and regularly accountable.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

32. In the past week, I have intentionally cared for at least three other church members.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

33. I need other church members to know and encourage me outside church gatherings.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

34. I take time to prepare myself (and those in my home) beforehand for worship on Sunday.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

35. I am committed to give sacrificially to my local church on a regular basis.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

36. I regularly establish relationships with non-Christians to share Christ with them.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

37. My lifestyle looks different from that of non-Christians.

SD                      D                      DS                      AS                      A                      SA

<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
strongly disagree	disagree	disagree somewhat	agree somewhat	agree	strongly agree

---

38. I know my spiritual gifts and regularly practice them under leadership of my pastors.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

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39. I take personal responsibility for the unity and health of Reformation Baptist Church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

40. I regularly pray and personally discuss with other church members how God's Word applies to life.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

41. I practice family worship in my home or in other families' homes on a regular basis.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

42. I intentionally strive to fulfill the specific responsibilities named in our church covenant.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

Which specific aspects of the church do you need more knowledge or better practices in?

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## APPENDIX 2

### BASIC ECCLESIOLOGY AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP SERIES EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to expert practitioners in pastoral ministry and ecclesiology from other local churches. These leaders evaluated the material to ensure accuracy, clarity, sufficiency, and relevancy of the teaching series for healthy church membership.

Name of Evaluator: _____					Date: _____		
Evaluation: Basic Ecclesiology and Church Membership Series							
1 = insufficient		2 = requires attention		3 = sufficient		4 = exemplary	
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments		
Accuracy							
The Scriptures used are rightly explained and applied with proper hermeneutics.							
The assertions of the material result from sound theology and faithful exposition of Scripture.							
Clarity							
The purposes of the messages are clearly developed.							
Terms and concepts used are clearly explained.							
Sufficiency							
The material sufficiently covers the basics of biblical ecclesiology and healthy church membership.							
The material is sufficient to introduce new members to what they need to understand and practice for healthy church life.							
Relevancy							
The material is relevant to prospective members of a local church.							
The material is relevant to the needs of the local church.							

Please name any aspects that were not adequately covered in the material: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please include helpful comments regarding the material: \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX 3  
EXPERT PANEL REQUEST

Dr. [fill in the blank],

I am preparing to teach a series of 6 messages to our church at RBC. This will be taught during our Sunday School hour primarily to existing members (average attendance around 75-85) but also likely to 10-12 prospective members. I will give out a survey before and after the series to gauge their knowledge and practice of the series contents and measure any changes that may occur after teaching the series.

This series is the core part of my writing for the Southern Seminary D.Ed.Min. program. I've limited myself to not teaching this series until I get it reviewed (with any/all needed edits) by at least 3 men that I personally consider highly credible in pastoral ministry and study/scholarship. Whether a small amount of time for a summary review or a review in detail, I would greatly appreciate any of your time.

I've attached my personal message manuscripts (6-week series) which no one else will see. I do plan to make a 1-2 page outline available of each message though. I'll have 50 minutes to teach each session, so the level of content (as it is now) will force me to summarize several sections in each message.

Background: This is a turn from my normal verse by verse exposition. I've taught through Ephesians (with messages in Matt 16 and Heb 10) over the last year and a half, so I'm seeing this series as a summarizing our study about the church with intent to possibly adapt it to a new members' class in the future.

I would be honored if you could return the completed review form (attached) by **Friday, July 27** to ensure time for all edits (*however, if this time frame isn't convenient, your feedback is important to me so I may be able to extend that time*)

*frame*). However, I completely understand if you are unable to do so and if this catches you at bad timing given the continual demands of life, family, and pastoral ministry.

Attached:

1. Church Membership series in .doc and .pdf
2. Evaluation Form in .doc and .pdf

In Christ,

Brandon Scroggins

## APPENDIX 4

### SERIES AND SURVEY PROMOTION

The following announcement was used to promote the survey and series through weekly emails, our members' social media page, and announcements during our corporate church-wide Sunday School hour and during the main worship gathering.

Current Members, Guests, and Potential New Members:

We have studied various aspects of the church over the last year and a half as we have seen our lives affected by the quality of health in the local church. In culmination of all that we have experienced and studied, we will begin a 6-part series in Sunday School. We will look at biblical responses to basic questions about the church. This is for everyone including all current members, guests, and anyone considering placing membership at RBC this fall.

Sun, Aug 26: an anonymous survey will be handed out to gauge our knowledge and practice of healthy church life as part of some doctoral research. This is to go along with a 6-part series that will be starting on Sun, Sep 9. Potential new members will also meet for 3 Sunday night sessions on Sun, Sep 30; Sun, Oct 7; and Sun, Oct 14 at 5pm (those interested in joining RBC please contact "x" to sign up for this portion of the class). There will also be a post-survey given on Sun, Oct 14. if you miss a message, please listen to it online before the final survey. Your feedback will be utmost helpful. Please commit to joining us and not missing any of these Sundays. We look forward to seeing how God will increasingly grow us together!

The following announcement was emailed to the church on Tues, Sep 4 and again on Fri, Sep 14 with the handouts for the series attached so that members could either print the notes or use them electronically during the messages.

Do you still have questions about the church? Why do some churches do it this way and others do it that way? What is important about a church? How can I be a healthy church member? And how can we continue to grow as a church? How are decisions made in governing a church? What is the purpose of the church? Why is baptism important, why church discipline, and what do we believe about the Lord's Supper?

In this series, we will look at what the church is and why it is important, how we worship and make disciples as a church, how you can be better informed as a participant in our member meetings, and how the church with all of its aspects can be a testimony to the gospel of Christ!

Don't miss Sunday School as we begin a new 6-week series on Sun, Sep 9.

\* 6 Week Series: "The Church: Biblical Responses to Basic Questions"

\* We will look at:

Message 1.) WHAT is the church?

Message 2.) HOW is the church ordered?

Message 3.) WHY does the church exist?

Messages 4. & 5.) Distinctives of a true church

Message 6.) Distinctives of a healthy church and a Baptist church

\* handouts are available for each message

Prospective members who had shown interest in joining or learning more about RBC were also personally emailed the following announcement.

Our Pastors and church would like to invite you to join us for our upcoming potential new members class. Joining a local church is the most fundamental display of biblical Christianity and essential for every Christian. Our church will be walking through a **6-part series in Sunday School from Sun, Sep 9 through Sun, Oct 14**. We will be studying "The Church: Biblical Responses to Basic Questions." Potential new members will need to be there for this series. (If you must miss a message, please make sure to listen online before the final week of the series). In addition, potential new members will meet on **3 Sunday nights (Sun, Sep 30; Sun, Oct 7; and Sun, Oct 14 at 5pm)** with our pastors to look at what RBC believes (our confession of faith) and how we agree to live (our church covenant and governing documents).

Anyone is welcome to attend the class (even those who are not believers, but checking out Christianity); attendance does not obligate one to join the church. However, after the class (6 Sunday Schools with 3 Sunday night meetings), if you would like to pursue membership, please contact ? (contact info: ?) so she can line up an elder interview for one of our pastors to spend time with you to hear your testimony and answer any questions you may have. In addition, on **Sun, Aug 26 in Sunday School**, one of our pastors is doing some doctoral research and will be giving out an anonymous survey in preparation for this series. If you could join us on that date, **your feedback would be utmost helpful!**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The announcements mention a six-week series because I originally designed the curriculum as six messages, but it took a seventh message to finish the series.

