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EFFECTIVELY AND BIBLICALLY ASSIMILATING  
NEW MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
TALLADEGA, ALABAMA

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

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Robert Alan Klotz  
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APPROVAL SHEET  
EFFECTIVELY AND BIBLICALLY ASSIMILATING  
NEW MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
TALLADEGA, ALABAMA

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To my longsuffering wife, Heather, without whose love, patience, and support, this work  
would not be possible.

To our three daughters, Hannah, Leah, and Esther, whose interruptions were always  
welcomed distractions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Context .....	1
Rationale .....	4
Purpose .....	8
Goals .....	8
Research Methodology .....	8
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations .....	10
Conclusion .....	12
2. CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP .....	13
Regenerate Church Membership in Acts 2:41, 47 .....	13
Doctrinal Integrity in Acts 2:42 .....	16
Accountability and Church Discipline in Matthew 18:15-17 .....	18
Involvement and Investment .....	22
Stewardship in Acts 2:44-46 .....	28
Conclusion .....	33
3. THE NECESSITY OF A MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	34
Regenerate Church Membership and the Membership Class .....	35
Doctrinal Integrity and the Membership Class .....	39
Communicating Expectations in the Membership Class .....	43

Chapter	Page
Conflict Resolution and the Membership Class .....	52
Conclusion .....	55
4. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION .....	57
Preparation Period .....	57
Implementation Period .....	62
Follow-Up Period .....	64
5. PROJECT EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS .....	73
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose .....	73
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals .....	76
Strengths of the Project .....	79
Weaknesses of the Project .....	82
Moving Forward .....	84
Theological Reflections .....	85
Personal Reflections .....	89
Conclusion .....	91
 Appendix	
1. MEMBER ASSIMILATION EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY .....	93
2. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ASSIMILATION TEACHING SERIES RUBRIC .....	96
3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ASSIMILATION PRE- AND POST-SURVEY .....	97
4. MEMBERSHIP CLASS CURRICULUM RUBRIC .....	100
5. POLICY CHANGE PROPOSAL RUBRIC .....	101
6. MEMBERSHIP ASSIMILATION EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY DATA .....	102
7. LESSON 1: BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DEFINED .....	103
8. LESSON 2: CHURCH MEMBER ASSIMILATION .....	106

Appendix	Page
9. LESSON 3: REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	109
10. LESSON 4: DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	112
11. LESSON 5: CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	115
12. LESSON 6: CHURCH INVOLVEMENT AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	118
13. LESSON 7: INDIVIDUAL INVESTMENT AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	121
14. LESSON 8: BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS .....	124
15. PRE- AND POST-TEST DATA .....	127
16. MEMBERSHIP CLASS SCHEDULE .....	128
17. MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 1 .....	130
18. MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 2 .....	135
19. MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 3 .....	144
20. MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 4 .....	147
21. POLICY CHANGE PROPOSAL .....	150
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	153

## PREFACE

This project is reflective of a long process of learning and a growing love for church revitalization in general, and for biblical church membership specifically. When I arrived for my first semester at Leavell College on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I did not even know the term “church revitalization.” What I knew was God’s call on my life to be a pastor, and specifically to shepherd dying churches back to spiritual vitality. I am thankful for the education I received through Leavell College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and for the love for the local church this institution instilled in me.

I am also grateful for the godly influence of a professor who became a pastor and a mentor: Dr. Byron Brown. It was Dr. Brown who, in my first semester of Leavell College explained the concept of church revitalization and its importance across the landscape of the Southern Baptist Convention. His excellent academic instruction and faithful pastoral leadership helped me learn and grow, but his personal investment in my life as a mentor helped train and equip me for the revitalization pastoral ministry to which God called me.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has further equipped me to better serve the church in revitalization ministry. Faithful professors’ commitment to the Scriptures spoke loudly against fads and gimmicks and insisted upon a biblical approach to church revitalization. Classmates in the doctoral program—brothers in the faith and in ministry—gave encouragement, edification, and wise counsel in the hours spent together and became life-long partners in ministry.

I must thank my wife that I even applied to Southern Seminary. Southern offered the program, the faculty, and the experience I desired as I pursued doctoral studies,



but distance and other factors made me hesitant. My precious wife insisted that if Southern is where I felt I needed to be, Southern is where I should apply. As thankful as I am for Southern Seminary and the education in church revitalization I have received through the doctoral program, I am assuredly thankful for her loving sacrifice and encouragement to steer me there.

Among the faculty and professors at Southern Seminary, I am specifically thankful for Dr. Plummer, who served as my faculty supervisor for this project. His encouragement throughout the development of this project has been instrumental. His helpful suggestions, timely response to questions, and supportive review upon submission of each chapter made the project a far less daunting task.

In roughly a decade now of pastoral ministry in two revitalization churches, I have seen many of the needs that contribute to the greater need of church revitalization. Among the most important of these needs is the need to return to a biblical view of church membership and an intentional method of assimilation that adequately prepares new members as biblical members. This need inspired this project, and my prayer is that it has contributed to the revitalization of First Baptist Church Talladega to the glory of God.

Robert Klotz

Talladega, Alabama

December 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama (FBC), is a church in need of revitalization. Declining membership numbers, baptism rate, and worship attendance all demonstrate numerically a spiritual problem of decline. Efforts to revitalize First Baptist Church must incorporate a variety of strategies and reforms, but among the most pressing issues is preparing new members to take part in the life and ministry of FBC. Problems of decline will only persist if new members are not informed about church doctrine, roles and functions of members, and the importance of church involvement for the spiritual health of the individual and the church.

#### **Context**

For many years, First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama (FBC), experienced vibrant worship services, baptized new believers regularly, planted churches around the community, and sent missionaries throughout the world. While FBC has had fluctuating periods of growth and decline throughout its long and storied history, its most recent season of decline placed it in need of revitalization before it loses any semblance of spiritual health and all hope of gospel impact upon its community.

FBC's decline has many contributing factors, the most spiritually deadly of which is doctrinal inconsistency among its members. Due to its centrality in the city of Talladega, FBC has attracted people from a variety of denominational backgrounds into membership. Though the church has consistently held the *Baptist Faith and Message* as its official statement of faith, theological positions among some key doctrinal issues have been and continue to be varied among its members. Contrasting understandings of issues

including biblical inerrancy, mode of baptism, soteriology, spiritual gifts, and women's roles in the church have all caused disagreement on issues that should be consistent within a particular local church.

Mixed responses to the Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention left FBC more inconsistent even in its understanding of Baptist doctrinal positions. FBC's doctrinal inconsistency has been so prevalent that until August of 2018, some of its publications listed the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* as its doctrinal standard while the church's bylaws maintained the *Baptist Faith and Message 1963* as the official statement of faith.<sup>1</sup> This discrepancy was not an oversight, but the result of a conscious decision to maintain the *Baptist Faith and Message 1963* in official church documents so some church members could maintain theologically-liberal positions on key doctrinal issues in good conscience while remaining members at FBC.

Infighting, rivalries, dissension, and division have plagued FBC for many years, and its reputation among its sister churches as well as within its community has suffered as a direct result. Church records indicate several periods within the past twenty years during which groups of church members left the church at a single time. The most recent example occurred on September 18, 2015, when in a single day, eighteen members transferred their letters to another church in the area. By February 2016, eleven more followed.<sup>2</sup> Matching these records with business meeting minutes and anecdotes from current members indicates that these members left through avoidable conflict. Without an understanding of biblical conflict resolution, neither those who departed nor those who

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<sup>1</sup> A significant difference between the two versions, among several noteworthy changes, is the change in Article I. The Scriptures, in which the Bible was defined in the 2000 edition as "God's revelation of Himself to man," and considered "totally true and trustworthy." The 1963 edition defined the Bible as the "the *record* of God's revelation of Himself to man" (emphasis added) and did not include the latter statement. The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* also added the following statement to Article VI. The Church not included in the 1963 edition: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

<sup>2</sup> These statistics were gathered from church records of changes in membership in 2015-2016 under the heading "Losses by Letter to Other Baptist Churches."

remained at FBC handled the situation biblically. Both groups demanded their own preferences and their own way, refusing to work together toward compromise or mutually beneficial resolution. Those who departed left their church family rather than working together, and those who remained harbored bitter feelings against those who left.

Others who have not moved their membership to another church have developed a practice of participating in Sunday school classes but avoiding corporate worship services. For the years 2017-2018, FBC's average attendance for Sunday School was 139, while its average worship attendance was 122. Removing Easter worship service numbers leaves average worship for these two years at 118. What began as a form of unbiblical and unhealthy protest against pastors has become a steady pattern of neglecting corporate worship akin to the warning in Hebrews 10:25.

Like many churches, FBC has struggled to inspire and include all, or even most, of its members in the ministry work of the church. Some of this problem is due to organizational structuring within its congregational polity, but much of the problem is a failure to motivate members to serve, failure to educate members about the opportunities for service available to them through the church's ministries and committees, failure to train volunteers so they can succeed within their volunteer positions, and failure to match members' spiritual and natural gifts with appropriate tasks in the church.

In its recent history, some of FBC's members have withheld tithes and giving to demonstrate their disapproval with the church, the pastor, a particular program, or a practice with which they did not agree. Such passive-aggressive withholding is alarming and an alarmingly common practice among the membership at FBC. While this practice does not currently hinder FBC from meeting its annual budget, it sets a dangerous precedent. Individuals should never use tithing and giving as weapons to hold a church hostage or dictate its future to suit their own plans and selfish desires.

While leadership at FBC must address each of the aforementioned problems among its current members, the church must also put into place measures to prevent such

problems from continually arising. One preventative measure is properly and intentionally assimilating new members into the body, and FBC utilized a New Member Orientation to inform its new members of church practices, policies, and beliefs. After joining the church through baptism, statement of faith, or transfer of letter from another Baptist church, new members attended a weekend-long New Member Orientation. The church constitution and bylaws required each new member to undergo this orientation with the pastor:

All new members of this church will be expected to participate in the church's New Member Orientation plan conducted by the pastor or someone he designates. The purpose of the New Member Orientation is as follows: Affirm the new member in his/her decision and extend a welcome into the fellowship. Insure that the new member has assurance of his/her salvation. Provide the new member with an understanding of our doctrine and polity. Acquaint the new member with the organizational structure, programs and ministries of our church. Help the new member understand how he/she can find a place of ministry in the church. Inform the new member about the stewardship program of the church.<sup>3</sup>

This requirement was not heeded for many years. No church record exists of a New Member Orientation class or event, and none of the members questioned could recall such an orientation when they or any other member joined FBC. Beginning in 2017, the church held New Member Orientation weekend during the fall months, using this weekend meeting to educate and inform new members about FBC. Even this effort to follow the policies already in place was not sufficient, because a membership class as a prerequisite for church membership is more effective in preparing and assimilating faithful, biblical members of FBC.

### **Rationale**

Each of the issues FBC faces is important to healthy, biblical church membership, and each of these issues is addressed in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:13-16, Paul instructed the church to grow together in doctrinal understanding in order to resist false doctrines and grow in Christ. In Philippians 4:2-3, he urged Euodia and

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<sup>3</sup> Bylaws of the First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, section 3: New Member Orientation, adopted August 21, 1996, Church Documents – Constitution and Bylaws: 1-8.

Syntyche “to agree in the Lord,” continuing to labor together in gospel work.<sup>4</sup> In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul provided a list of spiritual gifts, explaining that believers were to use their spiritual gifts for the good of the church within the context of the local church. The book of Acts contains multiple examples of faithful stewardship and generous giving, as well as the cautionary account of Ananias and Sapphira’s attempt to use giving as a means of self-glory.

FBC’s New Member Orientation was limited in its effectiveness to assimilate new members largely because this approach did not begin to inform individuals about church policies, doctrines, organization, and practices until after they have already become members of the church fellowship. In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus encountered three men who were eager to follow him. As each one approached him and announced his willingness to follow after the Lord, Jesus reminded them of a particular cost associated with coming after him—a cost that was too great for each one of the men. Again, in Luke 14:25-33, Jesus instructed the crowds to carefully consider the cost of following him. He told them they must hate their families, bear a cross, and renounce all that they had, and if they were not prepared to do so, they were not prepared to follow him. Further, Jesus used the illustrations of a man preparing to build a tower and a king preparing for war to remind his hearers that they must consider the cost before following him. While Jesus’ instructions were directly related to following him, the general principle Jesus communicated suggests that counting the cost of church membership should be a considerable part of an individual’s decision to join a local body of believers.

A New Member Orientation after an individual has already joined a local church imposes church expectations upon members. A prerequisite membership class, however, gives people the opportunity to understand expectations and to decide whether to join the church or not—to count the cost. Asking people to participate in a New Member

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

Orientation after-the-fact places them in an unnecessarily difficult predicament in which they must choose to either remain members of a church with which they have some level of disagreement, or withdraw their membership having only recently joined the church. A membership class ensures that every new member at FBC has carefully considered the implications and expectations before committing to join the church.

A membership class should also correct many of the weaknesses FBC currently faces. First, a prerequisite membership class provides a better venue through which the pastor could become familiar with the testimonies of potential members. Pastors certainly cannot judge the hearts of all who seek membership, but having the opportunity to hear individual testimonies and ask follow-up questions would give the pastor, and in turn the congregation, a better understanding about whether the candidate for membership is a believer.

Without addressing the issue of salvation as well as critical doctrinal issues before an individual joins FBC as a member, the potential would continue for doctrinal inconsistency. Individuals who join the church without first understanding the church's doctrinal statement and positions would likely be resistant to change their own personal positions should they discover that these positions are not consistent with those of their newly-joined church, but they may also be hesitant to depart a church they have only recently joined. Membership candidates ought to have the opportunity to evaluate the doctrinal positions of the church, having these positions clearly presented and explained to them, before they join as members. Additionally, a local church should be afforded the opportunity to make clear to membership candidates those doctrines the church understands as non-negotiable and to teach candidates, from the Scriptures, why the church holds those positions. It is a dangerous folly to assume that all candidates who desire membership at FBC also agree with FBC's doctrinal statement. The church, through its membership class, should take the time to teach this doctrinal statement to membership candidates to help avoid erroneous doctrinal influence or even false teaching within its fellowship.

A membership class gives people the opportunity to understand the church's expectations of stewardship, whether financial stewardship or stewardship of spiritual gifts and natural abilities. Teaching membership candidates about tithing and giving as well as about using their God-given gifts and abilities for the good of the local church helps transform a culture of passive-aggressive withholding and apathy into a culture of investment and involvement. Through a membership class, the church is able to clearly define and communicate its expectations for attendance, stewardship, and participation. Further, the church can explain the importance and benefits of participating in corporate worship, outline how financial gifts are used to further the work of the kingdom, and connect individuals to ministries in which their spiritual and natural gifts will be most effective.

Finally, in a membership class, the pastor and other church leaders can help prevent future church conflict by outlining biblical conflict resolution, accountability, and church discipline. Whether they are new believers or come from a church where such matters were not addressed biblically, some new members arrive at FBC uncomfortable with the idea of church discipline, uneasy about accountability to other members, and unaware of biblical methods of resolving conflicts. By teaching candidates about such matters before they ever become members, the pastor and other leaders at FBC can increase the likelihood that conflicts will be avoided or handled in a more biblical manner in the future. Church members are also more likely to submit themselves to biblical accountability and church discipline when they understand the goal of reconciliation in all such matters. Individuals are far less likely to submit to authority of which they were previously unaware, but after these systems of accountability and authority have been presented in a membership class, candidates have the option of either willfully submitting themselves or refusing to do so by declining membership.



## **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a more effective process for assimilating new members of First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, through a membership class required as a prerequisite for membership.

## **Goals**

To lead the church toward a more effective process for assimilating new members through a prerequisite membership class, the following goals were proposed. Upon completion of these goals, FBC had a method of incorporating new members into fellowship that better prepares these members to serve faithfully and participate biblically in the life of the church. With new members better prepared, FBC will have a more secure foundation for its future and will have taken a vital step toward church revitalization.

1. The first goal was to assess the current process for assimilating new members at FBC.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-week teaching series to educate current members of FBC about biblical church membership and member assimilation.
3. The third goal was to develop a curriculum for a membership class.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a policy change proposal to require a membership class as a prerequisite for membership at FBC.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the current process for assimilating new members at FBC. This goal was measured by administering a Member Assimilation Effectiveness Survey (MAES) to current church members who joined the church at various times in the past fifty years and who volunteered to participate.<sup>5</sup> Forty-one church members voluntarily participated in the survey. The survey included two main sections. The first section surveyed the member's understanding of FBC's member assimilation process through a New Member Orientation and its effectiveness. The second section tested the

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approval by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

effectiveness of the process whereby the member surveyed was assimilated into FBC. The goal was considered successfully met when twenty-five members complete the MAES and the surveys had been analyzed to develop a better understanding of the current assimilation process and its effectiveness.

The second goal was to develop an eight-week teaching series to educate current members of FBC about biblical church membership and member assimilation. The class educated church members about biblical church membership and demonstrated the effectiveness of assimilating church members through a membership class. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the classes were taught in an online format. Videos were pre-recorded and posted to FBC's website, Vimeo account, and Facebook page for church members to view. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of a local pastor, a pastor experienced in church revitalization, an associational leader, and a university professor, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the teaching series.<sup>6</sup> This goal measurement was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Additionally, this goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey to twenty church members, which was used to measure the change in understanding of biblical church membership, member assimilation, and effectiveness of assimilation utilizing a membership class.<sup>7</sup> This goal measurement was considered successful when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in pre- and post-survey scores.

The third goal was to develop a curriculum for a membership class. The curriculum was designed to be taught over the course of a Friday night and Saturday membership class prerequisite for membership at FBC. This goal was evaluated by the

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 3.

leadership team of First Baptist Church, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, relevance, and helpfulness of the curriculum as it relates to membership at First Baptist Church.<sup>8</sup> This goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The fourth goal was to develop a policy change proposal to require a membership class as a prerequisite for membership at FBC. This goal was measured by the Administrative and Bylaws Committee of FBC who used a rubric to evaluate the clarity and relevance of the proposal.<sup>9</sup> The goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the proposal was revised until it met the standard.

### **Definitions and Delimitations**

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

*Assimilation.* *Assimilation* is joining new members with the current membership of a local church, and those members, as Mark Dever writes, “being incorporated in practical ways into the body of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> *Assimilation* includes the means by which each new member is not only added to the membership role but also practically included in the life of the church, including service in the ministries of the local church, participation in corporate worship, adherence to the church’s statement of faith, faithful and regular stewardship, and submission to accountability structures.

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 4.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 5.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 176.

*Church membership.* For the purpose of this project, John S. Hammett's definition of regenerate *church membership* was used as the definition for church membership: "Meaningful church membership, involving only those with a genuine commitment to Christ and the congregation of Christ's people."<sup>11</sup>

*Membership class.* A *Membership class* is a class that defines and addresses key issues of membership in a local church including, but not limited to, doctrinal matters, stewardship, service, and participation in corporate worship. A membership class is a required prerequisite for membership in addition to statement of faith, baptism, or transfer of letter.

*New Member Orientation.* A *New Member Orientation* is a class that defines and addresses key issues of membership in a local church including, but not limited to, doctrinal matters, stewardship, service, and participation in corporate worship. A New Member Orientation is required of a church member after he or she has joined the church by statement of faith, baptism, or transfer of letter.

One limitation applied to this project. The effectiveness of the eight-week teaching series on biblical church membership and assimilation was limited by the constancy of attendance. Should a participant miss one of these sessions, his or her score on the post-survey was adversely affected. To mitigate this limitation, each session of the teaching series was recorded, and participants were required to view the video from any sessions they missed.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project was confined to a twenty-four-week timeframe. This time-frame allowed sufficient time for the MAES, development and implementation of the eight-week teaching series, development and review of the membership class curriculum, and development and review of the policy change proposal. Second, this project addressed only current members of First Baptist

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<sup>11</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2005), 82.

Church Talladega, Alabama. The project focused on the effectiveness of the current member assimilation process, current members' understanding of biblical church membership and assimilation, and a proposal to change the membership policy that was placed before the current membership of First Baptist Church Talladega.

### **Conclusion**

Assimilating new members in a more effective manner will help FBC take a significant step in the process of church revitalization. Through this project, current members better understood their own role as biblical church members. More importantly, however, they established a means of assimilating new members that will better prepare these new members to participate as vital parts of the body of Christ at FBC.

## CHAPTER 2

### CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The New Testament clearly teaches five critical elements of church membership: regenerate church membership, doctrinal integrity, member accountability and church discipline, involvement and investment of individual members in the body, and faithful financial stewardship. A church that values membership will teach its members the importance of each of these elements and hold its members accountable in each of these areas. Further, a church that places a high value on biblical church membership must also commit to communicating these expectations and teaching these principles to candidates for membership that they may join the body as healthy, committed, biblical church members.

#### **Regenerate Church Membership in Acts 2:41, 47**

The body of Christ is composed of believers—those who are in Christ by grace through faith. Because only those who are in Christ are true members of the church as the body of Christ, regenerate church membership must be the first and most fundamental characteristic of local church membership. Acts 2:41, 47 emphasizes the importance of regenerate church membership by demonstrating that those added to the fellowship of the church were individuals who believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized upon hearing Peter’s preaching at Pentecost. Darrell Bock explains that the language of the text describes conversion: “‘Receive’ goes along with ‘call on the name of the Lord’ (v. 21) and ‘repent’ (v. 38). Each expression points to a different dimension of the embrace of the gospel that

saves.”<sup>1</sup> Luke identifies the new members of the church—the fellowship of believers—as those who have been converted. Conversion is the first mark, characteristic, and criteria for membership in the local church. Alan Thompson writes, “Thus God’s people are those who have responded in repentance, embraced the risen Jesus as suffering Messiah and reigning Lord, and have received the new-covenant blessing of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, C. K. Barrett writes, “Baptized, the new believers entered upon the common life of Christians.”<sup>3</sup> In the section spanning verses 41-47, Luke describes other characteristics of the early church, and many consider verse 42 the beginning of this section. Barrett, however, argues that the paragraph should begin at verse 41 because Luke commonly used the phrase *μὲν οὖν*: “As he turns from a source he has been following either to a new one or to a piece of his own composition.”<sup>4</sup> Dividing the text to include verse 41 demonstrates the intimate connection between “those who received the word” and “were baptized” with those who made up the new community of the church, and emphasizes the foundational importance of regenerate church membership: that the church is made up of believers in Christ.

The new church, this group of believers in Jesus, continued to grow. F. F. Bruce observes, “Their numbers were constantly increased as more and more believers in Jesus were added by Him to the faithful remnant.”<sup>5</sup> Again, those added were regenerate

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 147.

<sup>2</sup> Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 27 (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2011), 134.

<sup>3</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, vol. 34 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 160.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 159.

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), 81.

believers. Craig Keener explains, “That the Lord was daily adding these converts to their community indicates the expectation that those being saved were becoming part of the remnant or, in subsequent theological terms, the relevance of soteriology to ecclesiology.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Ben Witherington explains, “Clearly at this stage the followers of Jesus are being portrayed by Luke as true, Messianic Jews, attempting to rescue other Jews so they might be part of a righteous remnant of Israel, the eschatological people of God.”<sup>7</sup> Luke describes not only the salvation of individuals who believed in Jesus Christ, but their simultaneous entry into a community of faith. Witherington also observes, “Daily God added those who were being saved to this community.”<sup>8</sup> Such an intimate connection between conversion and addition to the congregation establishes a clear pattern to be emulated in contemporary contexts. Local church membership must be regenerate church membership—as believers are added to the body of Christ, they are added to a local body, and only as they are added to the body of Christ through repentance and faith in the Savior may they be added to a local church.

In verse 47, Luke describes the growth of the church and identifies “the Lord” as the one adding to his church. Thompson observes, “In view of the overwhelming emphasis throughout Acts 2 that Jesus is ‘the Lord upon whom we must call, the ‘Lord’ at the end of Acts 2 who is adding believers to the church is Jesus who has been made ‘Lord and Christ.’”<sup>9</sup> Only those whom Jesus adds to his church are truly the church, and Jesus only adds to the church those whom he has redeemed. John Stott confirms, “He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning),

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<sup>6</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1038.

<sup>7</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

<sup>8</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 51-52.



nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together; they still do.”<sup>10</sup> The notion that one can be a believer and not join a local church is as foreign to the principles of the local church in Acts as is the concept that a nonbeliever can be a member of the body of Christ. Because Jesus defined and added to his church by regenerate church membership, the church must continue to observe regenerate church membership as vital to the life of the local church.

### **Doctrinal Integrity in Acts 2:42**

In Acts 2:42, Luke records the early church’s commitment to the apostles’ teaching, demonstrating the importance of doctrinal integrity in the local church: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” Bruce suggests commitment to the teaching of the apostles defined the early church: “The three thousand converts were then formed into a distinct community, the apostolic fellowship, constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching.”<sup>11</sup> The Christian church is set apart from the world by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but also by adherence to certain fundamental truths of the New Testament. Stott explains, “Since the teaching of the apostles has come down to us in its definitive form in the New Testament, contemporary devotion to the apostles’ teaching will mean submission to the authority of the New Testament.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Thompson argues, “Because the apostles are the authorized delegates of the reigning Lord Jesus, it is their teaching that must be listened to.”<sup>13</sup> To maintain an orthodox set of beliefs and unity around foundational truths of the Christian faith, the church must submit to the Scriptures,

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<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 87.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 179-80.

including the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament as authoritative truth. Local churches must maintain a commitment to basic doctrinal truths not only on an institutional level, but also among individual members.

