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TEACHING THE DEFINITION AND VALUE OF REGENERATE
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
WEST COLUMBIA, TEXAS

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TEACHING THE DEFINITION AND VALUE OF REGENERATE
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WEST
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To Danyel, Elijah, Mia,
and Jude, blessings
beyond degree.

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PREFACE

This project could not have been completed without support and assistance from many people. Dr. Adam Greenway, my supervising professor, encouraged me to pay attention to detail and prodded me toward completion. I am grateful for his discerning eye, his thoughtful critique of the project, and his patient and gracious spirit.

I am blessed to have a loving, understanding and encouraging wife. When I did not think I could continue she encouraged me to persevere. She showed great patience, endured many nights alone with our children, and loved me through the whole process. My love for her continues to grow.

Our three beautiful children are a constant encouragement to me. Their hugs, kisses, and smiles are indescribable gifts from God. I love Eli, Mia, and Jude more than I could ever explain, and I am humbled that God has entrusted them to us.

Most of all, I am indebted to Christ my Savior. This project is not presented in an effort to display merit for his use, but as further evidence that God can use anyone to do anything that He pleases.

Ryan Richard Lintelman

West Columbia, Texas

December 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this ministry project was to develop a system for training the congregation of First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas, in the definition and value of regenerate church membership.

Goals

This project's superseding goal was to develop my pastoral leadership ability in the process of guiding a congregation through a potentially tenuous issue, namely regenerate church membership. The standard for personal evaluation was the project's three established goals. The first goal was to establish a biblical understanding of church membership among the congregation as a whole. There are many contemporary views concerning the essential characteristics of the biblical church. Most church members considered the church to be merely an address as opposed to a dynamic community of regenerated persons to which they are necessarily connected. Four sermons over a ten-week period challenged First Baptist Church to observe and realize that converted persons constitute the church and motivated them, therefore, to be the church instead of attending a church.

The second goal was to establish understanding of the value of regenerate

church membership to the individual church member. Through a five-week small group study, a selected focus group of adults was taught the importance of participation in a community of faith to their personal spiritual development. The foundational theme of the study was the need for every church member to be a genuine believer. The study clearly stated that without conversion an individual receives no spiritual benefit from church membership. The study did not diminish the weight of individual spiritual disciplines such as private prayer and fasting, but it displayed that participation in a local church is, in and of itself, a spiritual discipline essential to spiritual growth.

The third goal was to alert the focus group members to their responsibility, as believers in Christ, to the edification of the body. Through a five-week small group study, the focus group members were taught that they were created and chosen, in Christ Jesus, for a specific purpose. The study clearly stated that without conversion an individual has no biblical responsibility to the church. The focus group was reminded of the privilege of serving God in and through his church, and that the local church has a kingdom purpose for intentional individuals to carry out corporately

Context

First Baptist Church is located in West Columbia, Texas, in Brazoria County. West Columbia was the first capital of the Republic of Texas, and Brazoria County calls itself the birthplace of Texas. West Columbia is located about fifty miles south of Houston, Texas, and is largely a blue-collar commuter community. Dow Chemical, BASF, Conoco-Philips Chemical, and Chevron-Philips Gas and Petroleum all have major plants or refineries within thirty miles of West Columbia. Many of the members of First Baptist Church have lived their entire lives in this blue-collar community.

The nearest large town to West Columbia is Lake Jackson, a city founded by Dow in the 1950's. While expansion from Houston has begun to drift south, West Columbia is fifteen years from feeling the impact of any southward urban sprawl. The population of West Columbia has remained stagnant for the last ten years, and there is little to no new development in the city or the surrounding areas. Almost all new development goes to Lake Jackson or to Angleton, a nearby town directly adjacent to the nearest freeway. The nearest four year university to West Columbia is the University of Houston and the nearest two year college is Brazosport College in Lake Jackson. Most college aged individuals move away from West Columbia to attend school or to find work.