APPENDIX 5  
SURVEY KEY

The following key was used in order to score each response from the Biblical and Healthy Church Pre-Survey. The scoring system ranges from one (lowest score) to six (highest score) with the correct answer (rated as six) indicated in bold and underlined.

**Section 2:** Using the following scale, circle the answer that best corresponds to your opinion.

**Biblical Knowledge: These statements engage your personal knowledge and viewpoint.**

1. The Bible provides everything a church needs to know about church growth.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

2. The gospel refers to the good news of how to become a better person.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

3. Christians can attend and participate in church(es) without need to formally join one church.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

4. A church is any gathering of Christians in one place.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1



5. There is no evidence in the Bible that Christians actually joined churches.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

6. Christians who refuse to join and submit to a local church are in sin.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

7. The local church has the authority to affirm or deny a person's profession of faith.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

8. It should be required that a person be baptized after true conversion to join a church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

9. A person who does not sign a church covenant should be denied membership in the church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

10. It is necessary for churches to state a summary of beliefs that members must adhere to.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

11. Churches should formally recognize elders to rule and deacons to serve in leadership.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

12. The Bible teaches that churches must distinguish between members and non-members.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

13. The church should frequently allow non-members to get involved and serve in its ministries.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

14. Christians who are not members of a local church should still be able to partake of the Lord's Supper.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

15. A member who refuses to attend church regularly should be removed from membership.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

16. The local church should have other spiritual authorities over it to hold it accountable.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

17. Missions are more effective through specialized ministries outside the local church.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

18. You should consider using your regularly designated financial giving to help other ministries in need rather than giving it to your own local church.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

19. Local churches should expect members to attend meetings to discuss church concerns and dismiss non-members from attendance.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

20. Churches should publicly remove members who persist in sin without repentance.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

21. Church members should continue Christian fellowship with excommunicated members.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

22. Church membership is unnecessary for globally spreading the Gospel.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

23. Watching a church service on a screen can be as effective as attending in person.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

24. Children of all ages who continually express desire to be baptized should be baptized.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

25. The most important thing about a preacher is that he is engaging to the congregation.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

26. The primary purpose of the church is to reach out and care for other people.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

27. If a person is not actively serving in their local church, they are breaking the covenant that they made with the church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

**Personal Practice: These statements are designed to engage your personal practice.**

28. It is beneficial to move my membership to another church if I feel that it better suits my desires.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

29. It is helpful to practice Baptism and The Lord's Supper outside the main local church gathering.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

30. I can grow as a Christian without consistent participation in the same local church.

<b><u>SD</u></b>	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6	5	4	3	2	1

31. I have at least one other church member to whom I am personally and regularly accountable.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

32. In the past week, I have intentionally cared for at least three other church members.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

33. I need other church members to know and encourage me outside church gatherings.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

34. I take time to prepare myself (and those in my home) beforehand for worship on Sunday.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

35. I am committed to give sacrificially to my local church on a regular basis.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

36. I regularly establish relationships with non-Christians to share Christ with them.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

37. My lifestyle looks different from that of non-Christians.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

38. I know my spiritual gifts and regularly practice them under leadership of my pastors.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

39. I take personal responsibility for the unity and health of Reformation Baptist Church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

40. I regularly pray and personally discuss with other church members how God's Word applies to life.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

41. I practice family worship in my home or in other families' homes on a regular basis.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

42. I intentionally strive to fulfill the specific responsibilities named in our church covenant.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	<b><u>SA</u></b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

## APPENDIX 6

### THE CHURCH SERIES NOTES

The following notes are an outline of my full manuscripts. They were made available to both members and prospective members prior to the beginning of the series. Numerous other Scripture references were documented as well, but space only allows for a selection of passages to be referenced. These six lessons were actually taught as seven lessons. During a seventh session, I finished lesson 6 and covered various aspects of each of the other lessons that time had not permitted covering.

## **“The Church: An Overview of Basic Ecclesiology and Healthy Church Life” The Doctrine of the Church as Central in God’s Redemptive Plan**

*(Scripture references from ESV)*

We begin a series of messages- biblical responses to basic questions about the church:

**Message 1: What is the church?**

**Message 2: How is the church ordered?**

**Message 3: Why does the church exist?**

**Messages 4 & 5: Distinctives of a true church**

**Message 6: Distinctives of a healthy church and a Baptist church**

### **Message 1: What Is the Church?**

“It is not surprising that sociologists find the church rather puzzling. Even Christians have extraordinary difficulty in describing the church. Luther claimed that a girl of seven knows what the church is, but that he had to pen thousands of words in order to explain what she understood. The church is different because it is the born-again family of God, the assembly and body of Christ, the dwelling of the Spirit” *(Clowney, The Church, 71)*.

#### **1. Common Misunderstandings of the Church**

Is the church a **people united under a common board, budget, and vision**? Is the church a **building**? Is the church a **meeting**? Is the church a **weekly evangelistic gathering for the unsaved**? Is the church a **denomination**? Is the church **any group of Christians who affiliate**? Is the church a **humanitarian group**?

**Consider 3 plagues of many modern professing Christians (individualism, consumerism, pragmatism):**

- **Individualism:** *Jonathan Leeman describes individualism, “I am principally obligated to myself and maximizing my life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness . . . I may choose to identify with another party, but only so long as doing so is demonstrably conducive to my personal advantage;” men therefore become self-authorized “free agents” *(Leeman, Surprising Offense, 44)*. Such individualism plagues the church and perverts Christianity.*

*Joseph Hellerman observes, “God has now been recast in the role of a divine therapist who aids the individual Christian in his or her personal quest for spiritual enlightenment and self-discovery.” *(Hellerman, When the Church was a Family, 152-153)*. Individualism is upheld by sinful autonomy (*Gen 3; 2 Sam 23:3-4*). Individualism undermines God’s glory (*Eph 1:10, 20-23; 2:16; 3:10*), misunderstands salvation, and ignores the means God of grace that God uses.*

- **Consumerism:** *John MacArthur argues, “The philosophy that marries marketing technique with church growth theory is the result of bad theology. It assumes that if you package the gospel right, people will get saved. It is rooted in Arminianism, which views conversion as nothing more than an act of the human will. Its goal is an instantaneous human decision, rather than a radical transformation of the heart wrought by almighty God through the Holy Spirit’s convicting work and the truth of His Word. An honest belief in the sovereignty*



of God in salvation would bring an end to a lot of the nonsense that is going on in the church” (MacArthur, *Ashamed of Gospel*, 96).

The gospel is often packaged minimally as possible to appeal as massively as possible. David Wells asserts, “The gospel cannot be a product that the church sells because there are no consumers for it.” (Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 53).

- **Pragmatism:** Christian consumerism is undergirded by secular pragmatism, which teaches that **whatever works to accomplish observable, quantifiable results is what most matters.** *What is true?* is replaced with *What works?* However, **the success of the biblical church is in direct proportion to its faithfulness to the truth of God’s Word and conformity to Christ** through the ministry of the word, ordinances, prayer, discipline and disciple-making, which may or may not include numerical increase.

Albert Mohler concludes that “the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other” (Mohler, *Polity*, 43). However, as Millard Erikson wrote, “Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationships to others” (Erikson, *Christian Theology* 1058).