If these early believers in the first-century church had not diligently studied the teachings of the apostles, then their beliefs would have been varied and full of error as they were influenced by pharisaical legalism and Roman culture. The New Testament is rife with examples of false teaching distracting the church from the truth—whether recorded in Pauline Epistles or addressed in Jesus’ own rebuke of some of the churches in Revelation. False teaching inevitably leads to sinful practice, but right doctrine correctly applied will ensure the faithfulness of the church to right belief and to right practice. So it was in the early church in Acts, as Barrett explains, “The steady persistence in the apostles’ teaching means (a) that the Christians listened to the apostles whenever they taught and (b) that they assiduously practiced what they heard.”<sup>14</sup> Bock suggests that the apostles’ teaching “likely would have included all kinds of instruction like what we see in the Gospels and Epistles: ethical and practical teaching and a grounding in the central promise God had given in Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> The early church’s commitment to the apostles’ teaching demonstrates likewise a commitment to doctrinal integrity as vital to the church’s survival and its continued effectiveness to obey Christ and his Great Commission.

Doctrinal integrity in the local church also equips individual believers to persevere in the faith. Keener writes, “As comparisons of evangelistic claims and church growth reports reveal today, it is possible to have many ‘converts’ in meetings yet lack a social reinforcement for, and persistence in their new faith afterward.”<sup>16</sup> In Ephesians 4:14, the apostle Paul warned of the danger of being “tossed to and fro by the waves and

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<sup>14</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 150.

<sup>16</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1000.

carried about by every wind of doctrine,” and it is the responsibility of the local church to equip individual believers to stand against theological error by teaching and maintaining doctrinal integrity. A system of right belief, faithful to the teachings of Christ and the Apostles in the Scriptures, equips the saints to persevere in the faith.

Believers in a local church must continually commit themselves to the study of the truths of Scripture for the sake of maintaining doctrinal integrity in the church. Popular notions of theology being divisive or doctrine only being a matter with which seminarians concern themselves is dangerous to the system of right, biblical, and true belief to which the local church must hold. The first-century church studied the apostles’ teaching and avoided such error, as Stott explains,

We note that these new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, he was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles’ feet, hungry to receive instruction, and they persevered in it.<sup>17</sup>

So too, the church through the ages must be filled with members who study the truths of the Scriptures, apply them to their lives, and discern between the truth of the Bible and errors of false doctrine and false teaching.

### **Accountability and Church Discipline in Matthew 18:15-17**

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives clear and specific instructions for exercising church discipline with repentance in view. As instruction from Christ himself, the Lord of the church, believers cannot ignore this critical component of the life of the local church. Without question, Jesus provided instructions for the church in this passage. Donald Hagner explains, “The reference to ὁ ἀδελφός σου, “your brother,” indicates that the

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<sup>17</sup> Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 82.

conduct within the community of disciples continues to remain in view.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison observe, “This paragraph sets down the community rules for dealing with trouble between Christian brothers.”<sup>19</sup> The three-fold process begins, according to Christ’s instructions, with a confrontation by the offended party to the individual who has committed the sin. If the individual is unrepentant, he or she is confronted with the sin again, this time in the presence of two or three witnesses. If the individual still does not repent, he or she is removed from the church. Hagner elaborates, “At this point, it is felt that enough opportunity for repentance has been given, and that if the person has failed to respond appropriately, the only course of action that remains is ostracism from the community.”<sup>20</sup>

Christ gave his church instructions for church discipline to ensure the integrity of the body and to hold individual believers accountable in their walk with him. As individual believers submit themselves to church discipline, they submit to a system of accountability that will protect them from the grip of unrepentant sin. The goal of church discipline is repentance and restoration. Jesus ended the first step in the instructions, “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” The church’s desire in and motivation for church discipline must begin with a desire to see believers repent of sin and be restored to fellowship with the local church. Accountability in church discipline is, in this way, radically different from casting judgment. Davies and Allison explain, “The individual disciple is commanded to approach his brother and attempt to expose his guilt in such a way as to persuade him of his sin.”<sup>21</sup> The desire of one follower of Jesus in such cases is

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<sup>18</sup> Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 531.

<sup>19</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 781.

<sup>20</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 532.

<sup>21</sup> Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 783.

to help another follower of Jesus see his or her sin and lead the brother or sister to repent. This concern for one another between individual brothers and sisters is the first motivation for church discipline. R. T. France argues that the chief concern of biblical church discipline “is not mainly with the safety and/or reputation of the whole community but with the spiritual welfare of the individual. . . . ‘Win’ suggests that the person was in danger of being lost, and had now been regained; it reflects the preceding image of the shepherd’s delight in getting his sheep back.”<sup>22</sup> This desire stems from Christ-like love, care, and concern for brothers and sisters in Christ. France observes, “The person at risk is described as ‘your brother or sister.’ This family language imports a note of personal care rather than objective censure.”<sup>23</sup> Far from an act of elitism, an excuse for favoritism, or a method of manipulation, Jesus defines and describes church discipline as an act of love for the good of the Christian and the church.

As a church body commits to practice biblical accountability and church discipline, incorporating it into the spiritual life of the church and utilizing it when necessary, the church will preserve its purity as the bride of Christ. France writes, “Sin, of whatever form, is not to be tolerated within the discipleship community, but is to be dealt with when it is noticed.”<sup>24</sup> Ulrich Luz et al. explain that every member of the church is expected to participate in this process for the good of the church as a whole. The instruction, they explain, is not limited to those with an “official responsibility for the way members of the church conduct their affairs. . . . It is a biblical, Jewish, and early Christian conviction that every sin affects the entire church. . . . Office bearers who are responsible for the excommunication do not appear until later in the Pastoral Epistles.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 692-93.

<sup>23</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

<sup>24</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 692.

<sup>25</sup> Ulrich Luz et al., *Matthew*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 451.

When sin enters the local church, the integrity and purity of the entire church are at stake, so the entire church must be both concerned about sin and committed to the process of church discipline. This concern begins with every individual believer concerned enough with the integrity of every other individual believer to hold one another accountable. France explains the manifestation of this principle in the practice of church discipline: “The subject is dealing with sin within the discipleship community, but remarkably, it is the concerned individual, not an appointed leader or group, who is expected to act in the first instance; the wider community is involved only when that individual initiative proves inadequate, and then only to back up the individual’s concern.”<sup>26</sup> Concern for one another as a characteristic of the church begins with concern for one another on an individual level.

There are times in the life of a church when expulsion of members will be the only sufficient measure to ensure the integrity of the body. Keener writes, “Disciples must pursue the straying sheep (18:10-14), but certain very exceptional circumstances demand expulsion of wolves in sheep’s clothing who may not wish to leave.”<sup>27</sup> Hagner explains the vitality of church discipline to the body of Christ: “Only in such a way can the community remain intact.”<sup>28</sup> Even in such severe cases, the goal of church discipline remains repentance and reconciliation. Davies and Allison write, “To treat someone as a Gentile and tax-collector would involve the breaking off of fellowship and hence mean exclusion from the community—no doubt in hope that such a severe measure would convict the sinner of his sin and win him back.”<sup>29</sup> In either case—the case of a wayward sheep or the presence of a wolf among the sheep—exclusion was intended to lead to

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<sup>26</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 690.

<sup>27</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 452-53.

<sup>28</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 531.

<sup>29</sup> Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 785.

repentance. Followers of Christ removed from fellowship should, at this point, see the sinfulness of their ways, repent, and be restored. So too, an unbeliever removed from fellowship has his or her unbelief exposed, not only to the church who has removed him or her from fellowship, but likewise that unbelief is exposed to him or herself, demonstrating the need to truly repent of sins and come to saving faith in Christ.

The severe and final step of disassociation with a church member is of eternal significance as the church reverses its affirmation that the individual is a believer in Christ. Keener explains, “The discipline urged here was full excommunication, implying spiritual death. . . . Neither outsiders nor the sinner should continue their delusion that this person is truly a follower of Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> Hagner writes, “Thus the unrepentant offender is not simply put out of the community but categorized as among the worst sort of persons.”<sup>31</sup> The final step of church discipline, then, necessitates the first distinguishing characteristic of biblical church membership: regenerate church membership. In the same vein, the goal of restoration after repentance insists upon regenerate church membership, because to restore a believer to fellowship with the body is to affirm both the believer’s repentance of the sin in question as well as his or her faith in Christ. Because of these eternal implications, this final step of church discipline is not taken lightly by the local church, and repentance must be sought earnestly and consistently through every step of the church discipline process to avoid this final step unless absolutely necessary.

### **Involvement and Investment**

#### **Involvement in Hebrews 10:24-25**

A true believer must be regularly involved in corporate worship. The author of Hebrews challenges believers to be regularly involved in the corporate worship of the local

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<sup>30</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 454.

<sup>31</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 532.

church (Heb 10:24-25). The author begins his appeal calling believers to “stir up one another to love and good works.” Albert Mohler explains, “We cannot have confidence and full assurance of faith apart from the church. . . . Each Christian desperately needs the body of believers for encouragement.”<sup>32</sup> To be a biblical church member, one must be regularly involved in the assembling together of the local church.

The author of Hebrews warns believers not to neglect “to meet together.” This corporate meeting refers to the weekly gathering of the local church. Philip Hughes explains, “Here, then, the term *ἐπισυναγωγή* should be understood as simply the regular gathering together of Christian believers for worship and exhortation in a particular place—a practice that first took place daily, but subsequently weekly, on the first day of the week.”<sup>33</sup> Paul Ellingworth agrees: “The implied setting, as explicitly in vv. 22, 25 and by implication in v. 23, is the believing community, especially as gathered for worship.”<sup>34</sup> Many in the church may argue that corporate worship is not important, and that because a believer can worship God personally the assembling of believers together is more suggestion than necessity. Some in the modern church use this faulty reasoning to defend their neglect of the corporate worship gathering. This mistaken viewpoint, however, ignores both that Scripture has commanded this assembling together of believers and described it in such a way that the believer must understand corporate gathering as vital to spiritual life and sanctification. Mohler argues, “To say ‘I can do this alone,’ is to defy the very command of Christ. . . . Those who neglect assembling together cut themselves off from the very means whereby Christ feeds, assures, and

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<sup>32</sup> R. Albert Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 158.

<sup>33</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 418.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 526.



protects his people.”<sup>35</sup> Hughes goes so far as to question the Christian faith of one who would neglect corporate worship: “He who does not love his fellow Christians fervently from the heart feels no compelling need to associate himself with them. Indeed, the genuineness of the Christian profession of a man in this state must be seriously suspect, for those who are one in Christ cannot help loving one another.”<sup>36</sup> Regenerate church members will be regularly involved church members. Ellingworth too writes, “Failure to do so is associated with apostasy, though the author does not claim a direct causal link between the two.”<sup>37</sup> Even without the “causal link,” the passage presents the clear principle that those who have genuine faith in Christ will not neglect to assemble together regularly as the local church for corporate worship.

Evidently, neglecting the assembly had already become a habit for some. Bruce observes, “Toward the end of the apostolic age we are made aware of a tendency in some quarters to withdraw from the Christian fellowship.”<sup>38</sup> Ellingworth proposes persecution, laziness, or a desire to form a rival group as possible explanations.<sup>39</sup> Hughes speculates that the habit developed from a selfish sense of individualism and a lack of love for fellow believers.<sup>40</sup> William Lane argues the neglect stemmed from a misunderstanding of Christ’s redemptive work: “The neglect of the worship and fellowship was symptomatic of a catastrophic failure to appreciate the significance of Christ’s priestly ministry and the

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<sup>35</sup> Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 415.

<sup>37</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 527-28.

<sup>38</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 253.

<sup>39</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 528.

<sup>40</sup> Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 415.

access to God which it provided.”<sup>41</sup> Whatever the reason, the habit had developed, and it made both the church and the neglecting individuals spiritually vulnerable. James Moffatt explains, “Any early Christian who attempted to live like a pious particle without the support of the community ran serious risks in an age when there was no public opinion to support him. His isolation, whatever its motive—fear, fastidiousness, self-conceit, or anything else—exposed him to the danger of losing his faith altogether.”<sup>42</sup> Whatever the reason believers in the twenty-first century may find to avoid worship, or whatever excuses they may offer as defense for neglecting it, in their neglecting of the corporate assembly they place themselves and their local church at spiritual risk.

Finally, the author placed an eschatological urgency upon his instruction to be involved in the meeting together of the local church. As the day of Christ’s return grows ever closer, the church’s desire to meet together to encourage one another will grow ever more necessary. Mohler observes, “As time moves toward the Day of the Lord, the author expects the church to grow in faithful commitment.”<sup>43</sup> Lane writes, “The sober reminder that the Day of the Lord is drawing near offers a further incentive for continued active participation in the life of the community. It indicates the tension between peril and promise will ultimately be resolved eschatologically.”<sup>44</sup> As the church draws closer to the return of Christ, closer still than was the church in the first century, a sense of urgency to gather together should be increasing; yet a lack of commitment seems to rise among the contemporary church, especially in American evangelical culture. Thus, local churches,

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<sup>41</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Dallas: Word, 1991), 290.

<sup>42</sup> James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 147.

<sup>43</sup> Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, 159.

<sup>44</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 290.

especially in American evangelical culture, must teach and insist upon the vitality of the weekly assembly for every individual church member.

### **Investment in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7**

The apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 that God has given believers spiritual gifts to be invested in the local church for the good of the local church. Paul explains that God bestowed a variety of spiritual gifts upon the redeemed, but despite the variety of gifts, he emphasizes the theme of unity throughout the passage. David Garland argues, “The emphasis of this verse is not on the variety of the different gifts but on the one Spirit who distributes them.”<sup>45</sup> Paul reminds believers that they have the same indwelling Spirit, the same Lord reigning over and directing their service in the local church, and the same God empowering their service as they use their spiritual gifts.

Anthony Thiselton importantly notes, “The present passive indicative *δίδοται*, is given, presupposes the agency of God.”<sup>46</sup> The divine source of the gifts points directly to God’s sovereignty and authority over their use. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner write, “The gifts are distributed by the Lord so that those receiving them might use them in his service.”<sup>47</sup> Believers must use the spiritual gifts God has given for the purpose He has designed, and His designated purpose is the edification of the local church. To use gifts otherwise, especially for self-centered purposes, would be to forget the grace with which these gifts were given. Witherington explains that “*charismata* (12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31) stresses their nature as gift, that is, the unmerited character of these functions or

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<sup>45</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 575.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 936.

<sup>47</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 570.

activities.”<sup>48</sup> No believer has the right to use his or her spiritual gifts according to his or her own purpose, because no believer has earned, deserved, or merited these gifts of grace. Rather, each believer must submit his or her spiritual gifts to the purpose of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit to be used in the context of the local church, for the good of the local church, in accordance with the design God set forth in this passage.

Raymond Collins and Daniel Harrington write, “Present in the Christian, these gifts are the means by which God acts within the community.”<sup>49</sup> God works in his local churches through the individual believers that make up the local body of Christ by using the spiritual gifts He has given each believer according to His purpose and design. Gordon Fee explains, “Thus each ‘gift’ is a ‘manifestation,’ a disclosure of the *Spirit’s* activity in their midst.”<sup>50</sup> The use of spiritual gifts in the church is not the work of believers, but the work of God, by his Holy Spirit, through these individual believers whom he has equipped with spiritual gifts.

The key phrase in the passage is “for the common good.” This phrase identifies the common purpose of the varied gifts: betterment of the local church. Ciampa and Rosner explain, “Each one has something they have (*sic.*) received directly from God and have been empowered to share with the rest.”<sup>51</sup> They continue, “They are not given for our own indulgence, but to benefit the community of which we are a part.”<sup>52</sup> Thiselton also insists,

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<sup>48</sup> Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 255, emphasis original.

<sup>49</sup> Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 450.

<sup>50</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 653, emphasis original.

<sup>51</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 568.

<sup>52</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 571.

“The Spirit produces visible effects for the profit of all, not for self-glorification.”<sup>53</sup>

Utilizing one’s spiritual gifts for one’s own individual benefit rather than for the “common good” of the local church is both neglect of the divine purpose of the gifts and sinful rebellion against the God who bestowed them.

Garland further observes, “Paul applies the word *charisma* to a wide range of phenomena . . . The majority of uses, however, refer to the manifestations of God’s working in the members of the Christian community, from which the whole community benefits (Rom 1:11; 1 Cor 1:4-7).”<sup>54</sup> Even the term for the spiritual gifts themselves implies their use for the good of the local church rather than for the self-interests of the individual believer. Fee explains, “The concern throughout this entire argument is on the effect of the gifts in the building up of the community.”<sup>55</sup> Paul’s entire argument and explanation through the whole of the text is the use of spiritual gifts for the good of the local church. So too, every believer—every church member—must be concerned with and committed to the exercise of his or her spiritual gifts in the way God has purposed for the good of his or her local church.

### **Stewardship in Acts 2:44-46**

The faithfulness of the early church to give in support of one another and in support of the ministries of the local church as recorded in Acts 2:44-46 demonstrates the importance of stewardship to church membership. Stewardship is foundational in the church’s ability to care for the material needs of its individual members. As each member gives as a faithful steward of his or her material possessions, the local church can provide for the needs of all of its members. As recorded in Acts, the church accepted contributions from its members, then distributed from the sum of those contributions as needs arose.

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<sup>53</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 936.

<sup>54</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 576, emphasis original.

<sup>55</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 654.

The contemporary local church ought to follow the biblical pattern with each individual member tithing and giving as faithful stewards that the church may care for every member of the local body as needs arise.

Stewardship not only ensures the material, physical needs of its members are met, but also ensures that the spiritual needs of its members are met. As the church cares for its individual members, those members are edified, shown the love of Christ in a tangible way, and justified in their trust in the providence of God. Bock suggests, “That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material needs are also a concern and are being generously provided.”<sup>56</sup> Those who give also grow in their faithfulness to trust God’s providence more than their own material resources and in their loving concern for brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, Thompson connects stewardship directly to faith in Christ: “The Holy Spirit also brings about the new covenant change of heart that leads the restored people of God to display their love for one another in tangible expressions of giving as the ‘fruit’ of repentance.”<sup>57</sup> Bruce notes the joy of those who gave generously: “Within the community there was a spirit of rejoicing and generosity.”<sup>58</sup> Faithful stewardship meets the material needs of those who receive the distribution, but it also serves as a vital part of the sanctification process for those who give as they increase in various areas of spiritual vitality, including sacrificial love, dependence upon God, and joy in serving and loving one another.

Luke did not describe communalism in Acts 2, but stewardship. Communalism takes the whole property of each individual and distributes shares equally among the members—ideally. What Luke describes is stewardship: members of the local church giving regularly, faithfully, and generously to the local church, and the local church

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<sup>56</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 152.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 137.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 81.

distributing these gifts among those in need as needs arose. Stott explains, “It is important to note that even in Jerusalem the sharing of property and possessions was voluntary. According to verse 46, *they broke bread in their homes*. So evidently many still had homes; not all had sold them. . . . It is also noteworthy that the tense of both verbs in verse 45 is imperfect, which indicates that the selling and the giving were occasional, in response to particular needs, not once for all.”<sup>59</sup> Witherington similarly observes, “The imperfect verb tense here suggests this was not a onetime occurrence but rather a recurrent past practice, presumably undertaken whenever need arose.”<sup>60</sup> Barrett disagrees: “It is however undoubtedly true and important that at the time of Christian origins various forms of communal rather than private ownership of wealth were being practiced, and it is quite reasonable to conclude that the Christians followed a similar plan.”<sup>61</sup> Barrett suggests that the early believers may have practiced communalism because they believed Jesus would return soon, they were seeking to obey Jesus’ teachings, or because they felt pressure from Jews who valued and practiced communalism themselves.<sup>62</sup> Bock argues, however, “This sharing of material things in common is not a required communalism but a voluntary, caring response to need, as the end of verse 45 shows.”<sup>63</sup> As Bock observed, the phrase “as any had need” describes not a uniform distribution of goods, but distribution on an “as-needed” basis. Keener also argues, “Further, Christians continues to use their property until needs arose, requiring

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<sup>59</sup> Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 84, emphasis original.

<sup>60</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

<sup>61</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 168.

<sup>62</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 152.

them to sell it (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35). Their resources do not become community property but are designated for the poor.”<sup>64</sup>

While the practices of the early church could not be described as communalism, their attitude and treatment of possessions was drastically affected by their stewardship.

Bock observes,

The quality of mutual caring is highlighted in verses 44-45, as the believers are together and treat everything as belonging to everyone, holding all things in common between them. . . . Some scholars suggest that this reflects their expectation that Christ would soon return (Barrett 1994: 168), yet the reason given is not eschatological but social. They are motivated by concern for the needs of the community.<sup>65</sup>

While they did not place all their material possessions into one community fund to be equally distributed to all, believers considered all of their belongings—even privately-held property—as belonging to brothers and sisters in Christ and regarded personal property at the disposal of the body of Christ as needs arose. Witherington explains, “Rather, what is being described here is that no one was claiming any exclusive right to whatever property he or she had, and where need arose the early Christians readily liquidated what assets they had to take care of fellow believers’ needs.”<sup>66</sup> Clearly, believers’ attitudes toward material possessions is to be radically altered from the standard and sinful attitude of the culture around them. Stewardship in the local church stems from, is motivated by, and holds one accountable to keep a willing and sacrificial concern for the well-being of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Faithful stewardship requires willing sacrifice. Barrett writes, “Holding all things in common meant that owners sold their property.”<sup>67</sup> Believers sacrificed of their

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<sup>64</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1021.

<sup>65</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 152-53.

<sup>66</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

<sup>67</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 169.



own possessions to ensure provision for others. Keener recognizes the counter-cultural nature of their stewardship:

Their commitment was radical, fitting Jesus' demands for disciples in the Gospel (Luke 12:33; 14:33). . . . Certainly those who joined the early Christian community went far beyond the normal entry dues for guilds or associations . . . these were mandatory fees to belong to a group, whereas the Jerusalem believers shared their wealth more fully and voluntarily.<sup>68</sup>

Only the gospel—the good news of Christ's own sacrifice for the salvation of sinners—could motivate such radical sacrifice, but as these believers trusted in Christ and became part of the local church, self-sacrifice and stewardship followed. In the context of the local church, believers found the opportunity to emulate and obey Christ with their worldly possessions. Keener writes, “Real disciples must forsake their possessions (Luke 14:33), give them to the poor (3:11; 12:33; 18:22), and practically demonstrate that they value other people's welfare more than they value their own resources (16:9-13, 21, 25).”<sup>69</sup> Christians in contemporary contexts must follow this example in their local churches, sacrificing financially to provide for the needs of fellow believers through the ministries and benevolence of the local church.

Even the believers' meals demonstrated their stewardship as the people shared, fellowshiped, and ate together. Barrett explains, “καθ' ἡμέραν: so that the meals referred to later in the verse are not weekly celebrations of the Lord's resurrection but, much more probably, the necessary daily meals, which the believers took in common.”<sup>70</sup> Church members shared meals to provide for one another's basic and essential needs. Their stewardship became such a vital part of their life together as a local church that it made otherwise normal parts of their lives markedly different from the normal pattern of the

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<sup>68</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1012-13.

<sup>69</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1022.

<sup>70</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 170.

culture around them. So too, modern believers in Jesus Christ should exhibit counter-cultural care for others through faithful stewardship to the local church.

### **Conclusion**

Just as regenerate church membership, doctrinal integrity, member accountability and church discipline, involvement and investment of individual members in the body, and faithful financial stewardship were critical to the life of the early church, so too these characteristics are vital to the modern church. Every local church should be defined by these characteristics among its members. To do so, the church must understand these principles from the Scriptures, teach them to its membership, and expect their application within the local church. Neglecting to teach these principles to incoming or prospective members, however, will result in a lapse of these characteristics as new members join the local church. The local church should focus on establishing these characteristics as the norm among existing members. The local church must also develop a system of biblical member assimilation that clearly communicates these characteristics as expectations for new church members and that prepares new members to exercise them appropriately in the local church.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NECESSITY OF A MEMBERSHIP CLASS

The most effective means of ensuring that biblical church membership is maintained in a local church is by utilizing a prerequisite membership class. A membership class should act as the central avenue through which a church safeguards regenerate church membership, maintains doctrinal integrity, communicates expectations, and outlines its understanding of conflict resolution and biblical church discipline. These critical matters of church membership, demonstrated by biblical evidence to be critical to the vitality of the local church, are not maintained or safeguarded if new members can join by simply walking the aisle on Sunday morning. Even if a New Member Orientation is required after an individual becomes a member, the church has already admitted into fellowship someone who does not understand the church's expectations or how it enforces those expectations, and someone the church cannot say with certainty is a believer or subscribes to the same understanding of critical doctrines.

Recognizing the usefulness of prerequisite classes, many churches have transitioned into this method of new member assimilation. In his study, Charles E. Lawless observes, "The percentage of churches that *require* members to attend membership classes increased from 18.2 percent in the 1997 study to 31.0 percent of the churches in this study."<sup>1</sup> Membership classes are more common because more and more churches recognize their effectiveness. In *High Expectations*, Thom Rainer explains, "The relationship between assimilation effectiveness and new member classes is amazing . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 22, emphasis original.

churches that *require* persons to enter member classes have a much higher retention rate than those that do not.”<sup>2</sup> He continues and specifies, “Churches that *require* membership class attendance *prior* to membership have significantly higher retention rates than other churches.”<sup>3</sup> Using a prerequisite membership class as the method of new member assimilation in a local church will ensure that churches continue to be made up of believers, that their members understand and agree on critical doctrinal issues, that expectations of members are clear, and that each member is submitted to the church’s structure of accountability, conflict resolution, and church discipline.