The trend for West Columbia is not representative of the county as a whole. The population of the county is expected to increase by more than 10 percent from 2004 to 2009 while the population of West Columbia is expected to increase by less than 2 percent over the same period. The population of the 77486 zip code, containing West Columbia, is approximately 7,100 people and the median household income is \$43,000. First Baptist Church faces the challenge of engaging an aging, traditional, historic, blue-collar community with little expectation of immediate growth in population or income.¹

First Baptist Church is located in a heavily churched area. Within a ten-mile radius, there are at least three churches of varying denominations, two of which are Southern Baptist, that average twice the attendance of First Baptist Church. Within the same ten-mile radius, there are no less than fifteen Southern Baptist churches and nearly fifty churches of varying denominations. First Baptist Church meets within a block of

¹Demographic data report for zip code 77486, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2004.

four other churches of varying denominations. With West Columbia anticipating little to no expected growth, all of these churches are vying for the same potential congregants. Almost every family in West Columbia claims membership to a congregation, whether they actively attend or not.

First Baptist Church entered into a time of transition in 2005. The church found itself in decline for the first time in its recent history. A youth minister had resigned because of a perceived moral failure, and his replacement was encouraged to step down because the church did not feel that he “fit in.” The church had been without a music minister and had recently hired a part-time to fill the gap while the church searched for a full time staff member. Immediately following this time of great turmoil, the church decided to enter into the “40 Days of Purpose” campaign. The church invested great time, energy, and money into understanding what it takes to become a “Purpose-Driven Church.” The intent of the campaign was to bring the church together under one banner and move forward. Unfortunately, the result was a deep divide in the church that remained as an obstacle to the church’s going forward for several years.

In an effort to “transition” the church into a Purpose-Driven model, the pastor brought in an outside consultant to assist in moving the church in the appropriate direction. The consultant became a lightning rod in the church, and the church split, with a small group leaving to form a church plant that was intended to be Purpose-Driven. Three years later, the group that left remained largely intact but had not grown. The church they left behind remained in constant decline without any central purpose or direction to rally around.

By 2007, the church seemed to have waded through all of the problems and divisions. The waters were calm, and the church stood at the edge of a great opportunity to begin effective ministry in the church and in the West Columbia community. A year passed, and the optimism of that moment faded. The church remained in decline and the church people became increasingly apathetic and lethargic. The question in 2007 was whether the church would choose a course of action determined by comfort, familiarity, and convenience, or choose an uncomfortable, challenging, and rewarding path to become a healthy, growing congregation. Unfortunately, the church was led in neither direction, and therefore, chose the path of least resistance.

The decline of the church could be traced back to 2005. Since 2005, average church attendance dropped from 220 to 150, while average Sunday school attendance declined from 180 to 120. In 2004, there were nineteen baptisms, but there were less than 19 baptisms in total between 2005 and 2009. The period between 2004 and 2007 stood as an example of poor leadership in casting vision, garnering support, standing by core values, and resolving conflict. The result was a church that had no mission, vision, or strategy.

An effort to find a positive aspect revealed that the church was doing a few things well. The group that the church was doing the best job of reaching was young married Caucasians with children age five and under. The new additions in this age group were diversified between white and blue-collar families. The preschool department and young married departments were the two fastest growing departments in the church over the three-year span between 2004 and 2007. Unfortunately, 100 percent

of the growth has come through transfer growth or biological growth. The growth in this age group could be a foundation for future growth.

A close examination of First Baptist Church revealed that the core problem is the church's lack of understanding of what it means to be the church. The mindset of the majority of the membership was a "country club" mindset. As long as the bills were paid, the staff kept things in relative order, and there was "something" provided for all ages to do, then the church was operating successfully. The church lacked spiritual vision and rarely approached its ministry from a spiritual position. The prayer ministry of the church was almost nonexistent. There were no church-wide evangelistic efforts. The financial needs of the church were met and therefore the church must have been blessed of God. Meanwhile, no member was held accountable for moral conduct or even church attendance. The percentage of "inactive deacons" mirrored the percentage of "inactive church members." There was no clear sense in the church of a biblical definition or purpose of church membership. The goal of this project was to fill the greatest perceived need of First Baptist Church, namely to understand what a church member is, what his responsibilities are to the church as a member, and in turn the church's responsibilities to him. When that foundation was established, the church obtained common ground on which to stand together and from which to move forward.