**Additional Clarification:** Rather than complementing the ministry of the local church, *para-church ministries* sometimes (with good intentions) replace the local church, assuming an authority and a promise (“to build my church,” Matt 16:13-20) God gave to the church. Even within the church, *ministries often function as competing tribes and disconnected islands of interests.* The church should be one unified body led by trusted elders with serving deacons.

## 2. Biblical Constitution of the Church

- **Origin of the church – Where did the church come from?**  
**Christ alone is HEAD of the church.**
  - Old Testament
  - New Testament- Matt 16:16-19; 18:15-20; Eph 2:12-16, 20
  - Early Church through Medieval Period
  - Reformation History
  - Separatist, Puritan and Baptist History
- **Nature of the church – What is the church like?**  
(these categories present different aspects of the church)
  - **Visible Church:** **Invisible**  
**Church:**
  - **Universal Church:** **Local Church:**
  - **Formal Organization:** **Familial Organism:**

- Church Militant: Church Triumphant: Heb 12:22-23

- The Church and the Kingdom

- Metaphors of the church – What are key biblical descriptions of the church?
  - People and Family of God - 2 Cor 6:18; 1 Tim 5:1-2; 1 Pet 2:9-10
  - Body and Bride of Christ - 1 Cor 12; Eph 5
  - Temple of the Holy Spirit - Eph 2:21-22; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16
  - Pillar and Buttress of the Truth - 1 Tim 3:14-16
- Attributes of the church – How has the church been historically described?

The **Apostles' Creed** affirms "the holy catholic [universal] church" and "the communion of saints." In the **Niceno-Constantinople Creed** (AD 381), the early church confessed "one holy, catholic [universal] and apostolic church." (see John 17)

- Marks of the church - What marks a true church off from any other gathering?

*The Belgic Confession (1561) stated, "The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head...and no one ought to be separated from it." John Calvin added, "For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments" (Calvin, Institutes, 1024).*

- Definition of the church Jesus establishes the church upon:

(See Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members*, 77- He calls this the "what" and the "who" of the gospel)

- A **Right Confession** [what we believe] of Faith- Matt 16:16; cf. Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 3:16
- A **Credible Confessor** of that Faith- Matt 16:17
- A **Covenant** [how we live] of those Confessors around the Confession- Matt 16:19; 18:15-20

Central to a true church is the gathering of believers for worship and the uniting of one another's lives upon biblical truth for global disciple-making. What about unbelievers? 1 Cor 14:24-25

Eph 2:19-22 May Christ be put on display through local healthy church life!

Trinity (v22)- "In Christ, you are built together into God's dwelling place by the Spirit."

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*(Scripture references from ESV)*

**We are in a series of messages- biblical responses to basic questions about the church:**

**Message 1: What is the church?** – *we saw what makes the church uniquely significant and consider membership in it.*

**Message 2: How is the Church Ordered?**

The Bible outlines the contours of a prescribed polity (or government), which correlates with both what a church is and how it accomplishes its mission. “Since the church is God’s creation,” John Hammett says, “it must be ordered and operated according to his instructions” (Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 15). **A properly ordered church consists of regenerate membership, qualified leadership, and elder-led congregationalism.**

**1. Regenerate Church Membership**

**Tying salvation to membership, the London Baptist Confession confesses:** “Those who are called he commands to live together in local societies, or churches, for their mutual edification and the fitting conduct of public worship that he requires of them while they are in the world. The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly displaying and demonstrating in and by their profession and life their obedience to the call of Christ. They willingly agree to live together according to Christ’s instructions, giving themselves to the Lord and to one another by the will of God...[in] following the ordinances of the Gospel (Reeves, *Confessing the Faith*, 50).

Every Christian should be a church member - every church member should be a Christian.

Church Membership is “(1) a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant that consists of (2) the church’s affirmation of the Christian’s gospel profession, (3) the church’s promise to give oversight to the Christian, and (4) the Christian’s promise to gather with the church and submit to its oversight” (Leeman, *Surprising Offense*, 217). It is simply “a covenant between believers whereby they affirm one another’s professions of faith through the ordinances and agree to oversee one another’s discipleship to Christ” (Leeman, *Understanding the Congregation’s Authority*, 34).

- **Biblical Evidence - Question:** Where is church membership in the Bible?  
*(Resources used include: Leeman’s shorter book entitled, “Church Membership” along with Hammett and Merkle’s work in “Those Who Must Give an Account,” 31-52).*
  - **Old Testament: A Biblical Theology of the themes of distinction and covenantal faith family**
  - **New Testament Church Membership Sightings** - New Testament believers lived together in covenantal community. Their lives centered around not autonomy or individuality but Christian community.
    - **The Concept of the “church” implies Membership of Christians**

- **Recognizable Distinction between Church and World compels Membership**
- **Early Directories indicates Membership**
- **Teaching on Leadership suggests Membership**
- **God's Commands to Christians require Membership**
- **Church Discipline involves Membership**

*John Hammett, "The dominant New Testament idea of the church is a concrete assembly, one with a recognizable membership, marked out by a distinctive, disciplined lifestyle"*

*(Hammett and Merkle, Those Who Must Give Account, 12-13).*

*John Stott warned against "that grotesque anomaly, an unchurched Christian. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person. For the church lies at the very centre of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God's new community. For His purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in a future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build His church, that is, to call out of the world a people for His own glory" (Stott, Living Church, 19). He said, "The church is supposed to be God's new society, the living embodiment of the gospel, a sign of the kingdom of God, a demonstration of what human community looks like when it comes under his gracious rule" (Stott, Living Church, 66).*

- **Practical Significance -**

**"Submitting to a local church:** 1) Identifies us with Christ [assurance of salvation]. 2) Distinguishes us from the world. 3) Guides us into the righteousness of Christ by presenting a standard of personal and corporate righteousness. 4) Acts as a witness to non-Christians. 5) Glorifies God and enables us to enjoy his glory. 6) Identifies us with Christ's people. 7) Assists us in living the Christian life through the accountability of brothers and sisters in the faith. 8) Makes us responsible for specific believers. 9) Protects us from the world, the flesh, and the Devil" *(Leeman, Surprising Offense, 267)*. **"Entering the kingdom of God means submitting oneself...to the rule of God and trusting his provision of salvation. If Christ then hands aspects of his rule over to the church to function as his proxy...the converted one is immediately ushered under the authority of the church"** *(Leeman, Surprising Offense, 199)*. **God's glory and salvation is proclaimed through healthy local churches.**

*As R.B. Kuiper asserts: "The Scriptural rule is that, while membership in the church is not a prerequisite of salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation. Outside the visible church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, Section II)" (Kuiper, Glorious Body, 112).*

- **Terms of Membership - Upon what conditions may one enter into the church?**

Regenerate church membership entails church members providing a fundamental understanding of the gospel, credible profession of faith expressed through personal holiness and demonstrated in believer's baptism, and willingness to covenant as a Christian with other specified Christians. Those coming from a church of like faith and practice must be transferred with legitimate reason and previously in good standing.