### **Regenerate Church Membership and the Membership Class**

As the biblical evidence demonstrates, only believers in Christ can truly be a part of the church. Regenerate church membership, then, is the most critical issue with which a church must be concerned as it takes in and assimilates new members. Mark Dever observes, “If you read the story of the early churches recorded in the book of Acts, you will find no evidence that any of them meant to have anyone other than believers as members. When you read the letters of Paul, it seems clear that Paul too wrote as if the churches were composed entirely of believers.”<sup>4</sup> John S. Hammett observes the same trend in Baptist history: “Anabaptists and early Baptists . . . sought to be a pure church of visible saints, participating in church discipline and limiting church membership to those who could make a claim to genuine salvation, manifested by a life matching their profession.”<sup>5</sup> With the biblical and historic precedents set, local churches are accountable

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 105, emphasis original.

<sup>3</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 106, emphasis original.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 158.

<sup>5</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 56.

not only to be defined as assemblies of believers in Jesus Christ, but are also responsible for ensuring they remain assemblies of believers as they assimilate new members. Every local church needs a means for hearing an individual's testimony, examining the fruit of conversion in his or her life, and discerning whether he or she is a believer in Christ.

Without a means to discern whether an individual is regenerate, a local church has no way to maintain the biblical and fundamental standard of regenerate church membership. Hammett notes, "Regenerate church membership began to disappear when Baptist churches in North America began to baptize and bring in members who gave no visible evidence of regeneration."<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Leeman asks and answers the challenging question, "Who gets in? Here's the super simple answer: Christians. That is to say, the standard for church membership should be no higher or lower than the standard for being a Christian. . . . You're looking to affirm sheep."<sup>7</sup>

What method, then, is the most effective for "affirming sheep?" If individuals are able to join the church simply by "walking the aisle," even if those new members are then required to attend an orientation after joining the church, then a local church may unknowingly accept unbelievers into church membership, regarded as part of the local body, who are not part of the Body of Christ. The brief conversations that may happen at the altar during a time of invitation are hardly sufficient to truly examine a person's testimony and evidence of conversion. Deeper conversations that happen in an orientation after a member has joined may more clearly discern whether an individual is regenerate, but by that time, if the individual is found to be unregenerate, he or she is already a member of the church, even as an unbeliever. Dever warns, "We must realize that it is

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<sup>6</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85.

possible to be an active member of a local church and yet not truly be a member of the people of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Alternatively, a pastor can use a membership class as an opportunity to gain insight into the spiritual condition of candidates for membership—inasmuch as is possible without knowing the condition of the heart of another human being. Candidates may be required to share their testimony, explain the gospel as they understand it, and interact with other candidates as they too share their testimonies. A pastor, listening and observing, can better discern whether a candidate for membership is regenerate. Further, in the time between scheduled membership classes, a pastor can watch visitors’ lives closely and get to know these individuals to have a more complete understanding of the fruit of their spiritual condition. A pastor can especially focus energy on such observations in the time between class registration and the start of the class itself. The advantage to this method over “walking the aisle” is clear: the pastor has more than a few short moments to converse and listen. The advantage over a New Member Orientation after someone has joined lies in the timing of the conversation; a pastor needs to discern whether an individual is regenerate before he or she becomes a member of the church, not after he or she is already a member.

Mark Clifton notes the usefulness of the membership class to discern whether candidates for membership are truly believers. In his work, he relayed the story of Liberty Baptist Church who added a required, prerequisite membership class and an interview with the pastor prior to joining the church. These measures, he explains, were part of the church “taking membership much more seriously.”<sup>9</sup> Using a prerequisite membership class to ensure regenerate church membership is more than a decent theory. As Clifton’s example illustrates, a prerequisite membership class is a practical means of ensuring that

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<sup>8</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 113.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 84.

only believers are enabled to join as members of a local church.

More is at stake than drifting from a textbook definition of a local church defined as a body of regenerate Christians. Without a proper means of determining if a candidate for membership is regenerate, the church cannot fulfill its role as a trustworthy witness to the salvation of its membership. Dever writes, “Membership in a local church is intended to be a testimony to our membership in the universal church. Church membership does not save, but it is a reflection of salvation.”<sup>10</sup> Dever reports of the church he pastors, “At Capitol Hill Baptist Church, people attend membership classes before being interviewed for membership.”<sup>11</sup> Leeman writes, “What is a church member? It’s someone who walks through the embassy doors claiming to belong to the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Without a reliable means of testing that claim, however, how can a church verify its legitimacy or expose its falsehood? Leeman continues, “That’s not to say that churches always get it right, but it’s their job to identify and affirm who belongs to the kingdom and who does not.”<sup>13</sup> Churches cannot perform this function well without a structure in place to do so, and a prerequisite membership class provides the best structure for such discernment.

All other aspects of church life and vitality suffer in addition to its inability to reliably bear witness to those who belong to Christ. Its ability to govern itself as an autonomous local church disappears as authority is handed over to those who are not submitted to the lordship of Christ or the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Hammett also argues, “Congregational church government is founded upon and presupposes a regenerate church membership, because only regenerate members are competent to govern

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<sup>10</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 172-73.

<sup>12</sup> Leeman, *Church Membership*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Leeman, *Church Membership*, 29.

themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Too much of the church’s function as a local church hangs in the balance to avoid a prerequisite membership class. Without a prerequisite membership class to filter out or evangelize unregenerate candidates, a local church will set itself up to be governed by those who do not acknowledge Christ as Lord of their own lives, let alone as head of the church.

### **Doctrinal Integrity and the Membership Class**

Doctrinal integrity follows closely behind regenerate church membership in order of importance for spiritually healthy churches. Every church carries in its identity certain doctrinal and theological distinctives—some that separate the particular local church from other denominations, and others that might even distinguish it from other local churches in its own denomination. A church that seeks to maintain spiritual vitality as it assimilates new members must concern itself with preserving its doctrinal integrity and protecting itself from doctrinal confusion within the body. Dever writes, “Theology is not merely an abstruse, abstract, academic affair. Biblical theology is a mark of a healthy church.”<sup>15</sup> Every local church has a responsibility, for the sake of its own spiritual life, to clearly communicate right doctrine to its membership.

The consequences of not clearly communicating right doctrine and its theological positions are dire for a local church. Confusion abounds, unity disappears, infighting intensifies, a church’s identity is lost, and a church is crippled from accomplishing the Great Commission task Christ has given his church. Church members may also find themselves disconnected from the theological identity of the local church and eventually leave the church because of this disconnect. In their study, Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer observe that many who had fallen out of local churches blamed, in part, a lack of doctrinal training. They report, “A number of the dechurched admitted that they

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<sup>14</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 69.



were biblically ignorant. They confessed that they only had a shallow knowledge of biblical doctrines. And while they usually took personal responsibility for their lack of biblical understanding, they also blamed many of the churches for the doctrinal ignorance.”<sup>16</sup> Churches that are unable to connect their members with the church’s spiritual identity by helping them understand doctrinal distinctives will decline. Beyond the possibility of losing members, no church should be satisfied with theologically ignorant members. Theologically ignorant members are an indication that the church is not faithfully discipling its members, teaching them the Scriptures, helping them understand difficult truths, or making right doctrine a priority.

Because they are so important to the life of a local church and so central to a local church’s identity, every church needs a venue in which to communicate its doctrinal positions and distinctives. Rainer reports, “Nearly three out of ten of the churches in our study actually required adherence to a doctrinal position for membership. . . . Another six out of ten churches *expected* their members to follow an established doctrinal position.”<sup>17</sup> Churches must not only establish and communicate their doctrinal positions but must also be deliberate in organizing structures—especially as it concerns assimilating new members—conducive to teaching its members right doctrine. Bill Henard writes, “A healthy church structure facilitates believers to know and apply Scripture so that they avoid false doctrine and false behavior.”<sup>18</sup> Scripture demonstrates throughout both the Old and New Testaments the express danger of false doctrine leading the people of God astray, and the New Testament specifically contains warnings for local churches to guard themselves against the threat of false teachers. A prerequisite membership class offers the

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<sup>16</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 149.

<sup>17</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 58, emphasis original.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 31.

most effective venue for communicating doctrinal truth and theological positions, ensuring that each member of a local church has understood and can reasonably subscribe to the essential doctrinal positions of the church before joining as a member of that local body. Rainer reports one church's decision to use the membership class to ensure that believers were trained in right doctrine even before entering fellowship as members. He writes, "For the new Christians who joined the church, the new member class served as the first point of introduction to basic biblical truths."<sup>19</sup> One can assume that at least some portion—and in healthy churches, a large portion—of new members will be new believers uniting with the local body having recently come to faith in Christ. Others may have recently been convicted about their lack of church membership and sought to take a significant step in their spiritual maturation. Others still may be transferring from churches that either held different doctrinal beliefs, did not emphasize the importance of right doctrine, or simply did not communicate doctrine well. In any case, a prerequisite membership class offers the best opportunity to engage membership candidates with the doctrinal distinctives of the church from the beginning of their time in the church—even as they are still considering officially joining the church.

During a membership class, the pastor or another church leader should teach through the entirety of the church's doctrinal statement. He should provide scriptural support and a thorough explanation for each major point. Membership candidates should interact, asking questions and seeking clarification until they understand the church's doctrinal positions, their own doctrinal positions, and how compatible the two are. When a church dedicates a large portion of time in a membership class to teaching biblical doctrine, its membership candidates not only grow in their own understanding of key doctrinal issues, but also understand that a church places a high value on doctrinal integrity. Lawless writes, "A membership class is an opportunity to say, 'What we believe

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<sup>19</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 27.

and do is important.”<sup>20</sup> Having been through the membership class, candidates who become members will have at least a foundational understanding of biblical doctrine and will also have a clear sense of the church’s doctrinal positions. Rainer writes of churches using membership classes, “More than any single topic, doctrine was considered the most critical issue to be covered in a new member class.”<sup>21</sup> The clear opportunity to present and teach biblical doctrine is among the greatest strengths of a membership class.

Some may object to a focus on doctrinal distinctives. Others may even reject the idea of using a membership class to teach doctrinal distinctives to membership candidates. Arguments might suggest that so much focus on doctrine and theology would drive people away from a local church. Rainer and Rainer observe quite the opposite in their study, however: “These formerly unchurched people were clear. They not only were interested in learning about doctrine; they were attracted to conservative, evangelical churches that were uncompromising in their beliefs.”<sup>22</sup> Not only are membership candidates not driven away by an emphasis on doctrine, but they are actually attracted to it. Further, most candidates for membership are attracted to biblically conservative views on doctrinal and theological matters. Rainer also argues, “Doctrine matters. What churches believe and how they communicate their beliefs do matter. Higher-assimilation churches were much more likely to ask prospective members to agree to a basic doctrinal statement of the church.”<sup>23</sup> As Rainer’s research demonstrates, individuals are not scared away from a church by the church’s demand that they know and hold to right doctrine, but instead are assimilated better into the local church having understood and themselves subscribed to a shared statement of faith. A prerequisite membership class that includes clear and

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<sup>20</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 232.

<sup>23</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 57.

focused teaching on the doctrinal distinctives contained in a local church's statement of faith is the most effective way to maintain doctrinal integrity in the assimilation of new members into a local church.

### **Communicating Expectations in the Membership Class**

Churches should expect a great deal from their members. Local churches should expect their members to regularly attend corporate worship: the gathering of the saints together to glorify God and edify one another. Dever states, "The most fundamental duty Christians have in relation to the congregation is the duty to regularly attend gatherings of the congregation."<sup>24</sup> Churches should expect members to serve in accordance with their natural abilities and spiritual gifts for the good of each believer in the body, each ministry of the local church, and for the advancement of the kingdom of God in their communities. Lawless argues, "Churches that make membership matter simply *expect* people to join and get to work."<sup>25</sup> Local churches should expect their members to support the ministries of the church through tithes and financial gifts, giving cheerfully as the Lord instructs and leads. Stephen A. Machia writes, "Stewardship and generosity are where the rubber meets the road in our lifestyle as Christians. The healthy church is filled with generous, well-intentioned, and cheerful givers of time, talent, and finances."<sup>26</sup> Churches should expect their members to resolve conflict biblically, hold one another accountable for the sake of spiritual maturation, and submit to the biblical exercise of church discipline when it becomes necessary for the church to call a member to repentance.

To expect attendance, service, financial support, and biblical conflict resolution from its membership is appropriate for a local church. Churches in need of revitalization

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<sup>24</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 160.

<sup>25</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 29, emphasis original.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 198.

should especially consider re-examining a biblical definition of church membership and raising expectations, if necessary, to meet the standard of biblical church membership. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson write, “Many comeback churches—53 percent—raised the requirements of church membership, challenging people to live out the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant community described in Scripture. Increasing membership requirements is not an easy process, but it is a sign of something significant.”<sup>27</sup> By increasing expectations of members, churches take a critical step toward church revitalization as they challenge current members and new members alike to function according to a biblical understanding of church membership and the high expectations membership entails. In so doing, they move away from a trend of casual membership in declining churches and into a healthy state of active, involved, invested members expecting much of themselves and rising to meet the biblically high expectations of the church.

High expectations of membership are unreasonable, however, if these expectations are not communicated upfront to candidates for membership. An individual who joins a church without first understanding the expectations of the church will be frustrated by expectations to which he or she did not agree to submit. Members join local churches with their own expectations of what church membership will require and entail. If a local church does not clearly express and explain what it expects of its members before the individual joins as a member, then the only expectations the member will have upon which to evaluate his or her experience as a member are those with which he or she arrived. When the church’s silent expectations and the member’s silent expectations do not match, members will grow frustrated, feel deceived, cause dissention, or even leave the church. Likewise, a church that does not communicate its expectations to individuals before they become members will be disappointed by the failure of its new members to

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<sup>27</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 124.

meet expectations. Lawless argues, “People tend to be much more committed if the church publicly expect them to be committed up front—a membership class provides a place to communicate these expectations.”<sup>28</sup> New members cannot object to a local church’s expectations of them after becoming members if the church has taken time to outline those expectations before the candidate is allowed into membership. If a church takes intentional steps to communicate expectations from the beginning, it will be to the advantage of both the church as a whole and to each individual member.

A prerequisite membership class offers the best opportunity for churches to communicate their expectations to candidates for membership and for candidates to understand expectations. Rainer writes, “New member classes or prospective member classes have become so common that they are virtually considered a regular program in these high-expectation churches. The class is the most-frequently-used point of entry where the expectations of membership are articulated.”<sup>29</sup> Rainer and Rainer observe of membership classes: “As prospective members attend these classes, they not only discover factual information about the church, but they also learn the personality of the church, and they learn what is expected of them.”<sup>30</sup> Stetzer and Dodson write of revitalized churches who raised expectations of members: “How were membership requirements raised? Almost all of the respondents mentioned that they added a new member class (93.2%).”<sup>31</sup> Churches who recognize the need for elevated expectations of their members increasingly use a membership class to communicate those expectations to membership candidates. Lawless writes of churches using membership classes: “In their new member classes, 96

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<sup>28</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 217.

<sup>31</sup> Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 124.

percent of the churches emphasized membership expectations.”<sup>32</sup> He writes of a particular church: “In this church, leaders emphasize a required membership class where prospective members learn that ‘uninvolved member’ is a contradiction in terms. The church makes time to teach and train new members, and new members are then expected to make time to do ministry.”<sup>33</sup> Rainer and Rainer argue that the membership class “is the entry level where expectations are shared and where information about the church is provided.”<sup>34</sup>

There is no better time to communicate expectations for membership than during a prerequisite membership class—when individuals have expressed interest in becoming church members but have not yet officially joined as members. During this window in the process, candidates are serious enough about membership in a local church to be interested in understanding and meeting a church’s expectations, but they are also not yet committed as members should they find any of the church’s expectations unreasonable or unrealistic. Rainer observes, “‘Frontend’ requirements or expectations were deemed to be much more effective than the communication of expectations later in their tenure. And the new member class, more than any other venue, was the vehicle by which expectations were most effectively communicated.”<sup>35</sup> He also argues,

The key to both the articulation of expectations and the clarifying of requirements is that both are done in the membership classes. These churches do not wait until the people have been church members for several months before providing expectations of discipleship and ministry. The expectations or requirements are stated on the front end.<sup>36</sup>

During a membership class, the pastor or another church leader should teach why the church expects its members to regularly attend corporate worship. He should explain how

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<sup>32</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 31-32.

<sup>34</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 250-51.

<sup>35</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 113.

the church expects its members to invest their natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the life and ministry of the church, and should outline how the church expects its members' financial support.

A membership class not only provides an opportunity to communicate expectations, but also an opportunity for church leaders to help new members meet those expectations. The class can and should include an overview of church polity, an outline of worship opportunities, a list of the various ways a member may serve in the local church, and an explanation of how the church will use tithes and financial gifts. All of this information will help membership candidates understand not only what is expected of them, but also what avenues are available through which they can and should meet those expectations. A member, for example, who understands that the church expects him to serve on a committee each year cannot meet the expectation if he does not understand how to volunteer to serve on committees within the church. Wise church leaders will also use the membership class to help members discern the ministries for which they are best suited and help them connect with or register for these ministries. Rainer notes, "A significant number of churches in our study used the new member class as an opportunity to offer places for the members to serve. . . . Three out of ten churches asked those in the new member class to complete a spiritual gifts inventory."<sup>37</sup> Stetzer and Dodson observe, "Comeback leaders . . . emphasized the importance of intentionally training and empowering God's people to fulfill their ministry purpose in serving the body of Christ and reaching out to the lost."<sup>38</sup> Lawless observes, "Fifty percent of the churches we studied used a spiritual gifts inventory in their membership classes."<sup>39</sup> Macchia argues that in effective membership classes "not only are people being trained for select

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<sup>37</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 101.



ministries, they are taken through a self-evaluation process to assist them in discovering their spiritual gifts, their temperament and passion, their personal mission, and to deepen their insight into God's will and calling."<sup>40</sup> Such training and equipping should be part of the ongoing discipleship process of the local church in the lives of each of its members, but that process is most responsibly begun at the point of entry into the congregation if a church desires and expects its members to be involved and invested.

The danger in not communicating expectations through a membership class is the risk of continuing the trend in many churches, in which the minority of church members do the majority of the volunteer work within the church, and the majority of members do not actively participate in the life and ministry of the church. This problem of inactivity manifests itself differently in the lives of different members, such as failure to attend worship on a regular basis, refusing to serve in any capacity within the church, or withholding tithes. Lawless argues, "In contrast, churches that emphasize membership and ministry through membership classes are much more likely to see attenders join and get to work. . . . Churches that choose *not* to make these classes a priority, however, may be unintentionally inviting attenders and members alike to remain uninvolved."<sup>41</sup> Churches that do not intentionally communicate expectations among membership candidates will unintentionally develop uninvolved members. Rainer writes emphatically, "God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel."<sup>42</sup> Such willing sacrifice of one's self for the sake of the church and the gospel is a biblical

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<sup>40</sup> Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 45, emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 6.

understanding of church membership created by the clear communication of biblical expectations of church members.

Clifton additionally notes the danger in not having a plan in place to incorporate new, young leadership into the church:

They may want young people in the congregation. They may complain endlessly about the lack of young people in the church, but they have no strategic plan in place to identify and place into positions of real and meaningful leadership young leaders, or worse yet, they tend to fight any attempt to put young people in charge of significant ministry efforts.<sup>43</sup>

Clifton continues with a sobering warning: “Leaders will lead. If you don’t provide young leaders the opportunity to lead in your church, they will eventually go somewhere else where they can lead.”<sup>44</sup> A church that does not replace aging leaders with young leaders who are well-equipped and placed into service and leadership roles will eventually find itself without leaders and without anyone to serve in the vital ministries of the church.

The very life of the church is at stake if membership expectations are not communicated well and communicated up front in a membership class. Dever suggests that if a church does not communicate expectations of its members, then it will lose its vitality: “Many churches compromise on this point of high expectations in order to gain a sudden influx of members, but in doing so, they usually doom themselves to losing the gospel, and finally to becoming extinct.”<sup>45</sup> Brian Croft agrees, explaining that a troubling issue in a church he pastored “was the lack of any kind of process where members are taken into membership. Not only was this true in the church I pastored, but it has been a consistent mark in virtually every dying church I have worked with in a revitalization process.”<sup>46</sup> It is critical not only to communicate expectations but to do so within a

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<sup>43</sup> Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 77.

structured intake process for new members in which they are able to understand what the church expects of them as members. Rainer proposes that much of the problem with American churches is that members expect to join without serving. He writes, “I am suggesting that congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. We join our churches expecting others to serve us, to feed us, and to care for us.”<sup>47</sup> Rainer also argues, “The Bible makes it clear that if one part does not do its job, the whole body does not function well.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, a church cannot function, cannot minister effectively, cannot serve its community, cannot meet needs within its own body, and cannot survive if its members are uninvolved. Without communicating expectations to church members during a prerequisite membership class, the probability is high that churches will continue to be filled with uninvolved members. Members will enter expecting little of themselves as members, churches will take in members without either setting or communicating high expectations, and conflict, frustrations, inactivity, and decline will result.

Having understood expectations before they become members affords candidates the opportunity to choose either to submit to these expectations or to reject them. A membership candidate may, at the conclusion of a prerequisite membership class, determine that membership at a particular local church is not wise for them. Others may, at the conclusion of the class, decide to proceed with joining the church, but as they do so, it will be with the understanding that they are agreeing to meet the expectations the church sets for them. Lawless writes,

In essence, the churches we studied used membership classes to declare the direction the church was flying. Prospective members (and in some cases, new members) then had to decide whether they were prepared to fly in the same

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<sup>47</sup> Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 13.

direction. While it seldom happened, we did hear about prospective members who chose not to join after learning about the church's intended direction.<sup>49</sup>

Just as it is appropriate for a church to expect much of its members if it properly communicates these expectations, it is also appropriate for individual members to expect that joining a local church includes a serious commitment from them. Dever argues, "By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service."<sup>50</sup> He also writes of church membership, "We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve and encourage us as well."<sup>51</sup> When a church uses a membership class to communicate its expectations of members to candidates for membership, they are consciously and specifically afforded the opportunity to align their own expectations of membership with those of the church. They make a conscious decision in joining the church, then, to meet the expectations of the church and to be held accountable by the church should they disregard what is expected of them.

Dever challenges, "Are you concerned that such high expectations could put people off or make them feel excluded? I think such expectations actually help."<sup>52</sup> Having submitted to the expectations set before them in a membership class, new church members will be much healthier church members who will, in turn, make the church healthier. Hammet writes that healthy church members "feel a sense of ownership of the church and attend business meetings in a prayerful spirit, seeking to play their part in discerning God's guidance for their body. They are actively involved, using their gifts to serve the body and affirming others in their ministries."<sup>53</sup> Church members who understand expectations

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<sup>49</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 174.

<sup>53</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 209.

and rise to meet those expectations grow to expect much of themselves, and eventually to expect much of the church as a whole as they are themselves fully invested as part of the body. As they understand themselves as a critical part of the local body, they become more committed to investing in the body. Hammett also explains, “A healthy church will be one where individuals hear the challenge to minister, receive the encouragement and equipping they need to minister, and are affirmed in their ministry.”<sup>54</sup> Healthy churches set expectations for healthy members. If they use a prerequisite membership class to set clear expectations from the outset, as a required part of the process required to join the church, then they begin to produce healthy members who are involved and invested in the local church from the beginning of their time as members.

### **Conflict Resolution and the Membership Class**

Churches will face conflict. Churches in the midst of revitalization will most assuredly face conflict. Too many churches allow conflict to fester in bitterness or grow to unresolvable proportions. It is critical to maintain a biblical understanding of conflict resolution, accountability, and church discipline within the local church. Croft writes, “A clear understanding of how the members of a church are called to relate to one another is a key in preparing them to move forward and find new life.”<sup>55</sup> Biblical conflict resolution, biblical accountability, and biblical church discipline are all vital to church revitalization as they ensure that members relate to one another as God intended his people to relate, especially in the local church.

Churches that do not have a system in place for conflict resolution and church discipline have set themselves in a dangerous position. Croft describes the troubling pattern:

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<sup>54</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 212.

<sup>55</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 78.

What is too common among churches that need revitalization is that the meaning of membership is gradually lost as the backbone in the life of the church. For the sake of managing growing numbers, a process of assessing potential members falls by the wayside. But when the church begins to decline, that process that has been lost is no longer in place to hold one another accountable. Unresolved conflicts fester into divisions and the members of the church stop bearing burdens with each other and making efforts to lift the downcast among them. As the church begins to panic at their dwindling numbers throughout the decades, they begin to take any warm, willing bodies into membership with no accountability or expectation. Sins of the members continue to be overlooked, eventually evolving into no godly standard of living whatsoever. In fact a common mark in dying, divided churches is a feeling of entitlement to privacy that prevents being involved in each other's lives where we can transparently engage one another as God's designed.<sup>56</sup>

Dever writes, "God himself disciplines us and . . . he commands us to do the same for each other. The local congregation has a special responsibility in this regard."<sup>57</sup> Dever also explains, "Our biblical theology may explain church discipline Our teaching and preaching may instruct about it. Our church leaders may encourage it. But it is only the church that may and must finally enforce discipline."<sup>58</sup>

A church that fails to rightly exercise church discipline neglects its biblical responsibility to its members. As a result, its members may fall into conflict with one another or unrepentant sin, either of which will cause severe damage to the body. Henard suggests, "Conflict is not the end of the church, but it certainly will facilitate a church's death if left unchecked and allowed to fester."<sup>59</sup> A church's structure for conflict resolution and church discipline is put in place to save a church from just such a death. Dever states, "In becoming a member of the church, we are grasping hands with each other to know and be known by each other. We are agreeing to help and encourage each other when we need to be reminded of God's work in our lives or when we need to be challenged about

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<sup>56</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 187.