## 2. Qualified Leadership

- Elder-led (or Pastor)
  - Elder: **Calling and Qualifications**

1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Tim 4:1-10; 2 Tim 2:24-25  
1 Cor 9:3-14; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17

- Elder: **Role and Responsibilities** -

Elders preach and teach God's word and shepherd the church toward Christ-likeness in their worship, ministry to one another, and disciple-making of all nations. They oversee the ministry of the church. They instruct and lead the church in the church's use of the keys of the kingdom. The only qualification that relates to an elder's function (other than as a faithful shepherd of his family) is that he is "able to teach" in some beneficial capacity over the church. He must hold the truth firm with ability to instruct as well as rebuke with sound doctrine and graciously correct his opponents (Tit 1:9; cf. 2 Tim 2:24-25). Specifically, pastors **lead the church by exhorting with Scripture** (2 Tim 4:1-2; Tit 1:9), engaging in oversight (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13), encouraging as a caretaking shepherd (Acts 20:28; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-2), establishing prudent policy (Acts 15), equipping the church for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12-16), emulating the example of Christ (1 Pet 5:3-5), and enriching the church by raising up other leaders (2 Tim 2:2).

- Deacon-served
  - Deacon: **Calling and Qualifications** - 1 Tim 3:8-13
  - Deacon: **Role and Responsibilities** - Acts 6:1-7

## 3. Elder-Led Congregationalism

A form of church government in which the gathered members of a local church acting in Jesus' name hold the final authority (under God's Word and in conjunction with the elders) for all essential matters of their local congregation as it pertains to doctrine, membership, leadership, and discipline. Each church in the New Testament orders its own affairs as complete with authority in itself. Though independent in authority, local churches are not to be isolated in ministry. Like-minded churches should minister to one another by providing wisdom, accountability, care, and combined efforts in missions.

These two streams of authority (that of members and leaders) are designed to harmonize for fruitful ministry:

- Church authority:
- Elder authority:

As Leeman concludes, "Polity, rightly practiced, guards the gospel, matures the Christian disciple, strengthens the whole church, fortifies its holy integrity and witness, and equips the congregation to better love their neighbors in word and deed" (Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members*, xiii). A biblically-ordered church is then a ministry-oriented church.

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*(Scripture references from ESV)*

**We are in a series of messages- biblical responses to basic questions about the church:**

**Message 1: What is the church?** – *we saw what makes the church uniquely significant and consider membership in it.*

**Message 2: How is the church ordered?** – *we saw what the church should look like and how to organize it.*

**Message 3: Why Does the Church Exist?**

The being or essence of the church (*What is the church?*) must first be established, and from that foundation the church derives its purpose and function according to its design. If we attempt to explain why the church exists or its mission or what it should be doing – before we establish what the church is (which seems to be the general thrust of many churches and popular books today) – we tend to both misunderstand and misuse it.       1 Tim 3:14-16

*David Platt proclaims, “The church...is the place where God lives and dwells and manifests His presence. Consider how significant this makes our weekly gatherings: the church gathers and the Lord, the living God, is among us. We are His house, worshipping in His presence, listening to His Word, and partaking of the elements at His table. How awesome is the privilege of being the dwelling place of God’s presence!”*  
*(Platt, Christ-Centered Exposition: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 68).*

In summary, the church exists for the glory of God- to enjoy and extend his glory throughout the earth. The church fulfills this purpose through the: worship of God, discipleship of one another, and witness to the world.

**1. Purpose of the Church**

- The church exists to Worship God as Supremely Worthy

The purpose of the church begins not with what man needs, but with what God is supremely worthy of, namely worship. *John Piper explains, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man...Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory...Missions begins and ends in worship”* (*Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad, 17*).

Heb 10:19-25

*Tom Schreiner warns, “Refusing to meet with other believers in this context signifies apostasy, the renunciation of the Christian faith”* (*Schreiner, Hebrews, 321*).

Corporate worship is to be in accordance with the truth of God whereby they simply read God’s Word (1 Tim 4:13); preach, teach, and confess the truths of God’s Word (Acts

20:27; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 4:2:1-2); see the truth of God's Word in rightly administering the ordinances to the believing members of the local church (Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 10:17); pray (1 Tim 2:1); and sing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) together (*see the 1689 London Baptist Confession, 22:5*). All should be **done with order** (1 Cor 14:40). The elements of the worship gathering are to **reflect the whole range of God's character** (both transcendent and immanent) and the **whole counsel of his Word** (every truth given its proper emphasis). God is three in one. God is holy, and God is love. God is king and creator, and God is intimate father. God is sovereign to save, and God uses means to do so. The church should reflect the full truth of God and his word. The church should seek to minister by Scripture and the Spirit to the range of human emotion and experience as those created good in the image of God (with body, mind, soul), fallen in sin, and redeemed only in Christ.

- The church exists to Disciple One Another as Believers—as lifelong learners and lovers of Jesus Christ

God's purpose is that his glory be demonstrated and delighted and so his people be conformed to Christ. A direct indication of rightly worshipping God is loving others (Exod 20:1-17; Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31).

Gal 6:10; 1 John 4:20

Much of Scripture's attention on the love of Christians for others is in the context of believers in local churches. Christians are to be continual witnesses to one another of the transforming and sustaining power of the gospel.

The ordinary means of grace are the biblical means for nurturing health and growth in the church toward Christ-likeness. They include reading, preaching, and teaching Scripture; a right use of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and prayer. The church gathers formally and also practices hospitality and exhorts one another daily.

**God preserves and nurtures his people in faith through their care for one another in local churches. Scripture calls us to "one another"** - to care for one another in light of the coming of Christ. We bear one another's burdens, confess our sin, pray for, show honor, give instruction, welcome, give to, forgive, greet, comfort, live in harmony, rebuke, exhort, be kind, forgive, bear, serve, submit, be truth, admonish, encourage, show humility, do good, build up, encourage, sing to, and walk in fellowship- with one another as believers.

*One scholar notes, "They must encourage and warn each other by reminding each other of the sufficiency of Christ and the magnitude of the privileges to be gained or lost by drawing near to God through him"* (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 482).

- The church exists to Witness to the World of God's Glory - The spread of true worship to the world. Matt 28:16-20

**The church has a dual relationship with the world-** "the church is for the world—encouraging its members to faithfully obey the culture mandate to build civilization while loving neighbors and making disciples—and against the world, helping its members to be compassionately critical of and justly opposed to all that in this fallen world is tainted by sin and in rebellion against Jesus Christ, head of the world and head of the church" (Allison, *The Church*, 462). The church proclaims the gospel, pictures the gospel

(through the ordinances and church discipline), and adorns the gospel in holy lives. Local churches are to plant and nurture other churches.

Eph 1:10, 22; 2:11-22; 3:10

*Charles Bridges explains, “The Church is the mirror, that reflects the whole effulgence of the Divine character. It is the grand scene, in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe” (Bridges, *Christian Ministry*, 1). *Michael Horton argues, “Everything that the church is called to do as a visible institution – not only its ministry of preaching, but its public services of prayers, singing, sacraments, fellowship, government and discipline – is to be a means of delivering this gospel to the whole creation”* (Horton, *Gospel Commission*, 88). The gospel is biblically portrayed and joyfully proclaimed through healthy local churches.*

## 2. Blessings and Responsibilities of Church Members

*(through the example of early Baptists)*

- Church members covenant to gather in worship with the church
- Church members covenant to submit their discipleship to the church
- Church members covenant to preserve the sound doctrine of the church
- Church members covenant to edify other members in the church  
*1 Thess 5:14-15*
- Church members covenant to live in holiness before the church
- Church members covenant to exercise the kingdom keys as a church
- Church members covenant to serve in ministry through the church

**Through church membership**, we publicly identify with Christ, enjoy the spiritual protection of the church, have assurance in the faith, partake of the Lord’s Supper, serve in the ministry of the church, mature, benefit from the leadership of shepherds responsible for members’ souls, and serve as a united banner of the gospel.

Those outside of good standing in a biblical, local church were generally viewed as being outside of Christ.

“Do you love the church of which Christ has called you to be a member?...[A]re you tempted to give up on the organizational church and go it on your own? Do the so-called saints you rub elbows with on Sunday seem to be obstacles rather than aids to your friendship with Christ... Jesus’ eyes see all the churches’ blemishes and bruises, yet our defects do not diminish his love for us or dim his eager expectation for the day when he will present the church to himself ‘in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing’ but rather being ‘holy and blameless’ (Eph. 5:27). When we glimpse the bride through the eyes of her Groom, it lifts our head in hope and calms our frustrated hearts for persevering love for one another” (Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, 343).



**“The Church: An Overview of Basic Ecclesiology and Healthy Church Life”  
The Doctrine of the Church as Central in God’s Redemptive Plan**

*(Scripture references from ESV)*

**We are in a series of messages- biblical responses to basic questions about the church:**

**Message 1: What is the church?** – *we saw what makes the church and membership significant*

**Message 2: How is the church ordered?** – *we saw what the church should look like*

**Message 3: Why does the church exist?** – *we’ll see the purpose of the church and what it should be doing*

**Message 4: Distinctives of a True Church (part 1 of 2)**

**There are 2 basic categories to distinguish in our consideration of the church:**

- “Esse”: **Marks of a True Church** – *defining elements of a church*
- “Bene Esse”: **Marks of a Healthy Church** – *elements of a more or less pure church*

**We begin by first studying the foundation:** What are the defining features that make a church “a church”? The true church is marked by the preaching of the Gospel and right administration of the ordinances, therefore implying the proper use of church discipline to ensure that the gospel is properly represented by believers as those marked out and distinguished from unbelievers. Fundamentally, the church is a creation of the Word of God. **Where these marks are found, there one finds the universal church actualized in a local church.**

**1. The Biblical Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**                      Rom 3:21-26

*David Platt summarizes, “The gospel is the good news that the only true God, the just and gracious Creator of the universe, has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death through the resurrection from the grave so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus along as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever” (Platt, Secret Church: Cults and Counterfeits, 9).*

- **God is Holy** –

He is creator and sustainer (Gen 1), utmost holy (Lev 19:2), perfect in purity (Hab 1:3), and righteous. God is just (Ps 7:11-12) and will judge the world (Acts 17:31).

- **Man is Sinful** – Gen 3; Rom 5:12-21; Heb 11:6

One Valley of Vision puritan prayer states, “Let me never forget that the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against” (*Valley of Vision, Humiliation, 142-143*). Man naturally hates the one true God, transgresses his law, and deserves the full, eternal wrath and curse of God for his rebellion (Gal 3:10; Heb 9:27). There is absolutely nothing man can do of himself to change his nature, forgive his sin, or merit God’s favor. How then can God be just in condemning sinners and justifier in forgiving sinners? (Pro 17:15)

- **Christ is Sufficient** – our federal head - truly man, truly God – prophet, priest, king active and passive righteousness, penal substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection - 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor 15; Heb 9:22
- **Faith and Repentance are Commanded** – Mk 1:15; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John

*Paul Washer states: “With one hand, God is motioning man to come to him. With the other hand, he is holding back his wrath. Soon, he is going to drop both hands” (see Washer, Gospel’s Power and Message). Come to Jesus Christ. Now is the time of salvation. **Scripture urges:** turn from your sin, believe in Jesus Christ, submit to his lordship and delight in him.*

*James Montgomery Boice summarized the core gospel doctrines, “Without these five confessional statements—Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and glory to God alone—we do not have a true church, and certainly not one that will survive for very long. For how can any church be a true and faithful church if it does not stand for Scripture alone, is not committed to a biblical gospel, and does not exist for God’s glory? A church without these convictions has ceased to be a true church, whatever else it may be” (Boice, Gospel of Grace, 32).*

The way we view God directly informs the way we think about the church.

## 2. The Right Administration of the Ordinances (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper)

Baptism signifies the initial identification of a Christian with Christ and the church. The Lord’s Supper signifies such continual identification. **“Baptism binds one to many, and the Lord’s Supper binds many into one”** (Jamieson, Going Public, 150). *Wayne Grudem explains, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper also serve as ‘membership controls’ for the church. Baptism is the means for admitting people into the church, and the Lord’s Supper is the means for allowing people to give a sign of continuing in the membership of the church—the church signifies that it considers those who receive baptism and the Lord’s Supper to be saved”* (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 865-866). Acts 2:41-42

### MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH:

#### THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM – 6 Basic Questions about Baptism

**WHAT is baptism?** - *The Abstract of Principles (1859) states, “Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus, obligatory upon every believer, wherein he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up to God, to live and walk in newness of life.”*

**WHO should be baptized?** – Christians with a credible profession of faith in Christ are the only recipients of baptism. Belief and baptism are married in Scripture- belief coming before and baptism following soon after.

*Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 8:37; 9:18; 10:44-48; 16:14-15; 16:32-33; 18:8; 19:4-5*

*Matt 28:18-20; cf. Jn 4:1-2; Rom 6:1-5; Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:11-12; Gal 3:27; 1 Pet 3:21*

Scripture does not teach that baptism saves but uses baptism as a short-hand to summarize salvation. Christians were those who underwent baptism to **profess, prove** and **picture** conversion (*Schreiner, Believers Baptism, 99*).

### WHY should a Christian be baptized?

*Baptism signifies union with Christ and communion with the church.*

- Baptism indicates an **Identification** with the Triune God – *Matt 3:15-17; Matt 28:18*
- Baptism indicates a **Distinction** from the World
- Baptism indicates a **Regeneration** by the Holy Spirit – *Tit 3:5; cf. Mk 1:8; Jn 3:1-8; Acts 2:38*
- Baptism indicates a **Purification** from Sin – *1 Pet 3:21; Ezek 36:25; Heb 9:13-14; 10:19-22*
- Baptism indicates a **Participation** in the Body of Christ – *Eph 4:4-5; 1 Cor 12:13; cf. Acts 8*
- Baptism indicates a **Proclamation** of the Gospel – *Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26; 2 Cor 5:15-17*
  - Picture of the Gospel
  - Profession of faith
  - Pledge of obedience
  - Promise of preservation
- Baptism indicates an anticipation of the Final **Resurrection**

### WHEN should a Christian be baptized?

What about re-baptism?

What about children?

**HOW should a Christian be baptized?** – Meaning is affected by mode.

*(John L Dagg, Manual of Church Order, 21-68; Restoring Integrity, chap 4, D. Allen)*

- Immersion is indicated by the **word** for baptism – *Mark 1:9*
- Immersion is indicated by the biblical **precedent** of baptism – *Matt 3:16-17; Mk 1:5, 10; Jn 3:23;*
- Immersion is indicated by the theological **picture** of baptism – *Rom 6:3-4*
- Immersion is indicated by the church's early **practice** of baptism

**WHERE should a Christian be baptized?** – **The local church is the authorized context** for baptism, which as a gathered assembly holds the keys of the kingdom and exercises them through baptism and discipline. **Baptism should ordinarily occur both *by* and *into* the local church which affirms one's faith and in which one commits his life.** "In Acts, baptisms resulted in the recipients gathering daily for additional instruction. The ecclesia, or local church, of the New Testament is the fulfillment of the commission of Christ. **The New Testament knows nothing of baptized believers not associated with a local church**" (*White, Restoring Integrity, 111*).