<sup>58</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 204.

<sup>59</sup> Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 49.

major discrepancies between our talk and our walk.”<sup>60</sup> Henard writes succinctly, “The church must be structured to care for and discipline its members.”<sup>61</sup> It is the church’s responsibility to adhere to the standards of member accountability, conflict resolution, and church discipline set forth in Scripture and to develop, maintain, and communicate that structure to its membership that they may willingly participate in this structure so vital to the life and health of the local church.

Churches must make members aware of their system of conflict resolution and church discipline. Churches who do not make members aware of their practice and policies, specifically concerning church discipline, until a member is under church discipline, do a disservice to the biblical process. The biblical evidence is clear that church discipline is a gradual process, grounded in a system of accountability, that seeks to resolve conflicts by calling those in sin into repentance. Repentance—not deeper conflict—is the goal. When members are unaware of the process itself or its goal of repentance, however, they will easily misunderstand and resist it.

A prerequisite membership class is the best opportunity to inform candidates for membership about how the church expects its members to resolve conflicts and how it will handle issues of church discipline. It even provides a venue in which relationships of accountability may begin to form between member candidates and church leaders as well as among the candidates themselves. Hammett observes a renewal of historical Baptist practices in growing Baptist churches today. He explains, “Some are practices that involve taking church membership seriously, such as exercising care in the admission of members (reflected in the growing number of churches with new member classes), renewing the practice of church discipline, and adopting church covenants to express the commitment

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<sup>60</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 164.

<sup>61</sup> Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 32.

members make to each other.”<sup>62</sup> Hammett’s observation demonstrates a direct connection between increasingly healthy churches, a renewal of church discipline, and the use of membership classes. Churches must use a prerequisite membership class to explain biblical accountability, describe biblical conflict resolution between fellow believers, and outline the church’s process for discipline. When this structure is taught to members while they are yet candidates for membership, the church will be more likely to develop a culture of biblical conflict resolution.

A membership class also affords membership candidates the opportunity to evaluate whether they are willing to submit themselves to the accountability structure of the church. Leeman argues, “Christians don’t join churches; they submit to them.”<sup>63</sup> Those who reject the thought of being accountable to one another in the local church and to the body as a whole will only be a detriment to the established structure for conflict resolution. If this unwillingness to submit to the church in this regard is recognized while the individual is still a membership candidate and not yet a member, he or she can simply decide not to join. Candidates who join after completing a prerequisite membership class in which church leaders have addressed accountability, conflict resolution, and church discipline will be knowingly committing and submitting themselves to these structures as they join as a member of the church.

### **Conclusion**

Because biblical evidence demonstrates the importance of regenerate church membership, doctrinal integrity, high expectations of members, and a structure of accountability, conflict resolution, and church discipline, First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, must put a structure in place to help ensure these vital, biblical characteristics. Further, because research and evidence demonstrate that a prerequisite membership class

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<sup>62</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 331.

<sup>63</sup> Leeman, *Church Membership*, 30.



is the best method for maintaining these biblical characteristics during new member assimilation, FBC should abandon its current practice of asking membership candidates to walk the aisle on Sunday morning to be accepted into membership, then attend an orientation at a later date. Instead, FBC should take in church members using a prerequisite membership class that addresses each of these four key areas of biblical church membership, ensuring that new members are better assimilated into the body and that a biblical understanding of church membership is engrained in the identity of the church through its assimilation method.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project itself focused on the four main goals as stated in chapter 1. Taking twenty-four weeks to complete, the project consisted of three portions: a preparation period, an implementation period, and a follow-up period. Significant obstacles necessitated unexpected changes in the project along the way, but the majority of the project proceeded as expected and yielded helpful results.

#### **Preparation Period**

The first goal of the project was to assess the current process for assimilating new members at FBC. The intention of this portion of the project was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current method of member assimilation. During week 1 of project implementation, members of FBC willing to participate in the study received the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey (MAES).<sup>1</sup> This survey analyzed the effectiveness of the current method of member assimilation at FBC: coming forward at a regular worship service to join upon congregational vote through baptism, statement of faith or transfer of letter, and then participating in a New Member Orientation after receiving membership. Though only members who would be able to attend the eight-week teaching series on Wednesday nights or would view video recordings of the sessions later could participate in the second phase of the project, for this phase it was helpful to gather as much data as possible from the congregation to have as clear an understanding as possible of the effectiveness of the current assimilation process. To include at least twenty-five church members in the study and to receive as much data as possible, the

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

MAES was given to church members during Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night services and was made available in the church office throughout week 1. Forty-five church members participated in this first phase of the project by completing the MAES.

During week 2, I collected the completed MAES from church members and analyzed data collected through the surveys.<sup>2</sup> The data gathered helped inform the eight-week teaching series by providing illustrative data for each session and by suggesting some key areas that needed to be addressed in the individual teaching sessions. A lower average score on the MAES among those who did not participate in a New Member Orientation suggested the benefit of such a class for new members, and the reality that 82 percent of those surveyed did not participate in a New Member Orientation, indicated that the class needs to be more compulsory, as a prerequisite Membership Class would be. This data helped demonstrate the need for a prerequisite Membership Class during the eight-week teaching series. That one participant indicated he or she was not a believer when he or she joined FBC, and that two indicated they did not have a growing, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, suggested that one teaching session should address the role of a membership class in ensuring regenerate church membership. Eleven disagreed that they were familiar with FBC's statement of faith and twelve indicated they did not have a clear understanding of doctrinal issues important to FBC when they joined, suggesting the importance of a lesson addressing the role of a membership class in maintaining the doctrinal integrity of a local church. Twelve did not believe the church had a responsibility to discipline its members, nineteen disagreed that they should hold one another accountable, and eighteen indicated they would not confront a fellow church member in unrepentant sin, indicating the need for a class on the role of a membership class in communicating standards for church discipline. Six indicated they could not find a place

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 6 for summary table of data collected.

of service within the first year, indicating a lesson on the role of a membership class in helping individuals understand how they can serve at FBC would be helpful.

With the statistics and the research accumulated through the course of this project, during week 3, I developed lessons 1 and 2 of the eight-week teaching curriculum to meet the second stated goal of the project: to educate current members of FBC about biblical church membership and assimilation. The most helpful material to the congregation would be that already researched in preparation of chapters 2 and 3 of this project. I used the same Scripture passages and commentary research from chapter 2 to teach the congregation about the importance of each of the five characteristics of biblical church membership examined and much of the information used in chapter 3 to demonstrate how a membership class would be a more effective means of new member assimilation to maintain these characteristics at FBC. I then added additional scriptural support in each lesson where it was helpful. Lesson 1 defined biblical church membership, focusing on the same five characteristics of biblical church membership addressed in chapters 2 and 3 of this project.<sup>3</sup> Lesson 1 served as the foundation of the remainder of the lessons, as later lessons addressed each of these five characteristics in greater detail and considered how a prerequisite membership class would better facilitate these five characteristics of biblical church membership at FBC. In lesson 2, I led the congregation to consider the strengths and weaknesses of both the current approach to new member assimilation through the New Member Orientation and the proposed approach of a prerequisite membership class.<sup>4</sup>

The timeline of the project included submission of each lesson to an expert panel during week 7. To provide as much time as possible for the panel to carefully review the lessons, however, I submitted each lesson when it was completed so the panel

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 7.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 8.

could complete their review by the completion of week seven. The expert panel consisted of Kevin Blackwell (Assistant to the President and Director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University), Byron Brown (Pastor of Redemption Church of Lacombe, Louisiana with experience in church revitalization), George Yates (a state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions focusing on church revitalization and training church revitalization coaches), and Mike Snyder (Lead Pastor of Eastaboga Baptist Church in the same association as FBC Talladega). The panel members used a rubric to evaluate each lesson and proposed recommended or needed changes to the lessons.<sup>5</sup> The panel provided helpful feedback and suggested changes for each lesson.

During week 4, I developed lessons 3 and 4 of the eight-week teaching series. The third lesson considered how a membership class would facilitate and preserve regenerate church membership better than the existing New Member Orientation approach.<sup>6</sup> Lesson 4 examined how a prerequisite membership class would better protect the doctrinal integrity of FBC.<sup>7</sup>

During week 5, I developed lessons 5 and 6. In lesson 5, I taught on church discipline, conflict resolution, and accountability among church members, focusing primarily on application of Matthew 18:15-17.<sup>8</sup> The lesson also called on participants to consider the importance of explaining the church's practice of discipline and system of accountability to individuals before they became church members so they could knowingly and willingly submit themselves to that accountability. Lesson 6 included a

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

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 9.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 10.

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 11.

discussion of the importance of church attendance from Hebrews 10:24-25.<sup>9</sup> The lesson also addressed the importance of the church to every individual believer and the importance of every individual believer to the body of the church from Ephesians 4:11-16. In this lesson, I began to outline for the congregation the importance of clearly communicating the expectations a church had for its members to candidates before they became members. I continued to demonstrate that this ability to communicate expectations preemptively was a significant strength of a prerequisite membership class and that among the New Member Orientation's greatest weaknesses was that it communicated such information after an individual was already a member at FBC.

During week 6, I developed lessons 7 and 8. In lesson 7, I taught about the importance of using spiritual gifts for the good of the church from 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.<sup>10</sup> I challenged listeners to invest their natural abilities and spiritual gifts in and through the local church. I also explained that the local church has a three-fold responsibility concerning members investing: to provide avenues for service, to explain the process of getting involved to its members, and to help members discover their gifts and understand how they can be best used in the local church. I described the benefits of incorporating a membership class to accomplish this three-fold responsibility. Lesson 8 focused on biblical stewardship as a characteristic of biblical church membership and described how a membership class can facilitate faithful stewardship among members by teaching them the importance and practicality of stewardship while individuals are still candidates for membership.<sup>11</sup> Repeatedly in these lessons I reminded the congregation that the New Member Orientation was not truly compulsory for members and its timing was problematic because it did not communicate such critical matters to members until after they had

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix 12.

<sup>10</sup> See appendix 13.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix 14.

joined the church. I continually explained that a prerequisite membership class is, by definition, compulsory and it communicates critical information to candidates for membership before they join.

During week 7, all eight lessons of the teaching series had been submitted to the panel for review using the designated rubric, and the panel submitted their reviews. Averaging the scores together for each lesson, lessons 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8 each met the sufficiency level requirement for teaching in each category. Lessons 2, 5, and 6 required resubmission to the panel with corrections before they met the sufficiency level. I used the panel's feedback and suggestions to make improvements in preparation to teach the lessons in the weeks that followed. Lesson 1 required minimal grammatical changes. Lesson 2 needed more scriptural support before re-submission. I re-structured the outline of lesson 2 and added a section examining Jesus' instructions to count the cost of discipleship and how those instructions might be applied to counting the cost of church membership as well. After resubmission, lesson 2 met the required standard. I added further explanation to some points of lesson 3 at the recommendation of the panel, including a section considering examples in Acts and in the epistles demonstrating the New Testament assumption that church members are first believers.

Lessons 5 and 6 required re-submission specifically because they scored low in the application category on the rubric the panel used to grade the lessons. The stated goal of this portion of the project focused on explaining the benefits of a membership class in each of the areas of biblical church membership, thus the central application in view was to help the people of FBC understand the advantages of a membership class. I may not have sufficiently explained this end goal to the panel, resulting in low scores in this category specifically, but the panel's feedback was helpful. I added more points of practical explanation and application that the congregation might be better helped by each individual lesson and re-submitted these lessons to the panel for another review. One panel member also pointed out the over-use of quotes and not enough use of Scripture in lesson 6. I

removed some of the quoted material and added additional scriptural support to the lesson before resubmission. Lesson 7 required only a minor change in wording to make one sentence more understandable, and a grammatical correction. I followed helpful suggestions from the panel to add a more thorough discussion of tithing and giving from Scripture into lesson 8.

### **Implementation Period**

During week 8, I distributed the pre-survey to church members who volunteered to participate in the project. The surveys were given to volunteers in person during a Wednesday Night Bible Study, and participants were given time during the meeting to complete the survey. Everyone at the meeting, with the exception of non-members, participated in the survey. Surveys were also made available in the church office for additional volunteers to participate should they choose to do so.

During week 9, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that FBC cancel all in-person church gatherings. All church services and meetings were moved to an online format, including Wednesday Night Bible Study. Because I intended to teach the eight-week series in person during Wednesday Night Bible Study, the second goal was adjusted to reflect that the classes would be taught in an online format. Each lesson was pre-recorded, and the videos were uploaded to the church website, Vimeo account, and Facebook page for participants to view the videos. Participants were encouraged to email me with questions. I taught lesson 1 during week 9 and the remainder of the eight-week teaching series in the weeks that followed.

During week 13, I received helpful questions from participants through email related to the matter of church discipline and conflict resolution addressed in lesson 5. Both questions concerned the role and place of children. I addressed the questions during the next lesson, but the second of the two questions became important for the fourth goal as I developed a proposal for a change to the church bylaws. The church member asked if children would be required to participate in the membership class, expressing concern



that some of the doctrinal discussions may be too difficult for children to grasp, and suggested that children be required to take a separate class from adults if the requirement held for children. This helpful question and suggestion informed me that when crafting the bylaw change proposal, I would need to specifically address how children will join the church and how the membership class requirement will related to them.

During week 17, with the eight-week teaching series complete, I provided instructions for participants to complete the post-test. The post-test helped measure the effectiveness of the eight-week series by measuring whether there was a statistically significant improvement in scores from the pre-test. Due to continued restrictions from the Alabama governor's office during the COVID-19 pandemic, the surveys were emailed to participants to fill out and return via email, mail, or personal drop-off. I also printed additional forms and left them in the church office for those who preferred to fill out a hard copy of the post-test in person.

The stated goal included twenty participants in the pre- and post-tests to gather enough data to measure whether a significant portion of the congregation had grown in their understanding of biblical church membership, and whether their position on requiring a prerequisite membership class had changed through the course of the eight-week study. Thirty-seven church members took the pre-test survey, indicating an intention to participate in the project. With the unexpected change to an online format, however, only seventeen church members viewed the teaching series in its entirety and completed the post-test. In this regard, the second stated goal was not successful. The statistics collected from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed with two *t*-tests for dependent samples.<sup>12</sup> I first conducted a 2-tail test in which  $t = 8.72599E-06$ . Because  $t < .05$ , it was statistically unlikely that the change in scores from the pre-test to the post-test were due to chance, and the results were thus statistically significant. The nature of the teaching series and survey data

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<sup>12</sup> See appendix 15.

suggested movement in only the positive direction, so I also calculated a 1-tail  $t$ -test in which  $t = 4.363E-06$ . The results of this  $t$ -test also suggested the change in scores was due to the teaching series rather than to chance. In this area, the stated goal was reached.

### **Follow-Up Period**

The third goal of the project was to develop curriculum for the membership class. The curriculum was presented to the Leadership Team of FBC to be evaluated with a rubric. I developed the membership class curriculum to better-prepare FBC to implement the class immediately upon its approval by a church vote, rather than needing to wait for the curriculum to be developed before requiring a membership class. In weeks 18 through 21, I developed the curriculum for the membership class. I examined the current requirements of material for the New Member Orientation listed in the bylaws of FBC, ensuring that the curriculum included at least this required material. Additionally, I included each of the five characteristics of biblical church membership addressed in the eight-week study in the membership class curriculum.

During week 18, I developed section 1 of the membership class curriculum. In addition to section 2, I also included a proposed schedule for each session to be covered in a weekend meeting.<sup>13</sup> The schedule began with a fellowship dinner, providing an opportunity for membership candidates to meet church staff, and for church staff to get to know the candidates better as well. Most importantly, the schedule included a time during the fellowship meal, at the beginning of the membership class weekend, during which each candidate would share his or her testimony. This time would not only help develop deeper relationships between the candidates and church staff, but also provide a defined opportunity for the pastor and other church staff to consider whether each candidate is a believer in Jesus Christ. Should an individual's testimony reveal that he or she does not have a relationship with Christ, that he or she does not understand the gospel, or if the

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<sup>13</sup> See appendix 16.

pastor has any additional questions or concerns, then the pastor would schedule a meeting with the individual for further clarification or evangelism. Beginning the meeting with personal testimonies is a critical first step to preserving regenerate church membership. The curriculum, along with this schedule would be given to candidates before the membership class begins so they can read the material and think of any questions they may have, but also so they can prepare to give their testimony during the fellowship dinner.

Section 1 was written to address “Who We Are” at FBC.<sup>14</sup> Chuck Lawless writes of candidates who attended a membership class: “Not surprisingly, these lay persons indicated that, above anything else, they gained knowledge of the church and its expectations.”<sup>15</sup> Sections 3 and 4 more directly addressed expectations of members, but section 1 was designed to help candidates understand the identity of FBC. Section 1 began with introductions of church staff to familiarize each candidate with the current church staff and their roles at FBC. The section also addressed the basics of church membership including requirements for membership, the rights and privileges of membership at FBC, and the benefits and importance of being a member of a local church. The section continued by addressing FBC’s church polity and organizational structure, including an address of the officers of the church and their role and responsibilities at FBC. Section 1 concluded by outlining and explaining FBC’s affiliation with its local association, state board of missions, and the Southern Baptist Convention. The entirety of the section will help membership candidates understand FBC’s identity, how the church operates, and how the church cooperates with denominational entities.

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<sup>14</sup> See appendix 17.

<sup>15</sup> Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 24.

During week 19, I developed section 2 of the curriculum for the membership class entitled “What We Believe.”<sup>16</sup> In section 2, I focused upon doctrinal integrity, explaining the central doctrines to which FBC holds. In the introduction to the section, I explained the difference between essential beliefs and non-essential beliefs and warned of the dangers of doctrinal disunity in the local church. The remainder of section 2 contained the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, which FBC has adopted as its statement of faith.<sup>17</sup> Containing those doctrines considered essential at FBC, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* will be used to explain key doctrines to membership candidates. Ample time will be planned during this section for questions and discussions to provide both a clear understanding of essential doctrines and a basis for doctrinal unity at FBC as each new member joins.

During week 20, I developed section 3 of the membership class curriculum entitled “How You Can Serve.”<sup>18</sup> The focus of section 3 was church investment, and the section began with an explanation of the biblical mandate to invest one’s spiritual gifts and natural abilities in and through the local church for the good of the local church from 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. The section also included the three-fold obligation of a local church to provide opportunities for service, explain the process for getting involved, and help members discover their spiritual gifts and connect them to a place of service. The section continued by fulfilling each of these obligations, first by listing and explaining each committee and position of service at FBC. Section 3 also included an explanation of the process for getting involved. I concluded section 3 with a spiritual gifts inventory and an

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<sup>16</sup> See appendix 18.

<sup>17</sup> Constitution of the First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, “Article IV. Articles of Faith,” amended July 29, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> See appendix 19.

opportunity for membership candidates to connect their discovered spiritual gifts with an appropriate place of service at FBC.<sup>19</sup>

During week 21, I developed the fourth and final section of the membership class curriculum entitled “What We Expect.”<sup>20</sup> Section 4 focused on FBC’s expectations of its members. One continuous theme among 4 churches who implement a membership class as a part of their revitalization efforts is that the class must clearly communicate the church’s expectations for its members. Thom Rainer observes,

If a single major trend could be gleaned from this study, it would be the emergence of new member classes as a common ministry in the higher-expectation churches. . . . What is the major purpose of this class? In the evangelistic and high-retention churches, the communication of *information* is secondary to the communication of *expectations*.<sup>21</sup>

The first portion of section 4 listed responsibilities of members at FBC as communicated in Scripture and in the church constitution and bylaws. To facilitate biblical conflict resolution and to make membership candidates aware of how FBC practices church discipline, the next portion covered conflict resolution and an outline of Jesus’ prescription for church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17. This portion of section 4 also included a discussion of the episode of church discipline recorded in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. The final portion of section 4 addressed stewardship. Lawless encourages churches to address this material: “Eighty-eight percent included in their membership classes a discussion of church financial support, and they weren’t afraid to challenge new members to tithe.”<sup>22</sup> This final portion first reminded candidates that faithful stewardship at FBC includes stewardship of time and abilities, communicating expectations for attendance and service,

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<sup>19</sup> Lifeway Christian Resources, “Spiritual Gifts Survey,” accessed June 4, 2020, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/women-leadership-spiritual-gifts-growth-service>.

<sup>20</sup> See appendix 20.

<sup>21</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 60, emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matter*, 84.

then proceeded to a more detailed discussion of financial giving as a matter of biblical stewardship.

During week 22, I presented the completed membership class curriculum to FBC's leadership team for evaluation and review. The leadership team at FBC is composed of all church ministerial staff, church officers, and chairpersons of each committee. Each member present at the meeting received a copy of the curriculum along with a rubric for evaluation.<sup>23</sup> The twelve members of the Leadership Team who were able to attend the meeting completed the rubrics, evaluating the membership class curriculum. Eleven of the twelve scored the curriculum as exemplary in all categories indicated on the rubric, and one Leadership Team member marked two categories as sufficient and the remainder of the categories on the rubric as exemplary. Several members included comments on the rubric expressing support for the addition of a prerequisite membership class to the membership requirements at FBC and expressing their enthusiasm for the curriculum itself.

The fourth stated goal of the project was to develop a policy change proposal to require participation in a membership class as a prerequisite for membership at FBC. During week 23, I developed the policy change proposal.<sup>24</sup> The proposal altered language in Article I of the FBC bylaws to require participation in a membership class as a prerequisite for church membership. In the proposal submitted to the Administrative and Bylaws Committee, I included the original language from the bylaws as adopted on August 21, 1996, and the new proposal with changes indicated in italics. The most fundamental change to the previous bylaws was the addition of the phrase, "Upon completion of a prerequisite membership class" at the beginning of the sentence, "all candidates for membership shall be presented to the church and voted upon during any

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<sup>23</sup> See appendix 4.

<sup>24</sup> See appendix 21.

regular service in the following ways.” This simple addition made a membership class mandatory for each membership candidate to complete prior to joining FBC through the various avenues listed in the bylaws following that critical sentence in Section 2.

The remainder of Section 2 listed four methods by which a candidate may join FBC as a member: profession of faith, letter or transfer of membership, statement or restoration, and baptism from another denomination. I added clear statements to the descriptions of each method to clearly identify the requirement for the prerequisite membership class regardless of the method by which an individual joined. I learned that such clarity was needed during the eight-week study when a participant asked if those transferring in good standing from other Southern Baptist Churches would also need to complete a membership class. Because of the autonomy of each local church and the variations of ministry practices, polity, and other matters between Southern Baptist churches, I included the requirement for every candidate for membership, regardless of the method by which he or she joined. I changed the existing section describing the New Member Orientation to define and describe the membership class, again defining it as a prerequisite for membership. This section also changed the six purpose statements of the New Member Orientation to seven purpose statements about the membership class. The purpose statements included curriculum requirements for the membership class that would ensure the class fulfilled its goal of better facilitating biblical church membership. The purpose statements included measures to safeguard regenerate church membership, protect doctrinal integrity, explain the identity and practices of FBC, facilitate investment and involvement in the local church, and communicate membership expectations to the candidates.

In the next section of the proposal, I included a requirement for the pastor to offer the membership class at least once per year. After considering survey data collected throughout the project and questions asked during the course of the project, I also included a provision to allow current members who had not had the opportunity to take a

membership class to also participate whenever the class was offered, if they chose to do so. I also included a new section to the bylaw to provide a “watch care” program at FBC, in which those who met other requirements but had not yet taken the membership class could be added to a deacon care list and serve in some capacities at FBC until the time they were able to take the membership class and become members. This section also explained rules for children joining the church and taking the membership class. Some members of the congregation raised questions about how children would relate to the membership class during the eight-week series, and members of the Leadership Team also expressed concerns about children taking the membership class when they evaluated the membership class curriculum. I added a final section addressing ministerial staff to ensure that they would be able to perform their ministerial obligations immediately upon accepting a call to FBC. Ministerial staff would be considered members immediately upon accepting a congregational vote to call them to serve and would participate in the membership class as soon as possible thereafter.

During week 24, I presented the policy change proposal to the Administrative and Bylaws Committee of FBC for evaluation. Each member received a copy of the original section from the bylaws so they could reference the wording as it appeared in the bylaws previously as well as the proposed change. Members also received a rubric for evaluating the proposal via email, and the group met to discuss the proposal one week later.<sup>25</sup> Once members of the Administrative and Bylaws Committee had completed their evaluations, the policy change proposal met the sufficiency requirement set in the stated goals. During their meeting, the committee discussed the proposal, asked questions of the writer, and suggested possible opposition or confusion that might come from the congregation. The committee then voted unanimously to recommend the proposal to the

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<sup>25</sup> See appendix 5.



church in the form of a motion to change the church bylaws at a scheduled business meeting in accordance with FBC's bylaws.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

The implementation of this project was helpful to FBC and was a significant step in FBC's revitalization. The project revealed areas of needed growth, strengthened understanding of biblical church membership, and laid the foundation for a prerequisite membership class that will strengthen FBC's member assimilation practice. By assimilating new members with a membership class, FBC will better facilitate biblical church membership and improve its health and vitality as a local church.