**The DANGER of Baptism**

**The BEAUTY of Baptism**

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**Message 5: Distinctives of a True Church (part 2 of 2)**

1. The Biblical Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
2. The Right Administration of the Ordinances: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper *cont*

**MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH: THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER -**  
**6 Basic Questions**

**WHAT is the Lord’s Supper?** – Matt (26:26ff), Mark (14:22ff), Luke (22:14ff). John records surrounding details. “The act of taking the bread and the cup is a dramatization of the Gospel, a graphic display of what Christ’s death has accomplished” (Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1119). It “tells a sacred story and creates a sacred community” (Jamieson, *Going Public*, 108).

**WHY should we observe the Lord’s Supper?** – This meal both **divides** and **unites**.  
1 Cor 11:17-34

- At the Lord’s Table, we **Remember** (a look backward) – Exod 12-13; John 1:29
  - The body of Jesus – Luke 22:19
  - The blood of Jesus – Luke 22:20; Heb 9:22; 1 Pet 1:18-19
- At the Lord’s Table, we **Reflect** (a look inward and upward)
  - The corruptness of our sin
  - The covenant in Scripture
  - The cross of our Savior - Psalm 32:1
  - The completion of our salvation – Lk 22:15-16; Jn 6:48-58; Rev 19:7-9; cf. Exod 16:32
- At the Lord’s Table, we **Receive** (a look outward) –  
*The 1689 LBC states, “It is given for the confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits of Christ’s death, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, and their further engagement in and to all the duties they owe him. The supper is to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Christ and each other.”*<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 11:23-26. <sup>21</sup> 1 Cor 10:16, 17, 21.”
- At the Lord’s Table, we **Renew** (a look around)
  - Examination: We renew our commitment to Christ – 1 Cor 11:28-29
  - Reconciliation: We renew our love for each other – 1 Cor 10:17; 11:33
  - Celebration: We renew our focus upon gospel mission – 1 Cor 11:26
- At the Lord’s Table, we **Rejoice** (a look forward)

**An earlier Baptist J. B. Jeter summarized the purposes of the Lord’s Supper from 1 Corinthians 11 as:** preaching the cross, memorializing the person and work of Christ, symbolizing God’s covenant with his people, presenting Christ as nourishment to the soul, predicting the second coming and believers’ future glory with Christ, and symbolizing the fraternal unity of those who partake of it (Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset*, 206-207). Thereby “the Christian performs an act of faith and receives a refreshing of his faith, a brighter manifestation of God to his soul” (Jeter, *Baptist Principles, Reset*, 207).

**WHO should observe the Lord’s Supper?** –

The terms of communion: How should we fence the Lord's Table?

- Baptized Christians –

*The Heidelberg Catechism clarifies, "For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy."*

- Local church members
  - Christian church members in good standing
- What about other members of other churches?

**WHERE should we observe the Lord's Supper? –**

Five times in 1 Cor 11 we read, "when you come together" (17,18,20,33,34).

**WHEN should we observe the Lord's Supper? – Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:26**

**HOW should we observe the Lord's Supper?**

Through the Lord's Supper: Believers **share** in the work of Christ as they partake of the Lord's Supper. Unbelievers **see** the work of Christ as they watch a visual sermon take place in the Lord's Supper (*David Platt sermon, The Lord's Supper: Celebration of the New Covenant, Mar 29, 2009*).

### **3. The Proper Use of Church Discipline** (the third mark of a true church)

**As the Lord's Supper signified communion, corrective church discipline signified a process that (apart from repentance) resulted in ex-communication-ing.** Baptists historically disciplined members for violating Scripture in both doctrine and life as expressed in the church's confession and covenant. Discipline is both **a privilege** that assures one that his perseverance in the faith does not rest on his own attempts, **yet also a responsibility** according to Scripture. Churches are responsible to affirm genuine professions of faith, disaffirm what appear to be false professions, and signify such judgments through admitting or barring one from the ordinances.

**Church members hold the sobering blessing and responsibility of corporately representing heaven.** At the heart of God's character is redemption.

*Albert Mohler, "The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other. . . . The very notion of shame has been discarded by a generation for which shame is an unnecessary and repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment.' . . . [As one scholar stated,] 'Go and sin no more' has been replaced with 'Judge not lest you be judged.' . . . The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church— and the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation. . . . As an infection weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanisms, so the church has been weakened by this ugly sore. The church has lost its power and effectiveness in serving as a vehicle for social, moral, and spiritual change." He concludes, "John Leadley Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, noted: 'It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.' If so, and I fear it is*

so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure" (Mohler, Polity, quotes range throughout the article from pages 43-56).

### **The Biblical Purpose of Church Discipline**

We are saved individually to live collectively. Formative and Restorative discipline:

- For the **Purity of the Church** - Matt 7:1; Acts 5:4-5, 14; 1 Cor 5:12-13; 6:5-6; Gal 2:11
- For the **Restoration of the Christian** - Heb 12:7, 10; Gal 6:1-2; Heb 10:23-25
- For the **Glory of God in Christ** - Lev 19:2 - *Mark Dever*, "Discipline draws a circle around the membership of the church. Careful practices of membership and discipline are meant to mark off the church from the world and thereby define and display the gospel" (*Dever, Church, xiii*).

### **The Biblical Pattern for Church Discipline** Matthew 18:15-20

*John Calvin articulated the power of binding as excommunication and loosing as reception into membership: "The church binds him whom it excommunicates-not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus"* (*Calvin, Vol. 2 of the Institutes, 1214*).

- **Private Correction**- Matt 18:15; cf. Matt 5:22, 24; 18:21-22
- **Personal Clarification** - Matt 18:16; cf. Deut 19:15
- **Church Exhortation** - Matt 18:17a; cf. 2 Thess 3:14-15
- **Church Excommunication** - Matt 18:17b

*Jonathan Leeman, "Church discipline is the act of removing an individual from membership and participation in the Lord's Table. . . . The church is saying that it can no longer affirm the person's profession of faith, and so it refuses to give the Lord's Supper. It's excommunicating, or ex-communication-ing, the person. . . . They could no longer call him a Christian and affirm his citizenship in the kingdom... There's a line between sins and sin patterns that you expect of Christians and sins and sin patterns that make you think someone may not be a Christians. . . . The general tenor of one's relationships with the disciplined individual should markedly change. Interactions should not be characterized by casualness but by deliberate conversations about repentance... [yet] family members should continue to fulfill family obligations"* (*Leeman, Church Membership, 109, 112, 115, ; also see Leeman, <https://www.9marks.org/article/church-discipline-primer/>*). We are to "interact redemptively, not socially" (*Cheong, Redeeming His Bride, 282*). Tit 3:10; 2 Thes 3:6; 1 Cor 5:1-5, 11-13; 1 Tim 1:18-20; 1 John 2:19; 1 Tim 5:24; 2 Cor 2:6-7

1 Tim 3:15 ...behave in the household of God...church of the living God...pillar...buttress of the truth. Disciplined churches make it easier for people to hear the Gospel of Christ and see the truth of godliness.

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**Message 4 & 5: Distinctives of a true church** – *what are the defining features that makes a church “a church”?*

What makes a church “a church” is the true gospel and right use of the ordinances in biblical reflection and response of the gospel, implying the biblical use of discipline. Now, what signifies the well-being of a church?

*Charles Spurgeon said, “Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church’s history, and I will find a little marginal note reading thus: ‘In this age men could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended.’ Never were there good times when the Church and the world were joined in marriage with one another . . . The more the Church is distinct from the world in her acts and in her maxims, the more true is her testimony for Christ, and the more potent is her witness against sin” (Spurgeon, sermon from March 25, 1860 entitled, “Separating the Precious from the Vile”).*

**Message 6: Distinctives of a Healthy Church and a Baptist Church?**

**In Eph 4:1-16, Scripture provides the Biblical Blueprint for True Church Growth:**

**The church** is not divided along ethnic lines, but one new man and body (2:15) at peace with God and one another, radiating the presence of God (2:19-22), declaring to cosmic creatures God’s manifold wisdom (3:10).

**1. Ephesians 4:1-6 – Pursue Holy Unity as a Covenant Community**

**Eph 4:1-3 begin with a practical picture of healthy church life.** Col 3:12-14

By living at peace with one another through the gracious treatment of others (humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance) in light of God’s treatment of us, believers protect the unity established by the Holy Spirit. Such sacrificial love displayed this way is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and evidence of sovereign grace (Gal 5:22-24).

**Eph 4:4-6- The theological foundation for preserving unity:** there is one church, united by one Spirit, for one hope of eternal joy, under one Lord, in one faith, through one baptism, all by one sovereign Father. United in such essentials, Christians preserve this unity as an accurate reflection of what and whom has bound them.

**2. Ephesians 4:7-12 – Equipped for Gospel Ministry under Biblical Authority**

**Eph 4:7-10 – God sovereignly endows the church with gifts of grace.**

1 Cor 12:4-7, 11, 18-26; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:10-11

God’s sovereign assignment of grace should provoke gratitude- each has a meaningful contribution in a different way for the **glory** of God, **growth** of the church, **grace** of the Christian, and **gospel witness** of the nations.

**The purpose of such by gifted leaders is** “not merely to do the ministry, but to invest their time heavily in developing and preparing fellow believers to engage in ministry to the body. The model Paul presents is therefore one of mutual service in the community and not one of professionals serving a group of consumers” (Arnold, Ephesians, 262).

**3. Ephesians 4:13-16 – Grow in Christian Maturity through Mutual Accountability**

*John Broadus, founder of SBTS: “All the sin that has darkened human life and saddened human history began in believing a falsehood; all the power of Christianity to make men holy is associated with believing truth.”*

**The measure of the church’s health** is its unity in the truth, maturity in ministry, and conformity to Christ. As Clinton Arnold summarizes, “The Christian community is essential for growth to maturity because Christ has sovereignly endowed every individual with special abilities to minister to all the other members. It is the responsibility of the divinely gifted leaders to equip the members for a life of mutual service. The goal of ministry is to help all believers grow in a knowledge of Christ and of the core doctrines of the faith, to mature to a greater Christlikeness, and to manifest love for one another in the life of the church community” (Arnold, Ephesians, 242).

“Jesus is the One who is ultimately building his church (Matt. 16:18). But he has graciously allowed us to participate in the construction process, and it is therefore according to his biblical blueprint that we must build the structure and life of the church” (Dever, *Deliberate Church*, 26). **We build according to the Chief Architect’s blueprint.**

**Distinctives of a Healthy Church:**

*(see books entitled, 9 Marks of a Healthy Church, What Is a Healthy Church?, What Is a Healthy Church Member?)*

- Sound Doctrine - Acts 20:17-38; 1 Tim 1:3-11; 6:3-4; 2 Tim 3:1-13

exegesis: \_\_\_\_\_ hermeneutics: \_\_\_\_\_

doctrine: \_\_\_\_\_ grammatical-historical method: \_\_\_\_\_

Biblical Theology: \_\_\_\_\_ Systematic Theology: \_\_\_\_\_

- Expository Preaching -

*Steve Lawson clarifies that, “the preacher primarily reads, explains and applies what the Bible teaches, all in a persuasive way...In its purest sense, expository preaching is biblical preaching that is God-exalting and life-altering” (Lawson, *Preaching the Psalms*, 17).*

2 Tim 3:14-17

- Saving Faith -



Earlier Baptist B. H. Carroll avowed, "The church is a spiritual body. None but the regenerate should belong to it. It is not a savior, but the home of the saved" (Carroll, *Ecclesia*, 154). Titus 3; John 3:5

- Biblical Worship – 1 Tim 3:15
- Covenantal Membership – 1 Tim 1:8-15; 2:4-7; 12-14; Titus 2; 5:1-16; 1 Thess 2:12
- Church Discipline –

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer insisted, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin" (Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 107). Far from unloving, biblical discipline is a display of God's love (Heb 12:6). **A loving faith family commits to pursue those who stray from the faith and restore them to the joy of truth.***

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pastors' responsibility was to preach God's Word, administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper, oversee church discipline, personally shepherd the flock according to the Word. and In the pre-civil war south, historian Gregory Wills records, "Southern Baptists excommunicated nearly 2 percent of their membership every year" (Wills, Democratic Religion, 68). "A church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church" (12). By the middle to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they replaced "the pursuit of purity with the quest for efficiency. . . . It [church discipline] simply faded away, as if Baptists had grown weary of holding one another accountable" (9). The Pastor became a spokesman of protracted meetings with calls to immediate decision, dealing only with most serious cases.

- Spiritual Unity – John 13:35; 1 John 4:20

"As people with little in common in the world's eyes love each other as if they are closer than family, all heaven looks on with wonder at what the gospel has created" (Eph 3:10). (Dunlop and Dever, *Compelling Community*, 73, 78-79, 189).

- Prayer Dependency – 1 Tim 2:1-2

**Prayer helps:** use A.C.T.S. as a model (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication)-use the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:5-15; cf. Jn 17) as a guide- pray through the Psalms by reciting a line and praying it back to God with personal application- pray through the member directory and church prayer list interceding for a few names per day- Use Paul's NT prayers (see D. A. Carson, *The Prayers of Paul*, Apostles' Creed, 10 commandments, and Sunday prayers of confession. Use the coming Sunday's worship guide to lead your family in preparation for Sunday.

Pray with your wife and children. Offer to pray for others in your workplace and community. Pray not just for them but with them. The Valley of Vision is a collection of puritan prayers that saints through the ages have used. **Study the prayers of Scripture so that our prayers more closely reflect the priorities of Scripture.**

- Local and Global Disciple-making –

Disciple-making is quite simply helping others to follow Christ. Disciples are learners or followers. All of life is disciple-making- learning to observe all Christ commanded.

Churches are charged to proclaim the gospel, gather converts, and plant and nurture other healthy churches. “Ecclesiology and missiology are intrinsically related to one another. The only way to do biblical missions is through a biblical church, and the only way to be a biblical church is to pursue faithfully God’s mission for the church as revealed in Holy Scripture” (Ashford and Akin, *Missional Implications in Hammett and Merkle, Those Who Must Give Account*, 189).

The church should care for **all suffering** especially **eternal spiritual suffering** (Piper, sermon on June 23, 2011 entitled, “Abortion and The Narrow Way”).

**Distinctives of a Baptist Church:** Baptists fundamentally hold to *Sola Scriptura*. They worked out reformation theology into local church structure and practice. Scripture is sufficient to organize and grow the local church.