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

The stated purpose of this project was to develop a more effective process for assimilating new members of First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, through a membership class required as a prerequisite for membership. The project accomplished this purpose by examining the need and addressing it. The project clearly communicated the demonstrated need to the congregation to help them understand the necessity of a membership class and to elicit their participation in developing and adopting a membership class. By evaluating and approving the curriculum for the membership class, the Leadership Team ensured that once the congregation has voted to require a membership class, the church will be able to immediately offer the class to prospective members. By evaluating and approving the bylaw proposal, the Administrative and Bylaws Committee has taken the first critical step toward changing the bylaws to require the membership class and has readied FBC to make the needed change to its bylaws.

Data analysis from the MAES demonstrated a clear discrepancy between those who participated in a New Member Orientation and those who did not: the average score

for those who did not participate in a New Member Orientation was 11.6 points lower, or 9.5 percentage points lower, than the average score of those who did participate in a New Member Orientation.<sup>1</sup> This information demonstrated the importance of some sort of class addressing issues of church membership, including regenerate church membership, church doctrine, church involvement, investment in the church, and church discipline.

The data collected through the MAES also demonstrated the need to make this class prerequisite to membership. As a requirement in the church bylaws, the New Member Orientation has been mandatory for new members at least since August 21, 1996, when the most current section of FBC's Bylaws concerning membership were adopted. Only one member surveyed in the MAES participated in an orientation prior to the arrival of the current pastor. That individual indicated he or she joined FBC in 1963, indicating that the requirement has been included in previous renditions of church bylaws as well. Not all members who joined the church since the arrival of the current pastor have participated in a New Member Orientation. Most alarmingly in this regard, of the 45 members who completed the MAES, only 8 indicated that they had participated in the required New Member Orientation, while 37 of those surveyed did not. Eighteen of those surveyed joined the church since the adoption of the most current bylaws regarding membership in 1996, and of those 18, 11 indicated they did not participate in a required New Member Orientation. Because the New Member Orientation was not compulsory—prerequisite to membership—the majority of members did not participate once they joined the church. This data strongly suggested that a prerequisite membership class before a candidate for membership is able to join the church would be more effective because it would mandate that every new member participate.

Question 14 on the pre- and post-test survey given before and after the eight-week study measured participants' agreement or disagreement that a prerequisite

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 6.

membership class should be required before an individual joined FBC. The pre-test score quantified their level of agreement before the eight-week teaching series, and the post-test score quantified their level of agreement with requiring a prerequisite membership class after the eight-week teaching series. Participants' answers to this particular question indicated both the success of the second stated goal of the project and the helpfulness of and need for the project overall. The question used the same Likert scale used throughout the survey. The writer used a 1-tail *t*-test to consider the assumed movement in scores from a lower value to a higher value, and  $t = 0.001021615$ . Some participants changed in the negative direction on question 14, so I also measured the statistics with a 2-tail *t*-test in which  $t = 0.002043229$ , because in both cases,  $t < .05$ , the data was statistically significant and helpful to the research. The mean score for question 14 improved from 3.764 to 5.176. The 3.764 mean score on the pre-test indicted that participants fell between disagreeing somewhat and agreeing somewhat that "participation in a membership class should be required before an individual is allowed to become a member of a local church." The 5.176 mean score indicated that most fell between agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement after completing the eight-week teaching series. The pre-test mode score for question 14 was 4, "agree somewhat." The post-test mode score for question 14 was 6, "strongly agree." The majority (12) of the participants increased their score on question 14 and the largest changes in scores were increases of 4 points from 1 participant and 3 points from 4 participants. Three participants, however, lowered their scores on this question, and 2 participants had no change. This data suggested that most who participated in the eight-week study believed more strongly that a prerequisite membership class should be required for members at FBC, though some disagreed more with the idea after the eight-week study. Overall, the positive change in agreement that a prerequisite membership class should be required meant the project fulfilled its purpose to a significant extent.

The purpose of the project was then more fully realized when both the curriculum and the bylaw proposal were approved. Once the Leadership Team approved the membership class curriculum, FBC was equipped with the necessary curriculum to begin holding a membership class immediately after a bylaw change. The completed curriculum helped the Leadership Team at FBC more completely understand what the membership class will teach and therefore how it will better assimilate new members at FBC. Further, the Administrative and Bylaws Committee, after approving the policy change proposal, has a written proposal ready to place in the hands of church members at FBC and call for a vote to change the bylaws, following the timeline and procedure outlined in FBC's constitution and bylaws. The committee's unanimous support will be helpful in leading FBC through the official change, and the committee also recommended sharing the proposal with FBC's Leadership Team and deacons that they may also voice their support of the change to the congregation.

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

Each of the project's four goals contributed to the overall purpose of the project, and the success of each goal through project implementation ensured that the project fulfilled its intended purpose.

#### **Goal 1**

The project's first stated goal was to assess the current process for assimilating new members at FBC. The goal was successful in providing information to analyze the current state of member assimilation through the New Member Orientation. The survey data collected demonstrated three key problems with the current method—each of which would be helped by adopting a prerequisite membership class. First, the data indicated substantial misunderstandings regarding biblical church membership. With varied opinions on the importance of right doctrine, the necessity of serving in the church, the exercise or importance of church discipline, and other issues, the congregation

demonstrated through the survey areas of weakness in their understanding, and even in their own exercise, of biblical church membership. The most glaring problem emphasized by the data was not condemnation upon the individual church members who participated in the survey, but in the system the church currently used to assimilate new members. The process was clearly ineffective and allowed members to join without a clear understanding of issues critical to their own healthy membership at FBC.

Second, the New Member Orientation, though encouraged and required by FBC's bylaws, is not practically compulsory or enforceable. As a result, few members have participated in the orientation. A membership class required as a prerequisite for membership is, by its definition, compulsory. Third, the timing of the New Member Orientation after a member has already joined is problematic. Thom Rainer observes, "In our post survey interview we discovered that one of the critical points to communicate expectations is at the point prior to a person's becoming a member of a church."<sup>2</sup> Church attendees need to be aware of certain matters before they join as members, including where the church stands on key doctrinal issues and what the church expects of its members. The survey data from the MAES indicted that many current church members should have been made aware of such issues before they ever became members. Third, the timing of the New Member Orientation after a member joins does not provide a sufficient avenue through which to discern whether a candidate is genuinely a believer and to thereby preserve regenerate church membership. In defining a New Testament church, Mark Dever writes, "According to the New Testament, the church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for his glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone."<sup>3</sup> John Hammett argues

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 106.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 157.

that regenerate church membership is critical to the operation and congregational government of a local church: “A congregationally governed church begins with a congregation of regenerate members.”<sup>4</sup> The data from the MAES also revealed that FBC’s current method of assimilation does not adequately preserve regenerate church membership.

## **Goal 2**

The second stated goal was to develop an eight-week teaching series to educate current members of FBC about biblical church membership and member assimilation. The goal was first successful in that, after recommended revisions to some lessons, each of the eight lessons reached the sufficiency level in 90 percent of the categories on the rubric provided to the expert panel. The class educated church members about biblical church membership and demonstrated the effectiveness of assimilating church members through a membership class. With the mean score on the pre-test improving by 19.2 percent, the class proved effective with statistically significant data.<sup>5</sup> The goal was not successful in that it did not reach the intended number of participants. More than the desired number of participants participated in the pre-survey, but fewer than the desired number participated in the teaching series once it was moved to an online format and completed the post-test.

## **Goal 3**

The third stated goal was to develop a curriculum for a membership class. The Leadership Team of FBC was given a rubric to evaluate the curriculum, and the curriculum as a whole reached the sufficiency level in 90 percent of the categories on the provided rubric. The curriculum met this standard upon its first submission with 11 of 12

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<sup>4</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 209.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 15.

evaluations scoring the curriculum as exemplary in each category, and the 1 remaining evaluation scoring two categories as sufficient and the remainder as exemplary.

#### **Goal 4**

The fourth stated goal was to develop a policy change proposal to require a membership class as a prerequisite for membership at FBC. The goal was successful as the committee's evaluations of the proposal met or exceeded the sufficiency level in each category. Additionally, the committee voted unanimously to bring the proposed change before the church in the form of a motion. FBC, then, is prepared to hold meetings to discuss the proposed change as well as a business meeting to vote on the bylaw change. The necessary steps required by FBC's constitution and bylaws have been completed to be prepared for such meetings. This goal was helpful, but not as thorough as it could have been. The design of the goal might have been more helpful if it had ensured the process of making the change was completed at FBC during the course of the project.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Strengths of the Project**

For those able to participate in the eight-week class and who took both the pre-test and the post-test, the changes both in their understanding of biblical church membership and their understanding that a prerequisite membership class would better facilitate biblical church membership at FBC were statistically significant.<sup>7</sup> The *t*-test for dependent sample results for the change in scores were reported in chapter 4. While communication of the importance of biblical church membership and how a prerequisite membership class can help facilitate it need to be spread further among the congregation before the church as a whole is adequately prepared to vote on a bylaw change, the group who participated have grown significantly in their understanding. They have grown in

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<sup>6</sup> This matter is addressed in greater detail in the "Weaknesses of the Project" portion of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 15.



their understanding of biblical church membership as a whole and have moved in their agreement that a membership class should be required as a prerequisite for church membership at FBC. The mean score on the pre-test was 125.94, and the mean score on the post-test was 150.12: a difference of 24.18 points or a 19.2 percent increase in the mean score. The eight-week teaching series was a successful approach for communicating information on biblical church membership. The material covered in the series helped participants better understand biblical church membership, thus the material has proven useful and should be included in the prerequisite membership class itself.

The project was strengthened significantly by including others in the development of materials in three of the four portions of the project. Clearly, the participation of others was necessary to complete the MAES, pre- and post-tests, and teaching series; but additionally, the collaborative efforts used to develop the teaching curriculum, the membership class curriculum, and the policy change proposal strengthened each of these materials individually and the project as a whole. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby explain, “Even the most outstanding leaders cannot accomplish significant tasks apart from the capable efforts of others. A solitary leader is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>8</sup> The expert panel helped tremendously in strengthening the teaching curriculum. Including Blackwell, a professor and administrator at a Christian university, challenged the work to be of academic quality; and including Yates, who works with the Alabama State Board of Missions to train church revitalization coaches, ensured that the curriculum would be a helpful part of FBC’s revitalization. Brown is an experienced revitalization pastor who implemented a membership class as a part of the revitalization of Redemption Church of Lacombe, Louisiana, and his feedback added a high level of biblical faithfulness and practical application to the material. Snyder, who pastors a church in the area and who also led his church to adopt a membership class, knows the

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda*, rev. and expanded ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 294.

people of this community, and his feedback helped the material maintain a focus on application. The panel's feedback was thorough and tough, and it required that some of the lessons be re-submitted. The high standard the panel expected, however, forced me to produce material that would be biblically faithful, focused on revitalization through a membership class, and practically applicable in the lives of those who participated in the study. The expert panel together ensured that the teaching series would be effective.

Including FBC's Leadership Team in the process of developing the curriculum for the membership class also incorporated a set of unique perspectives from all the church staff and church members who evaluated the curriculum. The variety of perspectives in the feedback ensured a curriculum that would be helpful to the variety of membership candidates who would use the curriculum as they participated in the membership class. In fact, the Leadership Team raised questions in their evaluations that demonstrated some specific areas that needed to be addressed in the policy change proposal. Similarly, the several individuals who comprise the Administrative and Bylaws Committee approached their evaluations of the policy change proposal with their unique skills, abilities, and perspectives. In their meeting they discussed a variety of concerns about the proposal, asked numerous questions of me, and anticipated concerns from the congregation. This interaction was tremendously helpful for me to consider how to explain the proposed change to members of the congregation who may not have participated in the eight-week study. The discussion was also helpful to prepare me for questions and concerns the congregation may raise in a business meeting concerning the proposed change. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, including the Administrative and Bylaws Committee in this portion of the project resulted in greater support for the change at FBC as an entire committee voted to bring the proposal before the church in the form of a motion to change the bylaws.

## **Weaknesses of the Project**

The shut-down orders affecting churches in the state of Alabama during the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on the project. Perhaps most notably, the implementation of the project was not sufficient to prepare FBC to make a change to its bylaws to require a prerequisite membership class for church membership at FBC. I designed the project and each goal within the project to adequately prepare FBC for this needed change to its member-assimilation procedure. The number of people who were unable to participate in various portions of the project for varied reasons, however, meant that I needed to take additional steps to explain the need to the congregation and to prepare church leaders to understand, evaluate, and consider proposing the bylaw change. A large portion of the congregation was not able to view the lessons presented in an online video format—whether by limited access or simply because they were not able to make the time to participate during the crisis. While those who did participate indicated a better understanding of the need for a membership class and a willingness to make such a change at FBC (according to data gathered from the post-test following lesson 8), the total number of those who participated in the entire process was limited and did not comprise a significant enough percentage of the congregation for me, as pastor, to believe the congregation as a whole was adequately prepared. Additional teaching, meetings for questions, and other communication may be necessary in addition to the implementation of this project before FBC is ready for this change. I will have several special business meetings to address concerns and answer questions before calling upon the church to vote on the change, even after the completion of the project.

The online format of the teaching classes was also problematic in that it did not facilitate questions and discussion. I received written questions from a few participants, but an in-person format—had it been possible—would have encouraged significantly more interaction with the material and questions that participants could have asked me in the moment. Some participants later indicated they had been confused by some of the

material, and I would have been better able to recognize and address such confusion in a more interactive setting as opposed to recorded videos.

Clear communication is key before a pastor can effectively lead needed changes in a church revitalization effort. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson write, “Churches wanting change must discuss, discuss, discuss.”<sup>9</sup> Though the project’s design and intent included thorough communication, in execution, communication was insufficient. Were I to move forward immediately, seeking to lead the church to change its bylaws to require the prerequisite membership class immediately upon completion of the project, that leadership would most likely be met with opposition. Stetzer and Dodson continue, “The majority of church members need to be involved in the change or it will soon produce resistance.”<sup>10</sup> The limitations placed upon church services by the COVID-19 pandemic presented obstacles to clear communication with the entire church body, and such communication to the entire church remains difficult even as the project has concluded. Timing, however, is also an important factor I must consider. I will plan further communication and schedule opportunities for further discussion immediately upon completion of the project. Delay would damage the work already done to prepare FBC to make the needed change to its bylaws.

Although the project helped the congregation understand the need for a prerequisite membership class, developed the curriculum for the class, and completed a bylaw change proposal, the project did not complete the process of implementing the change to the church bylaws. Due to the time constraints of the project, the length of time required by the church bylaws for making a bylaw change, and the nature of careful and clear communication to the church before making such a significant change, it was best to conclude the project before a congregational vote. Only a final congregational vote on

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<sup>9</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 32.

the matter will change the bylaws to require a prerequisite membership class, and this project did not include that final step. The project was successful in developing a better process for member assimilation with a new member class, but the final vote to completely implement the change at FBC did not occur at the time of project completion. The lack of this final step is a weakness in the project's design as it does not ensure the bylaw change is adopted by the church. The project has, however, done all the necessary work to prepare the church to discuss the matter in a called business meeting and move forward with a vote.

### **Moving Forward**

Both the preparation for and implementation of the project demonstrated a clear need, not only for a membership class, but also for a detailed study on biblical church membership. Through survey data and interacting with the church members participating in the study, I learned that many current members of FBC do not understand biblical church membership. The members at FBC also have tremendous variation in their understanding of issues, such as investment in the local church, biblical stewardship, and the importance of a consistent doctrinal statement. While the overall purpose of the project was to address this need in part by educating candidates for membership before they ever joined, the existing membership also needs much of the information that will be covered in the membership class once implemented fully at FBC. I determined both to teach on these various subjects of biblical church membership in the coming years, but also to leave the membership class open to current members. Recognizing a need in their own lives, current members may desire to participate in the class, so each class will include space for a certain number of current members to join, along with any candidates for membership.

I should communicate the material covered in the eight-week teaching series in some format to those who were unable to participate in the eight-week study to better prepare them before moving forward with the bylaw change regarding new member

assimilation. Because not enough church members were able to participate given the circumstances and the necessary online format, I will schedule a time to give at least an abbreviated version of the material covered in the teaching series, working it into timeline for a bylaw change required by FBC's constitution and bylaws. As many church members as possible need to be included in the decision to make such a change, so as many church members as possible need to understand why the change is being recommended.

To change the church bylaws to require the prerequisite membership class, the Administrative and Bylaws Committee will have to call a special business meeting to propose the change to the church, providing each member with a copy of the proposed change. This meeting will include a time of further discussion, questions, and answers concerning the proposed change. After this meeting, the proposed change, in accordance with the church bylaws, will be made available to all church members, whether they were able to participate in the first meeting or not. A time for consideration and prayer will be allowed before calling the congregation to vote on the proposed change in a regularly-scheduled quarterly business meeting. The project laid the necessary groundwork and produced the necessary materials for this process to proceed smoothly.

### **Theological Reflections**

Biblical church membership is vital to church health. Thus, facilitating biblical church membership is a key component to any church revitalization effort. Dever writes, "I'm convinced that getting this concept of membership right is a key step in revitalizing our churches, evangelizing our nation, furthering the cause of Christ around the world, and so bringing glory to God."<sup>11</sup> Many of the issues facing churches in need of revitalization and many of the issues contributing directly to these churches' decline are issues of church membership. Whether doctrinal disunity, a lack of involvement, or fundamentally a large percentage of church members who are unsaved, problems of

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<sup>11</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 156.

unbiblical church membership create problems of infighting, difficulty sustaining the work of the church, and people making decisions without submitting to the authority of the Scriptures and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials write, “A church in need of revitalization is described as one where: there is the plateauing or declining after a phase of recent or initial expansion followed by the beginning of a high turn-over of lay leaders. There then becomes a shorter duration of stay of fully assimilated people within the work, and the church morale and momentum level drops.”<sup>12</sup> In this definition of a church in need of revitalization, the authors identify a lack of assimilated members as a central issue causing the decline of the church. A church seeking to revitalize must focus on adding and maintaining members who both understand biblical church membership and are themselves committed to living as biblical church members in their local church. Gregg Allison writes, “Accordingly, becoming a member, joining with others in the voluntary society called the church, does not ultimately constitute the church. Rather, it joins that member to an already existing reality, or it defines the constituents of that particular entity that has already been constituted a church by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup> Church membership must be taken seriously because it is not simply signing a name to a roll or some sort of club membership. Church membership is joining to a spiritual body of those redeemed by God’s grace. The way churches understand, view, protect, and facilitate biblical church membership will be key to their health. Allowing, and even propagating, a superficial, unspiritual, unbiblical, casual view of church membership will never allow revitalization and will only perpetuate the issues that have brought about such a dire need for church revitalization across the landscape of the Southern Baptist Convention and evangelicalism as a whole.

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<sup>12</sup> Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *The Nuts & Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando: Renovate Publishing, 2015), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 128.

A membership class is useful to church revitalization. First, it provides a clear avenue through which visitors can become members. Bill Henard writes, “The average church in America sees only 12 percent of first-time guests return the following Sunday and, in turn, become members.”<sup>14</sup> Henard also writes of key steps in a church revitalization process: “With these thoughts in mind, several key areas therefore exist that must be reevaluated in order for the church to revitalize. These include: . . . How will the church accept members, and how will membership requirements be enforced?”<sup>15</sup> A church in need of revitalization needs new members, and it must put in place a defined process for bringing in new members. Such a church needs not only new members, but new members who are committed to a biblical understanding and practice of church membership.

Second, though it does not directly address issues of biblical church membership among existing members, the membership class does provide a means for ensuring that new members who come into the church thereafter have a clearer understanding of biblical church membership. Henard explains that the membership class can and should introduce staff members, explain how the church functions, define and explain church membership, explain the mission statement of the church, give an overview of discipleship groups, cast the vision of the church, provide a spiritual gifts inventory and explain ways members can serve, outline the church budget, and explain critical doctrinal matters.<sup>16</sup> Helping new church members assimilate effectively will help them benefit from being a part of the local church and ensure that the local church benefits as each new member joins and becomes a vital part of the church family. Rainer writes, “It is in this class where the prospective member hears what it means to be a part of the local church. He or

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<sup>14</sup> Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 90.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 166-67.

<sup>16</sup> Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 101.



she typically understands clearly after this class that some level of commitment is expected. Membership means much more than attendance.”<sup>17</sup> A membership class is a vital component of church revitalization because the class makes a decisive effort to eliminate the concept of inactive church membership in the minds of incoming members. The membership class makes it possible to truly assimilate new members into the body of believers and incorporate them into the ministry work of the church rather than simply adding their names to the church roll.

Congregational polity demands healthy, biblical church membership. Thus, a congregation should take steps to ensure healthy, biblical church membership through a membership class. The practice is not a new concept adopted by the modern church. Allison explains, “In the first few centuries of Christianity, before people could be baptized and join the church, as catechumens preparing for that entrance event their lives were scrutinized carefully.”<sup>18</sup> Adopting a prerequisite membership class is not only helpful but historical in the Christian faith. Such a means of adequately preparing members to be a vital part of the body of Christ is also, most importantly, a biblical concept. In his commentary on Acts 2:42, Darrell Bock writes, “Instruction is an important part of the new community. The centrality of Jesus and the preparation of members to share in the new life and witness are key community concerns.”<sup>19</sup> Hammett explains the importance of biblical church membership, and specifically regenerate church membership, to the operation of the church in its congregational polity: “Since all believers are priests, and only believers should be members of the church, Baptists have argued that these believer-priest church members are able and responsible to help the church find God’s direction

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<sup>17</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 180.

<sup>19</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 150.

for its life.”<sup>20</sup> Hammett also writes, “Since all the members are regenerate and thus indwelt by the Spirit, all are able to receive guidance from Christ. Thus, congregationalism involves democratic participation, with every member having an equal voice and vote.”<sup>21</sup> If biblical church membership is not maintained, then a local church will not be able to function biblically or effectively as a local church. A local church must be comprised of believers who are submitted to the Scriptures and led by the Holy Spirit in all things. Additionally, members must be actively involved and invested in their local church. Such a biblical practice of church membership enables the church to function, ensuring that decisions are made as Christ rules and the Spirit leads, and ensuring that the body is functioning properly with every member doing the work to which he or she has been called as a vital part of the overall kingdom work of the church. Congregational polity depends on each member embracing his or her responsibilities as a biblical church member.

### **Personal Reflections**

I learned a great deal about the helpfulness of technology in ministry, but also discovered some of its severe limitations. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the only option available to complete the teaching portion of the project was to do so online as in-person meetings were no longer possible. If not for technological advances and the accessibility of these online tools both to me and to the congregation, the project would have been forced to cease until the pandemic subsided. God’s common grace of technological advance, however, made it possible to record the lessons and post videos online where church members were able to view them. I was also able to send pre-tests and post-tests to participants who were not able to pick them up at the church office for health reasons via email. This enabled some to participate who would not have otherwise been able to do so. The two glaring weaknesses to using these technologies for this

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<sup>20</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 143.

project, and in church-life in general, are its limits upon interaction and its inaccessibility to some church members. I am thankful to have been able to continue the project with the use of technology despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. I will also implement more technology use in communicating to church members in the future, especially as the pandemic continues to limit church gatherings. These methods do not replace, however, the saints assembled together. Allison argues, “Without the actual, visible procedure of meeting together there is no church.”<sup>22</sup> Throughout the project I repeatedly referenced the admonition from the author of Hebrews not to neglect the assembling of the saints together, and the limits of technology helped me gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for that admonition.

In church revitalization it is vitally important to help others understand a need for change before seeking to implement change. Albert Mohler writes, “The leader who wants to effect long-term, lasting, determinative change in an organization has to be its lead teacher, changing minds in order to transform the organization.”<sup>23</sup> I spent a significant portion of time, energy, and preparation on the second goal of the project: developing and presenting the eight-week teaching series. Prior to the beginning of the project I did not understand quite how central to the overall success of the project this portion of the implementation would be. The importance of this portion of the project was demonstrated in both positive and negative ways. The majority of those who were able to participate in this portion of the project grew in their understanding of biblical church membership and increased their agreement that a membership class should be a prerequisite for membership in a local church. These church members were helpful in continuing with the next two phases of the project and in encouraging other members about the importance of FBC making the change to its bylaws. Those who did not participate in the class, however, had

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<sup>22</sup> Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership that Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 68.

trouble understanding the importance of the prerequisite membership class when they were asked to evaluate the curriculum or the policy change proposal. In both regards, communication of the importance of the membership class proved invaluable. Blackaby and Blackaby argue, “You cannot be a poor communicator and a good leader.”<sup>24</sup> The project clearly demonstrated that a church leader must make every effort to explain the purpose of and reason for change before seeking to implement such change in a local church. Sam S. Rainer III lists not understanding that a change is necessary as a central reason for resistance to change in established churches: “It’s a key question: Do the people I’m leading even recognize the need for change? If the current way appears successful, then the evidence of a problem is hidden from the plain sight of the people. . . . Before you implement a change effort, you have to show people the hidden problem.”<sup>25</sup> This caution is especially important in a church walking through a season of church revitalization in which much change may be required and in which opposition to change may be most evident.

### **Conclusion**

This project was an important step in the revitalization of First Baptist Church Talladega. The project took the necessary steps to help FBC adopt a prerequisite membership class by evaluating the present system of accepting members, explaining biblical church membership to the existing members, helping existing members understand how a membership class would facilitate biblical church membership among incoming members, providing curriculum for the class to be implemented immediately upon a congregational vote, and preparing the policy change proposal so the Administrative and Bylaw Committee can present the change for a church vote. By God’s grace, FBC will be

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<sup>24</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Sam S. Rainer III, *Obstacles in the Established Church: How Leaders Overcome Them* (n.p.: Rainer Publishing, 2014), 22.

a healthier church as it more effectively assimilates members through its membership class, thoroughly preparing them to be active, faithful members of their local church.