- Confessional Theology – clearly confessing what they believe Scripture means by what it says.

- Regenerate Church Membership (believer’s baptism) –

J. B. Jeter stresses that “a spiritual, or regenerate, church membership . . . lies at the foundation of all Baptist peculiarities” (Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset*, 23). Moreover, “A church comprised of an unregenerate membership several generations removed will no longer care about proclaiming such essentials as the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the way to salvation” (Duesing, *Restoring Integrity*, 250).

- Priesthood of all Believers –

All Christians are authorized by God for interceding ministry to one another and the world as “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). This doctrine provided the **backbone for congregational polity**. Contrary to the individualistic idea of “The Priesthood of *the* Believer,” Timothy George explains what was initially “The Priesthood of *all* Believers,” “Of course, Luther did believe that all Christians had direct access to God . . . [but] the priesthood of all believers did not mean, “I am my own priest.” It meant rather: In the community of saints, God has so tempered the body that we are all priests to each other. We stand before God and intercede for one another, we proclaim God’s Word to one another and we celebrate his presence among us in worship, praise, and fellowship. Moreover, our priestly ministry does not terminate upon ourselves. It propels us into the world in service and witness” (<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>).

- Congregational Polity (elder-led, congregationally ruled, autonomous)

Under the lordship of Christ and leadership of pastors, each church is responsible for doctrine, membership, discipline, and leadership as they discern the will of God together. **Coming and going is an act of the church.**

**Christ** is Head. **Elders** rule, shepherd, and teach. **Deacons** are leading servants.

**Members** are all ministers. Baptists distinctly prize **local church autonomy**- self-government apart from outside spiritual governance.

Though **independent** in authority, Baptist churches are not to be **isolated** in ministry. As Christians were expected to join churches, early Baptist churches were expected to be in covenant communion (exceeding casual friendship) with one another. They gave and received: affirmation to one another as true churches to extend fellowship; guidance on various matters; counsel in discipline cases or disputes; assistance in establishing churches; material gifts in need; pastoral leadership and pulpit assistance; accountability in doctrine and purity; care for one another; and partnership together in providing financial provision for pastors, education for prospective pastors and evangelism and church planting unto the world (Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, 154-183).

Though members of separate churches are not in the same type of covenantal union, New Testament churches shared love and greetings (Rom 16:5, 16; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 13:13; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4), preachers and missionaries (2 Cor 8:18; 3 John 5-6), financial support and encouragement (Rom 15:25-26; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:24; 9:12; 2 Cor 8:1-2), worthy example to emulate (1 Thess 1:7; 2:14), caution about teachers (1 Jn 4:1; 2 Jn 7-8), and prayer (Eph 6:18) (Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations*, 374-375).

- Religious Freedom –

“Baptists have always believed that a free people in a free state is the best context for the faith” (Norman, *Baptist Way*, 159). True faith can’t be **coerced** and shouldn’t be **suppressed**.

What about para-church ministries?

When should I leave a church?

**FIRST Scriptural snapshot of the church: Acts 2:42-47**

**FINAL Scriptural snapshot of the church: Revelation 2-3**

**Reformation begins with the church:**

“church reformed and always being reformed according to Scripture.”

The church is at the center of God’s purpose in creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The church exists for the worship of God, disciple-making ministry to one another, and gospel witness to the world. The gospel is thereby biblically portrayed and joyfully proclaimed through healthy local churches.

## APPENDIX 7

### REFORMATION BAPTIST CHURCH COVENANT SERVICE

At Reformation Baptist Church, our elders invite new members who have been accepted into membership to come forward during corporate worship on a Sunday morning to covenant together with the church. The following documents is an expression of our church covenant used in question and answer format. This act is a demonstration of our church body extending the right hand of fellowship to new members as those new members formally take on the blessings and responsibilities of church membership. The opening words of the first six points in our actual church consisting of, “Together, we resolve,” are here replaced with the words, “Will you resolve.”

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## Reformation Baptist Church: Covenant Service

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**Pastor: I want to invite Reformation Baptist Church members to stand together as we recite the opening paragraph of our church covenant.**

We, the members of Reformation Baptist Church, hereby affirm this covenant with one another by God's grace, for our good, and for God's glory. Having been brought, as we believe, by the Spirit of God and divine grace, to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord, Savior, and supreme Treasure of our lives, and upon the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do, in the presence of God and this assembly, solemnly and joyfully covenant with one another, as one body in Christ, to glorify God by worshipping together and making disciples.

**Pastor: Now, I want to invite our new members to hear the words of our church covenant and should you accept this covenant, please respond after each point by stating, "By the grace of God, I will."**

1. Will you resolve to love Christ above all, to seek God's kingdom through regular devotion to Scripture and prayer as we actively fight against our sin?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

2. Will you resolve to come together regularly for worship? By the Holy Spirit, will you strive for the unity of this church in knowledge, holiness, love and peace; and to promote its fruitfulness in the true preaching of the Gospel and right use of the ordinances? Will you partake of the Lord's Supper as we remember the past work of Christ on the cross, celebrate the present work of Christ at the Father's right hand, and anticipate the future work of Christ in His return for the full redemption of His bride?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

3. Will you resolve to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember one another in prayer, participate in one another's joys, and bear one another's burdens? Will you cultivate Christian compassion and be slow to take offense, always being ready for reconciliation? Will you humbly and graciously confront and receive correction from one another through biblical church discipline and restoration? Will you edify one another with your speech and encourage one another in your example?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

4. Will you resolve to pray for and submit to the leadership which has been entrusted by God to shepherd this body by exemplifying godliness and equipping the saints for the work of the ministry?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

5. Will you resolve to seek the salvation of your family and neighbors? Will you encourage the maintenance of family worship as we train our children and those under our care according to the Christian faith?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

6. Will you resolve to walk wisely in the world, to be faithful in your engagements and Christ-exalting in your lifestyle, to avoid all gossiping, and to abstain from all practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or one's faith? Will you contribute cheerfully and sacrificially to the support of the church, aid of those in need, and spread of the Gospel through all nations?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

7. If you move from this place, will you as soon as possible, unite with another biblical local church of like faith and practice, where you can carry out the spirit of this covenant and truths of God's Word?

Response: **By the grace of God, I will.**

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

**Pastor: On behalf of our local church, we graciously welcome you into the covenant community of Christ as members of Reformation Baptist Church**

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHING BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT REFORMATION BAPTIST CHURCH IN WETUMPKA, ALABAMA

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This project sought to teach biblical church membership for increasingly healthy church life at Reformation Baptist Church (RBC) in Wetumpka, Alabama. Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of RBC and provides an overview of the project's rationale and purpose followed by specific directions for achieving its goals.

Chapter 2 provides exegesis of four passages of Scripture (Matt 16:13-20 and 18:15-20; selected passages in the Pastoral epistles, Eph 4:1-16; Heb 10:19-25) asserting that biblical ecclesiology and practice are essential for healthy Christian disciple-making. This chapter establishes the biblical foundation of a biblically-ordered church along with the responsibilities of its members and leaders.

Chapter 3 establishes an overview of basic ecclesiology and common challenges to church membership.

Chapter 4 specifies the implementation of the project with its curriculum and teaching methodology.

Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals with reflections on its implementation and considerations for future implementation.



Ultimately, this project seeks to exhibit the glory of God through the local church, and shepherd Christians toward Christ-likeness through biblical church membership.

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