## APPENDIX 1

### MEMBER ASSIMILATION EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the effectiveness of the current member assimilation process at First Baptist Church Talladega. This research is being conducted by Robert Klotz for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date:

Identification Code (last 4 digits of SSN#): \_\_\_\_\_

Age:

\_\_\_\_ 18-35

\_\_\_\_ 36-50

\_\_\_\_ 51-74

\_\_\_\_ 75 or older

1. What year did you become a member at First Baptist Church Talladega (FBC)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which of the following best describes how you became a member of FBC:
  - A. Profession of Faith
  - B. Believer's Baptism
  - C. Transfer of Letter
  - D. Other (please explain below)
3. Did you participate in a New Member Orientation upon becoming a member?  
Yes / No
4. If you answered "yes" to question 3, approximately how long after becoming a member of FBC did you participate in a New Member Orientation? \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you answered "yes" to question 3, was the orientation offered in a group setting or individually? \_\_\_\_\_

The next set of statements uses the following scale. Please circle only one option for each question, choosing the item from the scale that best applies to you.<sup>1</sup>

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

DS = Disagree Somewhat

AS = Agree Somewhat

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

6. I was a believer in Jesus Christ when I became a member at FBC.	SD D DS AS A SA
7. I was familiar with FBC's statement of faith when I became a member of FBC.	SD D DS AS A SA
8. Within the first year of becoming a member at FBC I was able to find a place of service in the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
9. The Bible communicates principles for financial contributions to the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
10. FBC expects its members to attend either worship services or Sunday school regularly.	SD D DS AS A SA
11. I had a clear understanding of the gospel when I became a member of FBC.	SD D DS AS A SA
12. Individual church members should not hold one another accountable for sin.	SD D DS AS A SA
13. When I became a member of FBC, I had a clear understanding of what doctrinal issues were important to the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
14. I had a personal, growing relationship with Jesus when I became a member at FBC.	SD D DS AS A SA
15. The church is responsible to discipline its members when they are found in unrepentant sin.	SD D DS AS A SA
16. Every church member should be actively involved in serving the church according to his or her spiritual gifts and natural abilities.	SD D DS AS A SA
17. Every church member should give financially to support the ministries of the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
18. Within the first year of becoming a member at FBC, someone helped me understand my spiritual gifts and how they could be best used in service to the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
19. I have a clear understanding of the doctrinal positions of FBC on key issues.	SD D DS AS A SA
20. I tithe regularly in support of the ministries of FBC.	SD D DS AS A SA

<sup>1</sup> Items 10, 12, 22, and 24 were scored in reverse order.

21. If I see a fellow church member in unrepentant sin, I am willing to confront that brother or sister in a spirit of love and with repentance in view.	SD D DS AS A SA
22. FBC does not believe the Bible is inerrant.	SD D DS AS A SA
23. FBC believes in baptism by immersion.	SD D DS AS A SA
24. FBC believes faith and works are necessary for a person to be saved.	SD D DS AS A SA
25. FBC believes local churches are autonomous.	SD D DS AS A SA



APPENDIX 2

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ASSIMILATION  
TEACHING SERIES RUBRIC

<b>Church Membership and Assimilation Teaching Series Rubric</b>					
<b>Lesson One Evaluation</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of church membership and assimilation.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on church membership and assimilation.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

### APPENDIX 3

#### CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ASSIMILATION PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

##### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the effectiveness of the 8-week teaching series on biblical church membership and assimilation at First Baptist Church Talladega. This research is being conducted by Robert Klotz for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Participants will answer the same questions before and after the 8-week teaching series. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date:

Identification Code (last 4 digits of SSN#): \_\_\_\_\_

Age:

\_\_\_\_ 18-35

\_\_\_\_ 36-50

\_\_\_\_ 51-74

\_\_\_\_ 75 or older

What year did you become a member of First Baptist Church Talladega? \_\_\_\_\_

Continue to next page

Use the following scale to respond to the statements. Please circle only one option for each statement, choosing the item from the scale that best identifies your agreement.<sup>1</sup>

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

DS = Disagree Somewhat

AS = Agree Somewhat

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

1. The Bible indicates that only believers can be members of a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
2. The local church has biblical authority to remove members who are in unrepentant sin from membership.	SD D DS AS A SA
3. Members of the same local church must agree on fundamental doctrinal issues.	SD D DS AS A SA
4. The Bible communicates principles for financial contributions to the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
5. God gives every believer spiritual gifts for the good of the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
6. Church members should be informed of the church's statement of faith before becoming members.	SD D DS AS A SA
7. The Bible instructs believers to hold one another accountable for sin.	SD D DS AS A SA
8. A local church should communicate expectations for attendance and involvement to an individual before he or she becomes a member.	SD D DS AS A SA
9. Doctrinal issues should not be a deciding factor for membership in a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
10. Individual church members do not have the right to call other individual church members to account for or repent of sin.	SD D DS AS A SA
11. Every church member should be actively involved in serving the church according to his or her spiritual gifts and natural abilities.	SD D DS AS A SA
12. Every church member should give financially to support the ministries of the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
13. Before becoming a member of a local church, an individual should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.	SD D DS AS A SA

<sup>1</sup> Items 9, 10, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, and 26 were scored in reverse order.

14. Participation in a membership class should be required before an individual is allowed to become a member of a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
15. A person does not yet have to be a Christian to become a member of a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
16. Every member of a local church should be committed to the church's statement of faith.	SD D DS AS A SA
17. The Bible does not indicate that church members need to attend corporate worship on a regular basis.	SD D DS AS A SA
18. Financial giving to the church is a personal matter and is not expected of church members.	SD D DS AS A SA
19. The pastor of a local church or another church leader should hear the personal testimony of any candidate for church membership before that individual becomes a member.	SD D DS AS A SA
20. A church member can learn after he or she has joined the church which doctrinal issues are of primary importance to a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
21. The method of member reception (baptism, statement of faith, transfer of letter) should be the only requirement for membership at a local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
22. A church should make candidates for membership fully aware of its church discipline practices before the candidate becomes a church member.	SD D DS AS A SA
23. A local church should help a candidate for membership understand how his or her spiritual gifts and natural abilities can best be used in the life of the church.	SD D DS AS A SA
24. An individual should submit himself or herself to church discipline as outlined by the Scriptures and understood by the local church.	SD D DS AS A SA
25. Churches should communicate to membership candidates how their financial gifts will be used before those individuals become tithing church members.	SD D DS AS A SA
26. A local church should accept unbelievers into membership with the goal of reaching them with the gospel.	SD D DS AS A SA
27. The local church should communicate their financial expectations of members to membership candidates before they join the church.	SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 4

MEMBERSHIP CLASS CURRICULUM RUBRIC

<b>Membership Class Curriculum Rubric</b>					
<b>Session One Evaluation</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The session is clearly relevant to membership candidates at First Baptist Church Talladega.					
The session is faithful to the Bible's teaching.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 5

POLICY CHANGE PROPOSAL RUBRIC

<b>Policy Change Proposal Rubric</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The proposal is relevant to the issue of church membership at First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama.					
The proposal is faithful to the Bible's teaching on church membership and assimilation.					
The proposal is theologically sound.					
The proposal is clearly stated.					

APPENDIX 6

MEMBERSHIP ASSIMILATION EFFECTIVENESS  
SURVEY DATA

Question	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Average	6	4	5	6	2	5	4	4	5	4	6	6	3	5	5	4	5	6	4	5
Mode	6	4	6	6	1	6	5	5	6	5	6	6	2	5	6	4	6	6	6	6
Average w/ NMO	6	4	6	6	1	6	5	5	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	5	6	6	4	6
Average w/o NMO	6	4	5	6	2	5	4	4	5	4	6	6	3	5	5	4	5	6	4	5

	Score	Percentage
Average:	94.3	78.6%
Average w/ NMO	104	86.5%
Average w/o NMO	92.4	77.0%

## APPENDIX 7

### LESSON 1: BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DEFINED

**Goal:** To develop within the congregation a biblical understanding and view of church membership by examining five critical elements of biblical church membership.

**Introduction:**

- Question: How would you define a “church member?”
- It is most important to understand how the Bible describes and defines church membership.

**Lesson 1 Outline:**

- Five critical elements of biblical church membership:
  - Regenerate church membership (**Acts 2:41, 47**) – Every member of a New Testament church is a believer in Jesus Christ.
    - The true church is composed only of genuine believers in Jesus Christ.
    - Those added to the fellowship in Acts 2 were those who had believed and been baptized.
    - Barrett explained that the new paragraph in the text begins at verse 41, because Luke commonly used the phrase *μὲν οὖν*: “As he turns from a source he has been following either to a new one or to a piece of his own composition.”<sup>1</sup> That the section begins at verse 41 demonstrates the connection between “those who received the word” and “were baptized” with those who made up the church.
    - In verse 47, those who were added to the community were “those who were being saved.”
    - In the same way, the church is to be made up of baptized believers, and only when someone has become a believer can he or she truly be a part of a local church as a member.
  - Doctrinal Integrity (**Acts 2:42**) – Church members agree to a given set of doctrinal parameters and standards of belief that maintain doctrinal unity within a given local church.
    - The early church was committed to a particular standard of beliefs: the Apostles’ teaching.
    - Still today, a local church must submit to a standard set of orthodox beliefs, and that orthodoxy is defined by the Scriptures.
    - As with the early church, to maintain doctrinal integrity requires consistent, careful study of the teachings of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, vol. 34 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 159.



- Accountability and church discipline (**Matthew 18:15-17**) – Believers hold one another accountable in their walks with Christ and discipline one another to elicit repentance in cases of unrepentant sin.
  - Hagner explains, “The reference to ὁ ἀδελφός σου, “your brother,” indicates that the conduct within the community of disciples continues to remain in view.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Jesus prescribed a three step process:
    - The offended brother goes to the offending brother, explaining the offense and urging repentance.
    - If the believer is unrepentant, the offended believer returns with witnesses.
    - If the offending brother still refuses to repent, he is brought before the church that the church may again urge repentance, and if there is still none, to be removed from fellowship until he repents.
  - The final step of disassociation is an expression that the church has reason to believe, because of unrepentant sin, that the individual is unregenerate and therefore not truly a member of the church.
  - The goal of church discipline is repentance and restoration.
  - The purpose of this system of accountability and discipline is to ensure the integrity of every believer’s walk with Christ and to protect the purity of the Bride of Christ.
- Involvement (**Hebrews 10:24-25**) and Investment (**1 Corinthians 12:4-7**) – Individual believers commit themselves to involvement in the corporate worship of the local church and serve one another by exercising their natural abilities and spiritual gifts for the glory of God and the good of the church.
  - Regenerate church members will be regularly involved church members.
  - The biblical command is clear: do not neglect to assemble together with the church.
  - The neglect of the corporate gathering places both the individual Christian and the local church at spiritual risk. The author of Hebrews is clear that the importance of gathering together becomes only more important as the return of Christ draws nearer.
  - God has given believers spiritual gifts to be used for the good of the local church. The key phrase in 1 Cor. 12:4-7 is, “for the common good.”
  - Even the term used for spiritual gifts itself implies that they are to be used for the good of the church.
  - Garland observes, “Paul applies the word *charisma* to a wide range of phenomena . . . The majority of uses, however, refer to the manifestations of God’s working in the members of the Christian community, from which the whole community benefits (Rom 1:11; 1 Cor 1:4-7).”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 531.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 576.

- Stewardship (**Acts 2:44-46**) – Church members financially support the missions and ministries of the local church.
  - As each member gives as a faithful steward of his or her financial resources, the local church can provide for the needs of its members through its missions and ministries.
  - In Acts 2, Luke described not communalism, but stewardship as members gave resources to the church that were then distributed to those in need.
  - Faithful stewardship is a part of the sanctification of both the giver and the beneficiary.
    - The beneficiary grows in faith, learning to depend more deeply upon God’s providence.
    - The giver grows in faith, recognizing that his or her resources truly belong to God and can be used in mightier ways when given back to him through faithful stewardship.
  - Faithful stewardship requires gospel-motivated sacrifice.
- Every believer is responsible to understand and practice biblical church membership in his or her own life and walk with the Lord.
  - Question: In what ways will a right understanding of biblical church membership change how we think about the church?
  - Question: In what ways will a right understanding of biblical church membership change what we do in the church?
  - Question: In what ways will a right understanding of biblical church membership change how we treat others in the church? [hold others accountable; love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; humbly serve one another]

**Transition to Lesson 2:**

- Can a church that is not made up of members practicing biblical church membership be regarded as a church at all?
- It is the responsibility of the church as a whole to maintain a biblical understanding and biblical standards of church membership. One of the most effective ways to maintain such biblical understanding and standards is to be intentional about how the local church brings in new church members.

## APPENDIX 8

### LESSON 2: CHURCH MEMBER ASSIMILATION

**Goal:** To help members examine the strengths and weaknesses of the current method of member assimilation at FBC and of a prerequisite membership class as an alternative.

**Introduction:**

In the last session, we talked about five critical elements of biblical church membership.

Question: Can you name those five critical elements?

We also said last week that it is the responsibility of the local church to understand and maintain these characteristics, and one of the important ways a local church does so is through the way it accepts and assimilates members.

**Lesson 2 Outline:**

**I. Current Method: New Member Orientation (NMO)**

- Individuals desiring to become members of FBC are presented for congregational vote at any regular worship service and may join by profession of faith and baptism, statement of faith, or transfer of letter from another Southern Baptist church.
- FBC also currently requires new members to participate in a New Member Orientation (NMO) after becoming members:

All new members of this church will be expected to participate in the church's New Member Orientation plan conducted by the pastor or someone he designates. The purpose of the New Member Orientation is as follows: Affirm the new member in his/her decision and extend a welcome into the fellowship. Insure that the new member has assurance of his/her salvation. Provide the new member with an understanding of our doctrine and polity. Acquaint the new member with the organizational structure, programs and ministries of our church. Help the new member understand how he/she can find a place of ministry in the church. Inform the new member about the stewardship program of the church.<sup>1</sup>

- Strengths of the current method:
  - Conforms to congregational polity by including a congregational vote on candidates for membership.
  - Includes appropriate methods of joining FBC that include and insist on regenerate church membership and believer's baptism.
  - Includes a New Member Orientation in which new members are able to learn about the church, its doctrinal stances, its process for accountability and discipline, and its expectations for attendance, involvement, and giving.
    - The average score on the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey (MAES) for those who had not participated in a New

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<sup>1</sup> Bylaws of the First Baptist Church Talladega, Alabama, section 3: New Member Orientation, adopted August 21, 1996, Church Documents – Constitution and Bylaws: 1-8.

- Member Orientation was 11.6 points lower or 9.5% lower than that of members who had participated in a New Member Orientation.
    - A class outlining issues vital to biblical church membership at FBC is needed, and the New Member Orientation fulfills that need.
  - Weaknesses of the current method:
    - The New Member Orientation is technically required in the church bylaws, but it is not actually compulsory nor is its requirement practically enforceable.
      - The NMO has been required in the bylaws at least since 1996. One individual who joined prior to 1996 indicated completing NMO, suggesting the requirement may also have been included in prior versions of the church bylaws.
      - 18 people surveyed indicated that they joined FBC after 1996 when the requirement is known to have been in place. 11 of those 18 indicated they did not participate in NMO.
      - Of the 45 total who participated in the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey (MAES), 37 indicated they did not participate in NMO.
    - The New Member Orientation occurs after someone has become a member, risking perceptions of “bait and switch” when expectations are communicated, misunderstandings about critical doctrinal issues, and unwillingness to submit to accountability and discipline, and no understanding of the church’s expectations until after someone has already joined the church.

## **II. Proposed Method: Membership Class**

- Through the remainder of this course of study, we will be considering replacing our New Member Orientation with a prerequisite Membership Class as a new alternative method for ensuring biblical church membership that includes the five critical elements we saw from Scripture last week.
  - Strengths:
    - The new proposed method would maintain all of the current requirements for membership. Candidates would be voted upon by the congregation to maintain congregational polity and would join by statement of faith, believer’s baptism, or transfer of letter from another Southern Baptist Church.
    - A Membership Class would replace the NMO and would be an additional requirement before someone becomes a member.
      - All the vital material covered in the NMO would remain.
      - This material would be covered with an individual before he or she became a member so the candidate would better understand the church, its beliefs, its expectations, and other key issues before becoming united with the church as a member.
    - A Membership Class encourages, facilitates, and requires every candidate for church membership to “count the cost” before becoming a member of FBC.

- In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus encountered three men who were eager to follow him. As each one approached him and announced his willingness to follow after the Lord, Jesus reminded them of a particular cost associated with coming after him—a cost that was too great for each one of the men.
- In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus instructed the crowds to carefully consider the cost of following him. Jesus used the illustrations of a man preparing to build a tower and a king preparing for war to remind his hearers that they must consider the cost before following him.
- While Jesus’ instructions specifically regarded following him, the general principle suggests counting the cost should be a considerable part of joining as a member of a local church.
- Further, Acts 2:41 identifies those who believe and are baptized as those who are added to the number of the church. Counting the cost of following Christ should lead to counting the cost of being “added to the number” in a local church.

- Weaknesses: Adding this requirement would make it more difficult for individuals to join FBC, requiring time, energy, and commitment.

**Transition to Lesson 3:** This apparent weakness is actually a great strength of this proposed method. We will consider how a prerequisite Membership Class would be a more effective method of conveying each of the five critical elements of biblical church membership over the next several weeks.

## APPENDIX 9

### LESSON 3: REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To help members of FBC Talladega to understand how a prerequisite membership class would better facilitate and protect regenerate church membership.

**Introduction:** During week 1, we outlined five critical elements of biblical church membership. [Question: Can you name all five?] In week 2, we considered the strengths and weaknesses of a New Member Orientation and a Membership Class as alternatives to assimilating new members in a way that ensures these five critical elements. This week, we will look more specifically at the first of the five critical elements – regenerate church membership – and how a prerequisite Membership Class better facilitates regenerate church membership.

**Lesson 3 Outline: (Acts 2:41-47)**

- Regenerate church membership means that all true members of a local church are believers in Jesus Christ.
  - In Acts 2:41, those added to the Body of believers were those who believed and were baptized.
  - In his commentary, Alan Thompson writes, “Thus God’s people are those who have responded in repentance, embraced the risen Jesus as suffering Messiah and reigning Lord, and have received the new-covenant blessing of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>
  - In Acts 2:47, those who were being continually added to the Body were, again, those who were being saved.
  - The clear pattern in the early church recorded in Acts is that only when an individual had become part of the universal Body of Christ by grace through repentance and faith did the individual then become part of a local church. Members in the local church were Christians – they were believers in Jesus Christ first, then joined as part of the church.
  - Dever observes, “If you read the story of the early churches recorded in the book of Acts, you will find no evidence that any of them meant to have anyone other than believers as members. When you read the letters of Paul, it seems clear that Paul too wrote as if the churches were composed entirely of believers.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Here in Acts 2, we have seen that those who were added to the church were those who had believed.
    - Reading through the epistles, as we have noted in our studies of Philippians, 1&2 Thessalonians, and others, the members of the church are addresses as “brothers and sisters” repeatedly,

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 27 (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2011), 134.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 158.

- indicating an assumption of regenerate church membership.
- Every local church must assimilate new members in a way that best facilitates and ensures that each new member is regenerate.
    - Hammett observes in Baptist history: “Anabaptists and early Baptists . . . sought to be a pure church of visible saints, participating in church discipline and limiting church membership to those who could make a claim to genuine salvation, manifested by a life matching their profession.”<sup>3</sup>
    - The local church needs to examine the lives and walks of candidates for membership to consider, as best they can, whether the person is a truly regenerate believer or not.
    - Without safeguarding regenerate church membership:
      - some will join the church who are not believers in Jesus Christ.
      - they will not share the bond of unity that comes between brothers and sisters in Christ.
      - they do not share the same gospel-transformed worldview and priority system.
      - they are not led by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
    - All other aspects of church life will suffer if a local church does not have a means of ensuring regenerate church membership.
    - Local churches need a means to:
      - hear an individual’s story of conversion.
      - examine the fruit of the gospel in an individual’s life.
  - The current New Member Orientation approach utilized at FBC is helpful, but has some critical weaknesses when it comes to ensuring regenerate church membership.
    - A pastor can only learn so much about a candidate for membership who walks forward during the time of invitation.
    - The congregation, who will be voting the candidate into membership, does not have the chance to observe the candidates walk with Christ whatsoever, aside from whatever information they may have gleaned through prior experience with the individual.
    - The very real danger is that an individual could join the church as a member with full voting rights and privileges of membership who is not a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.
    - Information collected from the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey indicated that this has been a problem at FBC.
      - 1 individual indicated he or she was not a believer when he or she joined FBC.
      - 2 indicated they did not have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ upon joining FBC.
      - 3 indicated they did not have a clear understanding of the gospel.
    - Though the New Member Orientation offers a lengthier time for observation and deeper conversation, under the current method, by the time an individual attends the NMO, he or she has already joined the church as an unbeliever.
    - Dever warns, “We must realize that it is possible to be an active member of a local church and yet not truly be a member of the people of God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 113.

- A membership class offers both the pastor and the congregation the time and interaction needed to more carefully observe whether the candidate is a genuine believer in Christ.
  - The first clear advantage of the Membership class is time.
    - The pastor has more than the few short moments during the invitation to determine the spiritual condition of the candidate.
    - The congregation has more than simply any prior interactions with the candidate to observe the faith and fruit of the candidate.
  - The second clear advantage is timing.
    - The prerequisite Membership Class takes place before membership.
    - If an individual is discovered during this process to not be a genuine believer, that individual has not yet become a member. The pastor and congregation can then share the gospel with the individual without the repercussions of having a non-believer, not led by the Holy Spirit as a member of the local church.
    - In order for the pastor to shepherd effectively, he needs to know who are the sheep. And in order for the congregation to vote a new member into the fellowship of believers, they need to know if he or she is a believer.
  - The Membership Class can be designed to include a time for the pastor to ask and consider the personal testimony of each individual.
    - The pastor can listen to the individual's testimony.
    - The pastor can hear the individual explain the gospel.
    - The pastor can observe the individual's interaction with others in the Membership Class and his or her understanding of their conversion accounts.
  - The period of time an individual is attending FBC while waiting for the scheduled Membership Class also gives the congregation the important time to observe the individual's walk with Christ (or lack thereof) and form personal relationships to better understand the candidate's testimony.
  - In his book *Reclaiming Glory*, Mark Clifton notes the practical usefulness of a membership class to determine the genuineness of a candidate's faith in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

**Transition to Lesson 4:** In the next session, we will see how a prerequisite membership class protects the doctrinal integrity of the local church.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 84.



## APPENDIX 10

### LESSON 4: DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To demonstrate how a prerequisite Membership Class better maintains the doctrinal integrity of the local church.

**Introduction:** The second, and perhaps also second in order of importance, critical element of biblical church membership is doctrinal integrity. [Question: What is meant by “doctrinal integrity?”] A local church needs to maintain a sense of unity around a common statement of faith in order to function properly as a local church. [Question: What are some of the reasons a local church needs doctrinal integrity?]

**Lesson 4 Outline: (Acts 2:42)**

- Doctrinal Integrity is the unity of a local church around a common statement of faith.
  - In Acts 2:42, a distinctive of the local church was its constant study of the Apostles’ teachings.
  - Their unity around these teachings was a defining characteristic of their identity as the church. Ephesians 2:19-20 demonstrates that the identity of local churches, now including the church in Ephesus, continued to be based in its belief in the teachings of the Apostles.
  - A Christian church is set apart by faith in Jesus Christ and by certain non-negotiable doctrines of the Christian faith. In addition to these, local churches maintain certain doctrinal distinctives that set them apart from other denominations and other local churches.
  - Stott explains, “Since the teaching of the apostles has come down to us in its definitive form in the New Testament, contemporary devotion to the apostles’ teaching will mean submission to the authority of the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>
  - In the early church, as indicated in this passage, doctrinal integrity required diligent study.
- A local church will face significant problems without doctrinal unity.
  - Doctrinal confusion amongst the membership hinders both the spiritual vitality of the local church and the spiritual maturity of the individual believers.
  - In Ephesians 4:14, Paul warned that individual believers or local churches might be shaken in their faith and tossed around by doctrinal whims if not grounded in a set standard of beliefs.
  - Without a clear understanding of doctrinal truth, a local church will not be able to discern doctrinal error and false teaching.
  - A church that is not united around a common set of theological and doctrinal beliefs will not be able to make unified decisions about faith or practice in and through the local church.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 82.

- The local church that experiences disunity in doctrine will experience disunity in all manner of things. Disunity will mean an increased risk of infighting.
- In their study, Rainer and Rainer observe that many who had fallen out of local churches blamed, in part, a lack of doctrinal training.<sup>2</sup>
- In a culture with so many varying doctrinal views and a community with so many denominational options, it is important that the local church identify and explain those doctrines which identify it as distinct.
  - FBC affirms the *Baptist Faith and Message, 2000* as its statement of faith.
  - Those beliefs and doctrines not in agreement with this statement of faith are out of unity with FBC.
  - Every member needs to understand these doctrinal distinctives from the beginning of his or her time as a member.
  - Henard writes, “A healthy church structure facilitates believers to know and apply Scripture so that they avoid false doctrine and false behavior.”<sup>3</sup>
- A New Member Orientation Method does not adequately ensure the doctrinal integrity of the local church.
  - Survey data demonstrated several areas of weakness in the doctrinal integrity of FBC under the current system of member assimilation.
    - 24.4% indicated they were not familiar with FBC’s statement of faith when they joined as members.
    - 26.7% indicated they did not have a clear understanding of doctrinal issues important to FBC when they joined.
    - 6.7% indicated they still did not have a clear understanding of important doctrinal issues even as members.
    - 17.8% did not believe that FBC considered local churches autonomous.
    - 22.2% did not believe FBC affirmed the inerrancy of the Bible.
    - 2.2% did not understand FBC’s position on baptism by immersion.
    - 35.6% indicated a belief that salvation requires both faith and works.
    - This data is far more of an indictment on FBC than on the individuals answering the questions. It demonstrates FBC’s failure to educate new members as well as long-time members about the doctrinal issues critical to FBC and central in its statement of faith.
  - Should an individual recognize points of contention with the statement of faith during the orientation, he or she is faced with the difficult decision of maintaining membership at a church with which he or she does not agree, leaving the church after recently joining, or seeking to subvert and change the doctrinal positions of the church as a member.
  - These are not good options! A local church should be spending its time and energy teaching so members can grow in understanding, and helping members apply beliefs to their live through obedience to Christ and to the Scriptures.
  - It is acceptable, and even good in some cases, for healthy disagreements to exist on non-essential theological issues (end times views, for example).

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 149.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 31.

- On essential doctrinal matters, however (deity of Christ, inerrancy of the Scriptures, believer's baptism), unity is critical.
- A prerequisite Membership Class would be far more effective in maintaining the doctrinal integrity of FBC.
    - Rainer explains the growing trend of using a membership class to maintain doctrinal integrity. He writes, "For the new Christians who joined the church, the new member class served as the first point of introduction to basic biblical truths."<sup>4</sup>
    - During a prerequisite Membership Class, the church has the chance to present and explain its statement of faith to membership candidates.
      - Without a clear understanding of a statement of faith, a believer cannot subscribe to it.
      - Time should be set aside during the class to explain the statement of faith, to provide biblical support, to identify how the statement of faith affects the life of the church, and to answer any questions membership candidate have regarding specific doctrinal issues.
      - Lawless writes, "A membership class is an opportunity to say, 'What we believe and do is important.'"<sup>5</sup>
    - During the Membership Class, candidates for membership also have the chance to read, review, and understand the statement of faith.
      - Candidates will be interested to know and understand where the church stands on key issues.
      - Rainer and Rainer observe: "These formerly unchurched people were clear. They not only were interested in learning about doctrine; they were attracted to conservative, evangelical churches that were uncompromising in their beliefs."<sup>6</sup>
    - Candidates also have the opportunity to decide not to become members if they do not agree with a particular matter that is central to the doctrinal identity of the local church.
      - Rainer argues, "Doctrine matters. What churches believe and how they communicate their beliefs do matter. Higher-assimilation churches were much more likely to ask prospective members to agree to a basic doctrinal statement of the church."<sup>7</sup>
      - Individuals who do not agree with a particular doctrinal distinctive of the local church need the opportunity to either grow in their understanding or find another church with whom they are better aligned doctrinally. A membership class affords the opportunity for both before the candidate has become a member.

**Transition to Lesson 5:** Next week, we will consider how the Membership Class better communicates the church's system of church discipline and puts in place a system of accountability.

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<sup>4</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 232.

<sup>7</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 57.

## APPENDIX 11

### LESSON 5: CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To explain how a prerequisite membership class provides an opportunity for the church to explain its process of church discipline and accountability between members and why it is important to explain church discipline and member accountability before an individual joins as a member rather than after.

**Introduction:** The subject of church discipline can be a controversial one, but it is a biblical concept and its practice is key to church health. The subject of church discipline and accountability between believers is, therefore, critical for church members to rightly understand and apply.

**Lesson 5 Outline: (Matthew 18:15-17)**

- Statistics collected from the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey (MAES) demonstrate that church discipline and accountability between members is a concept many at FBC do not understand and that some resist altogether.
  - 42% of participants in the survey disagreed that individual church members should hold one another accountable for sin.
  - 40% of participants said they would be unwilling to confront a fellow church member in unrepentant sin.
  - 27% did not believe the church had the responsibility to discipline its members.
  - The data indicates some misunderstand the concept of church discipline, not believing it is the responsibility of the church. Others may believe it is the responsibility of the church, but that individual church members should not be involved in the process, perhaps assuming discipline should be relegated to church leadership or staff. The greatest number of participants disagreed that they would hold another member accountable. Because this percentage was highest, the data suggests some believe church discipline should be practiced in the church, some may even believe it to be their responsibility as individual members, but they may personally be unwilling to take part in the process.
- The church can and should better facilitate the faithful practice of biblical church discipline by better instructing church members in its proper application in the local church.
  - The process of church discipline begins with the offended brother going to the offending brother to tell him of his sin against him.
  - If there is no repentance (that is, a genuine turning away from sin), the offended brother goes again to the offending brother, this time with two or three witnesses.
  - If there is no repentance still, the matter is to be brought before the church. The church also calls the offending brother to repent.
  - If there is still no repentance, the church must treat the offending brother, in unrepentant sin, as a nonbeliever who shows no signs of regenerate faith in his refusal to repent.

- **Example:** If a brother in Christ sinned against you by telling a lie about you in the community, your response should not be to call him out on Facebook, gossip to others about it, or tell an equally harmful lie about him. Instead, go to the brother and tell him how he has harmed you, and ask him to repent of this sin. Prayerfully, he repents, and the whole process stops here! If he refuses, take two other brothers in Christ and go to him again. If still there is no repentance, take the matter to the church. The church as a whole should then call this brother to repentance, and if he still refuses, he is to be treated like a non-believer. That means two important things: first, he no longer has the rights and privileges of a church member because he cannot be trusted to be operating in submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and second, we share the gospel with him – either he is a believer who needs to be reminded of the truth, or he was a false believer who needs to believe it for the first time.
- The goal in each step of the process is repentance.
- The greater goal of the entire process is the protection of the Body of Christ from unregenerate members and the salvation or restoration of those who are disciplined.
  - The church should be concerned about the implications of a non-believer operating as a church member, as we saw in an earlier lesson.
  - But, to return to the example a moment ago, the greatest concern of all should be that your brother would be saved. If you see unrepentant sin in the life of someone in your church who professes to be a Christian, and after you have brought that sin to his attention he still refuses to repent, you should be fearful that he may not truly be saved – his eternity is at stake! Isn't his eternity more important than the awkwardness of having to walk through this process with him?!
- The purity of the entire local body and the eternal condition of the offending party are at stake, meaning the entire church should be gravely concerned and thus willing to be faithful to this biblical practice.
- Faithful and biblical church discipline begins with love and concern of individual believers for one another. France explains, “The subject is dealing with sin within the discipleship community, but remarkably, it is the concerned individual, not an appointed leader or group, who is expected to act in the first instance; the wider community is involved only when that individual initiative proves inadequate, and then only to back up the individual's concern.”<sup>1</sup>
- Churches will face conflict, especially during seasons of revitalization. During seasons of conflict, tensions are high. Seasons of revitalization in churches are often seasons of “secret meetings,” slander, and interpersonal conflict. Local churches need clearly identified methods of conflict resolution to which every member commits and submits, and biblical church discipline and accountability is a key portion of biblical conflict resolution. If not, church revitalization will be even more difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 690.

- Croft writes, “A clear understanding of how the members of a church are called to relate to one another is a key in preparing them to move forward and find new life.”<sup>2</sup>
- . Henard suggests, “Conflict is not the end of the church, but it certainly will facilitate a church’s death if left unchecked and allowed to fester.”<sup>3</sup>
- A critical place for this instruction to begin is in a Membership Class where candidates for membership can understand the process of church discipline, the role the church expects its members to play, and the need for them to submit themselves to the process.
  - For a member to become aware of the process only when a need for discipline arises is antithetical to the biblical purpose of church discipline. The goal of church discipline is restoration, repentance, and conflict resolution, not deeper conflict.
  - Finally, if every incoming member is not aware of the process of biblical church discipline and its application in the local church, every member will not be able to hold every other member individually accountable, as is the clear intention of the biblical design.
  - The membership class should explain the process, the intention of the process, and every member’s role in the process.
  - It is also unreasonable to expect church members to submit to a process of discipline to which they have not previously agreed. A prerequisite membership class affords this opportunity.
    - Leeman argues, “Christians don’t join churches; they submit to them.”<sup>4</sup>
    - Accountability is another word often misunderstood or rejected in modern American church culture. Accountability is the practice of believers being willing to point out unrepentant sin in one another’s lives and, more importantly, the willingness to hear, receive, and heed the warnings as others point out our unrepentant sins. Accountability within the local church is one of many instruments of God’s sanctification in the lives of believers.
    - Those who reject the thought of being accountable to one another in the local church and to the body as a whole will only be a detriment to the established structure for conflict resolution. If this unwillingness to submit to the church in this regard is recognized while the individual is still a membership candidate and not yet a member, he or she can simply decide not to join.

**Transition to Lesson 6:** Next week, we will consider how the Membership Class better facilitates church involvement and communicates the church’s expectations of its members.

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 30.

## APPENDIX 12

### LESSON 6: CHURCH INVOLVEMENT AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To explain how a prerequisite membership class can better prepare new members to be involved in the local church, specifically through attendance and participation in corporate worship gatherings and discipleship opportunities.

**Introduction:** Can we be blatantly honest for a moment? FBC has a problem most churches do not have. It is an unusual problem and a pernicious one that hides itself in numbers that appear to be a wonderful strength but, in fact, are a glaring weakness in FBC as a local church: a significant number of people leave FBC after Sunday School, not willing to participate in corporate worship. On average, twenty people have left after Sunday school since February of 2017. In other words, 14% of those attending Sunday School leave before worship. If attendance from Easter and Christmas are removed, 16% depart after Sunday School on average. These statistics assume, improperly, that everyone who attends worship also attended Sunday School. If the statistics are adjusted to account for a modest estimate of 20 people who attend worship without attending Sunday School, the percentage doubles to and alarming 32% of Sunday School attendees who leave and do not attend corporate worship. These statistics are not explained by the good work of one outreached-based class, but instead are a result of a habit developed among the membership through years of practice of leaving in protest of music, preaching, or individuals they do not like. The practice is sinful, is a danger to the health of the church, and could be addressed, to an important extent, through a Membership Class that outlined expectations for church involvement to membership candidates. Further, and equally alarming, is the reality that on average only 120 of 339 (39%) resident members attend corporate worship on a given Sunday with good attendance.

**Lesson 6 Outline: (Hebrews 10:24-25)**

- Scripture makes absolutely clear the need for believers to participate in corporate worship with the local Body of Christ.
  - Dever states, “The most fundamental duty Christians have in relation to the congregation is the duty to regularly attend gatherings of the congregation.”<sup>1</sup>
  - The author of Hebrews refers directly to the corporate worship gathering of the local church in this passage.
    - Philip Hughes explains, “Here, then, the term *ἐπισυναγωγή* should be understood as simply the regular gathering together of Christian believers for worship and exhortation in a particular place—a practice that first took place daily, but subsequently weekly, on the first day of the week.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Believers are instructed not to neglect this gathering together of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 418.

local church.

- The clear command, instruction, and expectation of Scripture mandates that believers be involved in corporate worship gatherings of a local church. To state it succinctly: Christians will attend church services.
- This passage really leaves no option, no middle ground: either attend the gatherings of the saints together for corporate worship in obedience, or neglect the assembly of believers and disobey God.
- **Application:** There are multiple benefits to attending the corporate worship gatherings of the church – fellowship, accountability, edification, deeper understanding, encouragement – but if none of these is sufficient, simply obedience to God’s Word should compel the believer to be involved in corporate worship gatherings in the local church of which he or she is a part.
- Some argue that the distractions of the day or the ability to hear preaching through other means diminishes the importance for the corporate gathering for the individual Christian. The passage indicates, however, that the closer the day of Christ’s return draws, the more the need for the corporate gathering increases.
- **Application:** Scripture indicates that things will get more difficult for believers as the return of Christ draws closer. Persecution, false teaching, and even the prevalence of people falling away from the church will only increase (**1 John 2:18-19; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 4:3-4**).
  - **Ephesians 4:11-14** – You need the church in order to grow in your relationship with Christ, to be firm in your faith, to mature in your faith, and to defend yourself against false teachings.
  - **Ephesians 4:15-16** – But the church also needs you, as we will see in the next lesson, to be able to function as God has intended. Every single part of the body, every single person in the local church, is important.
- Churches seeking revitalization should both raise and clearly communicate their expectations of members.
  - Stetzer and Dodson write, “Many comeback churches—53 percent—raised the requirements of church membership, challenging people to live out the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant community described in Scripture. Increasing membership requirements is not an easy process, but it is a sign of something significant.”<sup>3</sup>
  - Churches should not hesitate to maintain expectations consistent with biblical standards of church membership, but should explain these expectations to candidates for membership in order to better equip them to involve themselves in the local church as biblical church members.
  - A prerequisite membership class gives the local church an opportunity to outline the expectation for individual involvement upfront, while individuals are still candidates for membership.
  - In a prerequisite Membership Class, the local church can explain to candidates the importance, both to them as individuals and to the church body, of their participation, involvement, and attendance in corporate worship.
  - **Application:** Think back to our opening illustration. How might the problem we face now at FBC of people leaving before corporate worship have been prevented if a membership class were in place? It might be

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 124.



helped in the future by communicating in a membership class that FBC expects its members to attend corporate worship, not leave after Sunday School is over.

- High expectations for church members, including expectations for involvement, are unreasonable when they are not communicated. In a prerequisite Membership Class, each candidate can decide if he or she is willing to commit to regular participation in corporate worship before joining the church.
  - . Lawless argues, “People tend to be much more committed if the church publicly expect them to be committed up front—a membership class provides a place to communicate these expectations.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Stetzer and Dodson write of revitalized churches who raised expectations of members: “How were membership requirements raised? Almost all of the respondents mentioned that they added a new member class (93.2%).”<sup>5</sup>

**Transition to Lesson 7:** Next week, we will consider how the Membership Class better encourages individual investment in the local church.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 124.

## APPENDIX 13

### LESSON 7: INDIVIDUAL INVESTMENT AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To explain how a prerequisite Membership Class can better facilitate the investment of natural abilities and spiritual gifts by every member, specifically new members, in the local church.

**Introduction:** Churches and pastors often lament about a “revolving back door” in local churches, referring to the prevalence of churches losing new members seemingly as quickly as they arrived because they are unable to find a place of service in the local church. When believers are unable to invest their natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the work and ministries of the local church, they will remain disengaged from the body and disconnected from the kingdom work the local church is doing, never truly becoming a vital part of the body.

**Lesson 7 Outline: (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)**

- Every believer has a responsibility and privilege to invest his or her natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the local church for the glory of God and the good of the local church. This is the clear design of Scripture as communicated in **1 Corinthians 12:4-7** and throughout the New Testament.
  - Every believer has spiritual gifts. Believers have different spiritual gifts, but all of them are bestowed by the same Holy Spirit.
  - Because God has given these gifts, he has the authority to prescribe how they must be used.
  - Raymond Collins and Daniel Harrington write, “Present in the Christian, these gifts are the means by which God acts within the community.”<sup>1</sup>
  - God has intended and designed that believers invest their spiritual gifts in the local church for the good of the church. The key phrase in the passage is “for the common good.”
  - Garland observes, “Paul applies the word *charisma* to a wide range of phenomena . . . The majority of uses, however, refer to the manifestations of God’s working in the members of the Christian community, from which the whole community benefits (Rom 1:11; 1 Cor 1:4-7).”<sup>2</sup> Even the term for the spiritual gifts themselves implies their use for the good of the local church rather than for the self-interests of the individual believer.
- Local churches likewise have a responsibility to ensure that its members are able to invest their talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts in the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 450.

<sup>2</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 576, emphasis original.

- Lawless argues, “Churches that make membership matter simply *expect* people to join and get to work.”<sup>3</sup>
- Local churches should maintain opportunities for believers to invest their spiritual gifts, provide a clear method of believers, and specifically new members, to commit to these opportunities for service, and help believers discover and understand their spiritual gifts and how they can be best applied “for the common good” in the local church.
- Without a Membership Class, FBC has members who are either unable, unwilling or unaware of how to invest their abilities and giftedness at FBC.
  - 6 individuals surveyed through the Membership Assimilation Effectiveness Survey indicated they could not find a place of service within the first year of membership at FBC.
  - According to the list of committees and positions voted upon by the church each year, in 2020, FBC has 27.7% of its resident members serving in some capacity in the church. (This number is not a perfect measurement, because on one hand it does not take into account volunteers for various ministries not listed in these reports from the Committee on Committees and the Nominating Committee, but on the other hand it does not account for those members of committees who do not attend regular committee meetings or actually participate in committee activities.)
- A Membership class affords a clear opportunity for a local church both to communicate its expectations for members’ investment in the church and to facilitate that investment.
  - Rainer writes, “New member classes or prospective member classes have become so common that they are virtually considered a regular program in these high-expectation churches. The class is the most-frequently-used point of entry where the expectations of membership are articulated.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Lawless writes of a particular church: “In this church, leaders emphasize a required membership class where prospective members learn that ‘uninvolved member’ is a contradiction in terms. The church makes time to teach and train new members, and new members are then expected to make time to do ministry.”<sup>5</sup>
  - The Membership Class curriculum should clearly communicate how the church expects its members to be biblically invested, but it should also help members discover how they can invest in the church.
    - It is important for a member to understand that he or she is expected to serve on a committee or ministry team, but if he or she does not know what committee or ministry team would be a good fit nor understand the process of applying or being selected, he or she will not be able to meet expectations.
    - A Membership Class should include a list of all positions of service, ministry teams, and committees in the church for candidates to consider as they determine how the Lord would have

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<sup>3</sup> Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 25.

<sup>5</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 31-32.

- them to serve.
- A spiritual gifts inventory is also a useful tool in the Membership Class to help candidates, some of whom will likely be new believers, to identify their spiritual gifts. Class time can then be used to help candidates match their spiritual gifts and known natural abilities with the various opportunities for investment in the church.
  - Rainer notes, “A significant number of churches in our study used the new member class as an opportunity to offer places for the members to serve. . . . Three out of ten churches asked those in the new member class to complete a spiritual gifts inventory.”<sup>6</sup>
  - Macchia argues that in effective membership classes, “not only are people being trained for select ministries, they are taken through a self-evaluation process to assist them in discovering their spiritual gifts, their temperament and passion, their personal mission, and to deepen their insight into God’s will and calling.”<sup>7</sup>
- The greatest danger for a church that does not communicate its expectations and facilitate investment by each member in the local church is not simply that it will not meet an abstract, hypothetical definition of biblical church membership, but that it will continue the common trend of the majority of church members remaining uninvolved and uninvested while the majority of the work and service is done by the minority of church members.
- Lawless argues, “In contrast, churches that emphasize membership and ministry through membership classes are much more likely to see attenders join and get to work. . . . Churches that choose *not* to make these classes a priority, however, may be unintentionally inviting attenders and members alike to remain uninvolved.”<sup>8</sup>
  - Perhaps the clearest means of closing the proverbial back door of the church is through a prerequisite Membership Class.

**Transition to Lesson 8:** Next week, we will consider how the Membership Class better encourages biblical stewardship from church members.

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<sup>6</sup> Rainer, *High Expectations*, 114.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 45.

## APPENDIX 14

### LESSON 8: BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Goal:** To explain how a Membership Class best communicates and facilitates the importance of biblical financial stewardship in and through the local church.

**Introduction:** Biblical stewardship maintains and supports the life and ministry of the local church. Without faithful stewardship from its members, the church cannot function properly, and more importantly, it cannot function biblically.

**Lesson 8 Outline: (Acts 2:44-46)**

- Biblical stewardship in and through the local church is a clear pattern set by the local church in Acts.
  - In biblical stewardship, every believer sacrifices of his or her own material possessions for the care of fellow believers.
  - Through the stewardship of its members, the church is able to provide for those members who are in need. Stewardship is thus foundational to the ability of a local church to fulfill its role of caring for every member within the body.
  - Witherington explains, “. . . what is being described here is that no one was claiming any exclusive right to whatever property he or she had, and where need arose the early Christians readily liquidated what assets they had to take care of fellow believers’ needs.”<sup>1</sup>
  - In the early church, as recorded in Acts, individuals did not practice communalism, but stewardship, thereby setting the example for the church through the ages to follow.
    - Members gave as they were able, and those gifts were distributed to those in need.
    - Stott explains, “It is important to note that even in Jerusalem the sharing of property and possessions was voluntary. According to verse 46, *they broke bread in their homes*. So evidently many still had homes; not all had sold them. . . . It is also noteworthy that the tense of both verbs in verse 45 is imperfect, which indicates that the selling and the giving were occasional, in response to particular needs, not once for all.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Acts indicates that much of this stewardship was financial. Believers sold property and gave the proceeds or a portion of the proceeds to the church. The early church, then, would not simply be receiving food donations, as some may assume, but financial

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 162.

<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 84, emphasis original.



- While this number is relatively small, the information is a reminder of three critical matters.
  - These were 2 of 45 individuals who are involved enough and concerned enough in the life of the church to take the survey.
  - These were 2 who were honest and willing to admit not tithing regularly.
  - Even if these were the only 2 in the entire church not tithing regularly, the data would still be an indication that the whole body suffers because it is not operating with the full financial investment of all its members.
- A Membership Class facilitates biblical stewardship by outlining the church's expectations of its members.
  - In order for the church to function as it needs to, the church needs the tithes and gifts of its members.
  - These expectations should be communicated to candidates during a prerequisite membership class to help them understand the church's expectations before they become part of the church and to ensure that each member contributes from the time he or she first becomes a member.
- A Membership Class also motivates financial stewardship, because the class gives the church an opportunity to explain to membership candidates how their financial giving will be used.
  - A Membership Class in a Southern Baptist Church like FBC should include an overview of the Cooperative program as well as how giving to local association supports missions in the local area.
  - Candidates for membership should gain a general understanding of the church budget and what missions and ministries are supported by their tithes and financial giving.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** Having now addressed, in depth and detail, the benefits of a Membership class, you will now re-take the same survey you took at the beginning of this series to measure its effectiveness in communicating how and why a Membership Class would benefit FBC.

APPENDIX 15

PRE- AND POST-TEST DATA

Mean (Pre-test)	125.94
Mean (Post-test)	150.12
Mean Difference:	24.18
1 Tail T-test (paired)	4.363E-06
2 Tail T-test (paired)	8.72599E-06

Question 14 Mean (pre-test)	3.765
Question 14 Mean (post-test)	5.176
Difference (mean)	1.412
Question 14 Median (pre-test)	4
Question 14 Median (post-test)	6
Difference (median)	2
Question 14 Mode (pre-test)	4
Question 14 Mode (post-test)	6
Difference (mode)	2
Question 14 1 Tail T-test (paired)	0.001021615
Question 14 2 Tail T-test (paired)	0.002043229



## APPENDIX 16

### MEMBERSHIP CLASS SCHEDULE

#### **Friday**

6:00-7:00pm – Welcome and Fellowship Meal with church staff

\*Candidates for membership will share their testimonies during the fellowship meal\*

#### **Section 1 – Who We Are**

7:05-7:15pm – Basics of Church Membership

7:15-8:00pm – Church Polity and Organizational Structure

8:00-8:30pm – Denominational Affiliation

#### **Saturday**

#### **Section 2 – What We Believe**

8:00-8:10am – Introduction

Essential and Non-Essential Beliefs and *The Baptist Faith and Message*

8:10-8:30am – The Scriptures

8:30-9:00am – God

9:00-9:15am – Man

9:15-9:45am – Salvation

9:45-10:00am – God's Purpose of Grace

10:00-10:10am – The Church

10:10-10:20am – Baptism and the Lord's Supper

10:20-10:25am – The Lord's Day

10:25-10:30am – The Kingdom

10:30-10:40am – Last Things

10:40-10:50am – Evangelism and Missions

10:50-11:00am – Education

11:00-11:15am – Stewardship

11:15-11:20am – Cooperation

11:20-11:30am – The Christian and the Social Order

11:30-11:40am – Peace and War

11:40-11:50am – Religious Liberty

11:50-12:00 – The Family

**12:00-1:00pm – Lunch Break**

#### **Section 3 – How You Can Serve**

1:05-1:30pm – Committees and Leadership Team

1:30-2:00pm – Volunteer Positions and Opportunities

2:00-2:50pm – Finding Your Place of Ministry

**Section 4 – What We Expect**

3:00-3:40pm – Responsibilities of Members

3:40-4:00pm – Conflict Resolution

4:05-5:00pm – Stewardship

**Sunday**

10:30am – Morning Worship Service – New Member Orientation class presented before the church.

## APPENDIX 17

### MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 1

#### **Section 1 – Who We Are**

##### Staff Introductions

- Pastor: Robert Klotz
- Associate Pastor of Music and Students: Heath Walton
- Director of Children’s Ministries: Judy Gaither
- Child Development Center Director: Jenifer Peters

##### Basics of Church Membership

- Any person may offer himself as a candidate for church membership at First Baptist. Upon completion of the prerequisite Membership Class, all candidates are presented to the church and voted upon in a regular worship service in the following ways:
  - By profession of faith
  - By letter or transfer of membership
  - By statement or restoration
  - By baptism from another denomination
- In short, FBC has three prerequisites for membership: the candidate must be a believer in Jesus Christ, the believer must have been baptized by immersion since becoming a follower of Christ, and the candidate must have completed FBC’s Membership Class.
  - The Bible describes local churches as local bodies or assemblies of believers. Members of a local church must be believers in Jesus Christ. We refer to this as “regenerate church membership.” (Acts 2:41,47)
  - As a Baptist church, we believe the biblical mode of baptism is by immersion. Because this is fundamental to our identity and to our understanding of the Scriptures, we require that every member be baptized in this way.
  - We believe firmly in biblical church membership, and this Membership Class gives us the opportunity, before you join FBC, to explain to you who we are, what we do, what we expect of you as a member, and what you can expect of us as a local church.
- The rights of membership at FBC include:
  - Voting
  - Consideration for Office
  - Participation in Ordinances
  - Assignment to a Deacon Care List

- *Why should I be a member of FBC Talladega?*
  - Obedience to the biblical mandate not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together
  - Accountability
  - A place to invest my natural abilities and spiritual gifts for the glory of God and the good of the church
  - Spiritual growth and development
  - Ephesians 4:11-14 tells believers why we need the church – to grow in our faith, to mature spiritually, to be equipped for the work of ministry God has given us to do, and to be prepared to stand against false teaching.
  - Ephesians 4:15-16 continues to describe why the church needs you – because God has given each of us a vital task to do in and through the local church.

### Church Polity and Organizational Structure

“Our church accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God, the sole and sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of doctrine and policy. The members of this church are all equal in rank, rights, and privileges. Pastors, deacons, and all officers are but trusted servants of the Lord and of the people. No individual or group has any authority whatsoever over the church. The church is an independent, democratic body responsible to Jesus Christ.” (Constitution and Bylaws: 1-1)

- The Bible as the sole and sufficient rule
  - **2 Timothy 3:16-17**
  - Other factors including church history and tradition, denominational practice, and personal experience are all helpful, but God’s Word alone is authoritative.
  - While no one member has more authority than another, God’s Word has authority over all.
- Members equal in rank, rights, and privileges
  - All members of FBC are equal in authority. Each member’s vote carries the same value.
  - No individual member possesses more authority than another, nor are privileges extended to some members and withheld from others.
- Pastors, deacons and all officers as trusted servants of the Lord and of the people
  - “The spiritual as well as the material work of the church is done by and through human agencies. This church does its work by delegation of duties to individuals (officers) and organized groups (committees, councils, organizations, departments, etc.)” (Constitution and Bylaws: 1-9)
  - Officers: pastor, ministerial staff, deacons, moderator, clerk, treasurer, and trustees
  - All officers are elected by the Body in accordance with the church bylaws.
  - **Pastor** – “The pastor is a scriptural officer of the church. He should meet the qualifications stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and such practical qualifications and experience as the church may deem essential to meet the needs of the congregation. He is a man whom God has called to serve a local church as the undershepherd of Christ. He is the chief administrative officer of the church. He is responsible for leading the

- church (the congregation, officers, and organized groups) to perform their tasks.” (Constitution and Bylaws 1-9)
- **Church Ministerial Staff** – “The church ministerial staff consists of those persons whom the church requires evidence of a personal call of God to minister in a specific or specialized area.” (Constitution and Bylaws: 1-10)
  - **Deacons** – “Deacons are to be servants of the church, in accordance with the meaning and the practice of the New Testament. The Deacons of this church are selected, not to honor the person, but to honor God and His church.” (Constitution and Bylaws: 1-10)
  - **Clerk** – The clerk, selected by the nominating committee, keeps permanent record of all actions of the church, keeps a permanent register of members, secures letters of transfer of membership, issues letters of dismissal, is the custodian of all church records, gives notice of all church meetings, prepares the annual letter of the church to the association.
  - **Treasurer** – The treasurer, also selected by the nominating committee, receives and safeguards funds given to the church, transports funds to the bank for deposit, consults counting committee.
  - **Trustees** – Legal officers of the church who hold in trust the church property.
- No individual or group
    - No one person, group, or position has any more authority in the church than another.
  - Independent, democratic body
    - No higher human entity above the local church itself exercises any authority over FBC.
    - While FBC cooperates with a local association, a state board of missions, and the Southern Baptist Convention, none of these bodies is a ruling body, but a cooperation of local churches.
  - Responsible to Jesus Christ
    - **Matthew 16:16-18**
    - **Ephesians 4:15-16**
    - All members and the church as a whole are accountable to Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and of His church.
  - First Baptist Church is Christ-ruled, pastor-led, deacon-served, and congregationally-governed.
  - First Baptist conducts church business at quarterly business meetings, and, when necessary, at special called business meetings.
  - Committees made up of church members elected by the church body as a whole serve in specific capacities to address specific areas of church ministry and to offer focused attention to specific areas of church life.
    - Committees offer reports to the church as a whole during business meetings when needed.
    - Committees provide a method for ensuring that every member has an area in which he or she is able to serve.
    - Committees make church ministry as a whole more organized and efficient.

- The church leadership team is composed of church staff and the elected chairpersons of each committee. This body, as an elected body of the church, meets monthly to address matters of the church, to discuss ministries of the church, and to organize the church calendar.
  - “The purpose of the Church Leadership Team is to lead in the planning, coordinating, conducting, and evaluating the ministries and programs of the church and its organizations.”

### Denominational Affiliation

- First Baptist Church Talladega is a member church of the Coosa River Baptist Association, the Alabama Baptist State Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.
  - Each of these groups is a collection of local churches that cooperate together in various areas of ministry.
  - None of these bodies exercises authority over FBC.
  - By joining together in cooperation with other local churches on the national, state, and local level, FBC is able to participate significantly in ways and areas of ministry that would be impossible and unavailable to us alone as an individual church
- A portion of giving to the church is sent to the Coosa River Baptist Association, the Alabama State Board of Missions, and the Southern Baptist Convention to support their various areas of ministry, and as partnering churches do the same, together we are able to support ministries such as international missions, Christian universities, and many others. This program of giving is known as the Cooperative Program.

#### Coosa River Baptist Association

- Comprised of 67 cooperating churches
- [www.crba.org](http://www.crba.org)
- Director of Missions: Stan Albright
- Partners cooperating churches for local missions and ministries.

#### Alabama State Board of Missions

- An autonomous association of Southern Baptist churches in the state of Alabama.
- [www.alsbom.com](http://www.alsbom.com)
- Executive Director: Rick Lance
- Areas of Ministry:
  - Evangelism and Discipleship: Bible Drill, College and BCM, Collegiate Ministries, Discipleship, Evangelism, Family Ministries, Single Adults, Senior Adults, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Youth
  - Leadership Development: Bivocational Ministers, Choirs, Church Administration, Church Compensation, Church Revitalization, Deacons, Leadership, Libraries, Music, Prayer

- Missions Mobilization: Associational Missions, Church Buildings, Church Planting, Deaf, Disaster Relief, Girls in Action, Literacy Missions, Men, Missions, RA's and Challengers, WMU
- Missions Support: Communications, Christian Ethics, Cooperative Program, Stewardship, Technology

#### Southern Baptist Convention

- The Southern Baptist Convention was founded “for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of Baptist denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the gospel.” (“About Us,” Meet Southern Baptists, [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net))
- [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net)
- Current President: J.D. Greear
- Cooperative Program funds of the SBC are used to support the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, SBC seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and other ministries.

## APPENDIX 18

### MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 2

#### Section 2 – What We Believe

##### Introduction

- In essential beliefs – we have unity (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- In non-essential beliefs – we have liberty (Romans 14:1, 4, 12, 22).
- In all our beliefs – we show love (1 Corinthians 13:2).
- Those beliefs outlined below are the beliefs considered essential at First Baptist Church.
- What are the dangers of doctrinal disunity?
  - Confusion among the membership about key biblical issues
  - Doctrinal disunity leads to general disunity.
  - Church members may be shaken in their faith and “tossed around” by ever-changing false doctrines (Ephesians 4:14).
  - Inability to discern false teaching and recognize false teachers
  - Inability to make unified decisions for right practice of right faith

##### The Baptist Faith and Message

- “Our Articles of Faith is the doctrinal statement, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000.” (Constitution and Bylaws 1-1)
- The *Baptist Faith and Message* is not a document that determines our beliefs as Southern Baptists, but is a summary of what we as Southern Baptists believe from the Scriptures.

#### I. THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

*Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke*



21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

## II. GOD

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

### A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

*Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.*

### B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

*Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53:1-12; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5,21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.*

### C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour,

and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

*Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10; 22:17.*

### III. MAN

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

*Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5,7,18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18, 23; 5:6, 12, 19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.*

### IV. SALVATION

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set

apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

*Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14,29; 3:3-21,36; 5:24; 10:9,28-29; 15:1-16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Romans 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18,29-39; 10:9-10,13; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18,30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12:8,14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-23; 1 John 1:6-2:11; Revelation 3:20; 21:1-22:5.*

## V. GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

*Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7,19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10,19; Hebrews 11:39-12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2-5,13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.*

## VI. THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

*Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.*

## VII. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

*Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.*

## VIII. THE LORD'S DAY

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

*Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5-10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16; 3:16; Revelation 1:10.*

## IX. THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

*Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10,23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6,9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22.*

## X. LAST THINGS

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The

unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

*Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27,30,36,44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40,48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28,35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.*

## XI. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

*Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8,16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17.*

## XII. EDUCATION

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

*Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7,11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.*

## XIII. STEWARDSHIP

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under

obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

*Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21, 42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.*

#### XIV. COOPERATION

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

*Exodus 17:12; 18:17ff.; Judges 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Nehemiah 4; 8:1-5; Matthew 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1ff.; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 1:6-10; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 1:15-18.*

#### XV. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

*Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16; Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.*

## XVI. PEACE AND WAR

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

*Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 5:9,38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36,38; Romans 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:1-2.*

## XVII. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

*Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.*

## XVIII. THE FAMILY

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent

lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

*Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6,15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15,17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Statement of Faith,” accessed June 4, 2020, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.



## APPENDIX 19

### MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 3

#### **Section 3– How You Can Serve**

- Every believer has the privilege and responsibility to invest his or her natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the local church for the glory of God and the good of the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).
- The local church also has a threefold responsibility to its members as it relates to serving:
  - Provide opportunities
  - Provide an avenue to engage those opportunities
  - Help members discover their spiritual gifts and match them with opportunities for service.
- In this section, we will seek to fulfill that three-fold responsibility.

#### Committees and Leadership Team

- **Administration and Bylaws** – The purpose of this committee is to consider, present, and recommend Constitution and Bylaw changes to the church and to see that all the official documents of the church including the constitution, bylaws, policies, procedures, and manuals of operation are kept up to date following action taken by the church in conference.
- **Audio/Visual Media Services** – The committee will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of audio/visual media services equipment used in the programs and services of the church.
- **Baptismal** – The purpose of this committee is to help the pastor and baptismal candidates before, during, and after scheduled baptismal services.
- **Building/Grounds** – The purpose of this committee is to assume responsibility for the operation, maintenance, repair, protection, and use of the buildings, operating facilities, and attached equipment including heating, cooling, and lighting. In addition, to be responsible for the landscaping and maintenance of the grounds and parking lots of the church property.
- **Children’s** – To serve as the advisory committee to the Director of Children’s Activities in helping plan events, activities, and special projects for all children as well as their parents. Said events, projects, and activities should strengthen both the home and church.
- **Chrismon Tree** – Erect, decorate, and store the Chrismon tree and decorate the church for the Christmas season each year.
- **Christian Thoughtfulness** – Help organize duties of this committee and assist in carrying out duties when needed.

- **Committee on Committees** – To select, enlist, and nominate qualified persons to serve on church committees.
- **Counting** – To assist the office manager in accurately counting all funds received by the church and deposit them into the appropriate accounts and banks.
- **Church Leadership Team** – The purpose of the Church Leadership Team is to lead in the planning, coordinating, conducting, and evaluating the ministries and programs of the church and its organizations.
- **Evangelism/Outreach** – The purpose of this committee is to counsel with and assist the Pastor and staff in planning for revivals and evangelistic ministry for our church. To communicate the Church's ministry to church members, prospects and the surrounding community.
- **Food Service** – The purpose of this committee is to formulate and recommend to the church policies outlining the proper use of food service facilities; communicate approved food service policies; evaluate and report to the church as appropriate the services to best meet church program needs.
- **Lord's Supper** – The purpose of the committee is to prepare for serving the Lord's Supper and cleaning up afterwards.
- **Nominating** – The purpose of the Nominating committee is to select, interview, enlist, and recommend to the church the best-qualified persons to fill all church-elected offices and nominate members of the Committee on Committees.
- **Personnel** – To assist the church in matters related to employed personnel administration.
- **Senior Adult** – This committee shall work with the pastor and church staff in keeping the senior adults of the church organized and involved in church-related activities.
- **Special Ministries** – To provide a ministry to the special needs population of Talladega.
- **Stewardship** – This committee shall organize, supervise the budget, handling, and safeguarding of moneys, records, and bookkeeping procedures. To adequately maintain the proper insurance coverage on all church property and bond coverage on all persons who handle money.
- **Teller** – The committee is responsible for counting the ballots in all elections except in Deacon election.
- **Van** – The purpose of the committee is to supervise the use of the church vans.
- **Weekday Education** – To help plan, coordinate, advise, oversee, and support the weekday activities of the Child Development Center.
- **Youth Ministry** – The purpose of the committee is to study the needs of youth and their parents and serve as an advisory panel to the Minister of Youth in identifying, planning, developing, coordinating, and implementing programs and activities to meet these needs.

### Volunteer Positions and Opportunities

- **First Impressions** – This group exists to assist members and visitors alike in feeling welcome on campus. The group consists of subgroups with focused duties: Greeters, Hosts, Parking Attendants, Ushers, and Welcome Center Workers.

- **Nursery Workers** – Provide care for children between the ages of newborn and 5 years during the Sunday morning worship service.
- **Media Library Staff** – The purpose of the Church Media Library is to provide and promote the use of wholesome media for reading, teaching, training, and growing persons.
- **Music Ministry** – Assist the Minister of Music in leading musical worship during worship services. Consists of choir members, musicians, and praise team members.
- **Prayer Partners** – Serve in the prayer room during the morning worship service. Each prayer partner spends 30 minutes in the prayer room on the assigned date. Offer “real time” prayer for prayer requests from the guest registration cards completed in the worship service and pray for needs on the weekly prayer list and for the worship service.
- **Sunshine Class Workers** – FBC’s Sunshine Class is designed to provide a safe learning environment for our special needs members and guests during both the Sunday School hour and the worship service.
- **Sunday School Teachers** – Teach adult and children’s Sunday School classes.
- **Van Drivers** – Provide transportation for people who need a ride for worship services.

### Finding Your Place in Ministry

- Take a few moments to complete the attached Spiritual Gifts survey. This is a tool used to help you understand how God has gifted you to serve in the local church.
- After completing the survey, consider the results of your spiritual gifts survey along with the natural gifts, talents, and abilities God has given you, and consider how God has equipped you to serve best here at FBC.
- Having considered how your spiritual gifts and natural abilities line up with particular committees or volunteer positions, it is important to know how to actually volunteer and begin serving.
  - Each summer, members of the church receive a form on which they indicate the committees and positions through which they would like to serve.
  - When you have this opportunity, volunteer for those committees and positions that are a good match with your spiritual gifts and natural abilities.
  - FBC’s Nominating Committee and Committee on Committees will use these forms to fill committees and volunteer positions for the next year to be voted upon by the congregation.

## APPENDIX 20

### MEMBERSHIP CLASS SECTION 4

#### Section 4– What We Expect

##### Responsibilities of Members

- Each member of FBC is responsible for obeying Christ's Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**) to make disciples of all nations. As this is the responsibility of every follower of Christ, it is also critical as a responsibility for members of the local church.
- Each member of FBC is responsible for loving God and loving others as Christ commanded in the Great Commandment (**Matthew 22:37-39**).
- Each member of FBC is responsible for growing in grace and knowledge (**2 Peter 3:18**). Growth in Christ is a life-long process, and every member should engage in worship, be involved in classes, and be dedicated to ongoing discipleship in his or her life to be always growing in Christ.
- Each member of FBC is responsible to study in order to correctly understand God's Word and serve the Lord (**2 Timothy 2:15**).
- Each member of FBC is responsible to promote the prosperity and spirituality of the local church, to sustain its worship, ordinances, doctrines, and discipline; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations (Constitution, Article V).
- Each member of FBC is responsible for maintaining personal and family devotions to disciple and educate his or her children.
- Each member of FBC is responsible for walking biblically in the world, being just in dealings with others, faithful in engagements, and Christ-like in behavior.
- Each member of FBC is called upon to hold his or her brothers and sisters in the local church accountable – always speaking the truth in love.

##### Conflict Resolution

- Should a member of FBC be found in unrepentant sin, Christ's instructions and outline for addressing conflict should be followed to the letter (**Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13**).
- Church discipline should never, on any level, be carried out from rivalry or spite; but must always be done in love and with a desire to see the offending member returned to fellowship through repentance.

- Where there is dissention or disagreement for reasons other than unrepentant sin, members of FBC are urged to “agree in the Lord” as were Euodia and Syntyche in **Philippians 4:2-3**, remembering that we labor together in the work of the gospel.

### Stewardship

- Serving Christ within the context of the local church includes faithful stewardship of:
  - Time – Attendance and Involvement in corporate worship and discipleship opportunities (**Hebrews 10:24-25**)
  - Talents – serving in accordance with your spiritual gifts and natural abilities for the glory of God and the good of the local church
  - Material Possessions (Tithing and Giving)
    - **Acts 2:44-46** – In the early church, believers gave sacrificially to support one another’s needs.
    - **Matthew 23:23-24** – Jesus affirmed the Old Testament practice of tithing, but raised the expectation, teaching that we must not neglect the “weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.”
    - **2 Corinthians 8:1-5** – Christians should start by tithing at least 10% of their income as regular giving to the local church. Then, as opportunities are presented for additional giving through special offerings and missions support, Christians should give generously and cheerfully above and beyond their regular giving as the Lord leads.
- Each member of FBC should contribute to the work of the local church, contributing according to his or her means, in accordance with the Scriptures, cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer’s cause on earth (Constitution, Article IV, Section 13).

## APPENDIX 21

### POLICY CHANGE PROPOSAL

Current Bylaw: Adopted August 21, 1996 (sections 1-3 of 7)

#### **Article I. Church Membership**

##### **Section 1. General**

- a) This is a sovereign and democratic Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto itself the exclusive right of self-government in all phases of spiritual and temporal life of this church.
- b) The membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who shall be members of this church and the conditions of such membership.

##### **Section 2. Candidacy**

Any person may offer himself or herself as a candidate for membership in this church. All candidates for membership shall be presented to the church and voted upon during any regular service in the following ways:

- a) **By Profession of Faith:** Any person publicly professing personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of a regenerate heart, and holding the views of the faith and practice of this church, shall, upon baptism by immersion, be admitted into the full fellowship of the church.
- b) **By Letter or Transfer of Membership:** Any person coming from another Baptist church of like faith and order may be received into membership upon receipt of a letter of transfer from that respective church.
- c) **By Statement or Restoration:** Because of loss of records or similar unavoidable circumstances, any person who has trusted Christ as his personal savior and was baptized by immersion, and whose record of membership is not available, may be received into full fellowship.
- d) **By Baptism from Another Denomination:** Any person who meets the requirements for membership under Section 2, a above, but who has been baptized by any method other than immersion, must be immersed to become a member of this body.
- e) **Dissent:** Should there be any dissent as to any candidate, such dissent shall be referred to the pastor and deacons for investigation. They shall make a recommendation to the church within thirty (30) days. A three-fourths vote of those church members present and voting shall be required to elect such candidates to membership.

##### **Section 3. New Member Orientation**

- a) All new members of this church will be expected to participate in the church's New Member Orientation plan conducted by the pastor or someone he designates.
- b) The purpose of the New Member Orientation is as follows:
  1. Affirm the new member in his/her decision and extend a welcome into the fellowship.

2. Insure that the new member has assurance of his or her salvation.
  3. Provide the new member with an understanding of our doctrine and polity.
  4. Acquaint the new member with the organizational structure, programs and ministries of our church.
  5. Help the new member understand how he/she can find a place of ministry in the church.
  6. Inform the new member about the stewardship program of the church.
- c) The New Member Orientation shall be done by personal conference or class instructions and by presentation of a New Member Information Packet provided by the deacons.

Proposed Bylaw (changes indicated in italics): (sections 1-3 of 7; sections 4-7 remain unchanged)

## **Article I. Church Membership**

### **Section 1. General**

- a) This is a sovereign and democratic Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto itself the exclusive right of self-government in all phases of spiritual and temporal life of this church.
- b) The membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who shall be members of this church and the conditions of such membership.

### **Section 2. Candidacy**

Any person may offer himself or herself as a candidate for membership in this church. *Upon completion of a prerequisite membership class*, all candidates for membership shall be presented to the church and voted upon during any regular service in the following ways:

- a) **By Profession of Faith:** Any person publicly professing personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of a regenerate heart, and holding the views of the faith and practice of this church, shall, upon baptism by immersion *and the completion of the membership class*, be admitted into the full fellowship of the church.
- b) **By Letter or Transfer of Membership:** Any person coming from another Baptist church of like faith and order may be received into membership upon *completion of the membership class and* receipt of a letter of transfer from that respective church.
- c) **By Statement or Restoration:** Because of loss of records or similar unavoidable circumstances, any person who has trusted Christ as his personal savior and was baptized by immersion, *who has completed the membership class*, and whose record of membership is not available, may be received into full fellowship.
- d) **By Baptism from Another Denomination:** Any person who meets the requirements for membership under Section 2, a above, *and has completed the membership class*, but who has been baptized by any method other than immersion, must be immersed to become a member of this body.
- e) **Dissent:** Should there be any dissent as to any candidate, such dissent shall be referred to the pastor and deacons for investigation. They shall make a recommendation to the church within thirty (30) days. A three-fourths vote of

those church members present and voting shall be required to elect such candidates to membership.

**Section 3. Membership Class**

- a) All candidates for membership at First Baptist Church Talladega will be required to participate in a prerequisite membership class conducted by the pastor or someone he designates. Candidates cannot be voted into membership until completion of the membership class.
- b) The purpose of the membership class is as follows:
  1. Affirm the candidate in his/her desire to join as a member of First Baptist Church, extend a welcome, and explain the benefits and privileges of church membership.
  2. Insure that the candidate has a clear understanding of the gospel and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
  3. Provide the candidate with an understanding of the statement of faith and the polity of First Baptist Church.
  4. Acquaint the candidate with the organizational structure, programs and ministries, and denominational involvement of First Baptist Church.
  5. Help the candidate understand the various places of service at First Baptist Church, the proper procedure for becoming involved, and how his/her spiritual gifts best fit the service opportunities at First Baptist Church.
  6. Inform the candidate about the stewardship program of the church, including First Baptist Church's understanding of the biblical instructions for giving and how funds are used in and through the ministries of First Baptist Church and the entities with which it cooperates.
  7. Clearly define expectations for membership including attendance, involvement, and service.
- c) The New Member Orientation shall be conducted by personal conference or class instructions and shall include the presentation to the candidate of materials pertaining to the subject matter to be addressed in the class.
  1. Any individual may participate in the membership class each time it is offered and is under no obligation upon completion of the class to join First Baptist Church.
  2. Current members of First Baptist Church who wish to participate in the membership class may do so if they became members prior to the class being offered.
  3. The membership class shall be offered at least once per year, or as often as the pastor deems necessary based on the frequency of visitors or inquiries concerning membership to First Baptist Church.
- d) Any person expressing a desire to join as a member of First Baptist Church who has not yet completed the membership class, but who otherwise fulfills the obligations of Section 2 may be placed under the watch care of First Baptist Church.
  1. Under watch care, a membership candidate will be placed under the care of a First Baptist Church deacon and may participate on any of the ministry teams of First Baptist Church.



2. *Candidates under watch care shall not have voting rights in business meetings of First Baptist Church, be permitted to serve on church committees or as church officers, nor serve as the main teacher of any Sunday School or Bible study class, whether composed of children or adults.*
  3. *Children under the age of 18 will not be required to participate in the membership class. Upon reaching the age of 18, children who are members must participate in the membership class within a year. Upon reaching the age of 19, any member who has not completed the membership class will be placed under watch care until such time as he/she completes the membership class.*
- e) *Ministerial staff, voted upon by the congregation of First Baptist Church, will, in order to effectively perform their ministry duties, be immediately considered members of First Baptist Church upon congregational vote to extend a call to minister. With the exception of the senior pastor, ministerial staff shall participate in the membership class as soon as it is offered after joining in this manner. It is the duty of the senior pastor to oversee the membership class and its curriculum.*

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## ABSTRACT

### EFFECTIVELY AND BIBLICALLY ASSIMILATING NEW MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH TALLADEGA, ALABAMA

Robert Alan Klotz, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

This project sought to help First Baptist Church Talladega effectively assimilate new church members as a significant step in the process of its revitalization as a local church. As opposed to the previous method of a New Member Orientation after an individual had joined as a member of the church, the project demonstrates the advantages of utilizing a prerequisite membership class to better prepare and incorporate new members into the local church. The project assessed the New Member Orientation process, developed a teaching series to teach the members of FBC about effectively assimilating biblical church members, developed a curriculum for the prerequisite membership class, and included a policy change proposal to transition to a prerequisite membership class as the new method for assimilating new members at FBC.

## VITA

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