Rationale

A churchwide survey conducted in fall 2007 revealed that 50 percent of survey participants did not believe personal conversion was necessary in order to become a church member. There was no clear evidence as to how this view of church membership developed in the church. First Baptist Church's previous pastors seem to have been

conservative evangelicals, theologically speaking. Church members could not recall a low view of church membership being taught or preached during the church's recent history. The confusion over church membership was most likely the result of the observation that all of the members of the church were not converted, therefore, conversion must not be necessary for church membership.

In order for First Baptist Church to pursue its purpose of kingdom ministry in southwest Brazoria County, it was imperative that the church understand and intentionally live out biblical church membership. Membership in the body serves as the foundation for accountability within the church. When church membership loses its value, the church loses mutual accountability.

Jesus established the church upon the apostles and their teachings about him. He established the church as an entity against which the gates of hell cannot prevail (Matt 16:18). The Holy Spirit came in fullness to the church at Pentecost, empowering the church to do the work for which God designed and called her. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture, as well as influenced and guided the church fathers as they assembled, organized, and preserved the Bible. God established the church as a community that will usher in his kingdom to the earth. He ordained the church as one body, with one head, gathered together corporately in local communities of faith. God chose each member of every local body for an appointed task that only he is able to accomplish within the ministry of the local church. A consumer culture, driven by convenience, has ignored and perverted the truth of the church's nature.

This project stood as a call to First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas, to return to her first love. This project was an effort to reform the local congregation into a

community of regenerate souls. The project sought to project the value of mutual accountability and edification to the individual believer and to alert the individual believer of his responsibility to the body.

Definitions and Limitations

In this project, Article VI from the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* served as the guideline for the definition of a 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.²

This project emphasized the aspects of the local congregation understanding that each local congregation forms a part of the universal body of Christ.

The limitations on this project were as follows. The first limitation was the fifteen weeks allotted for completion of the project. The fifteen weeks consisted of four sermons preached concerning the nature of the church and church membership and two five-week, small group Bible studies. The first five-week Bible study covered the definition of church membership and the responsibility of the church member to the church. The second five-week Bible study explored a corporate understanding of regenerate church membership and the congregation's responsibility to the individual

²*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Southern Baptist Convention, 2005.

church member. This project aimed to define church membership, to discover the responsibilities of each church member to the congregation as a whole, and to develop the ministry of the congregation to individual church members.

The project's scope was itself a limitation. The four sermons were preached to the whole congregation, but the Bible studies were conducted within the context of a focus group of fifteen to twenty adult members. I began this project as a support staff member, and it was not plausible for me to conduct a church-wide Bible study. But I became the pastor allowing for more freedom to conduct the project. These studies were intended to add basic understanding of church membership to a core group of First Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Introduction

The first chapter laid the groundwork for this project and its importance to the church. First Baptist Church West Columbia must gain a firm understanding of biblical church membership in order to lay the foundation for effective evangelism, Christian growth, and church discipline. This chapter examines the biblical and theological basis for the principle of regenerate church membership, which is an ecclesiological issue with soteriological implications. More is at stake than church membership rolls. A church's view of its membership determines what the church is, who the church is, and what the church's function should be. This chapter begins with Christ as the founder and foundation of the church and then seeks to establish a biblical definition of the church. Based upon a biblical definition of the church this chapter argues that regeneration should be a necessity for church membership. The chapter concludes by highlighting two functions of the church and its members that can only be carried out by regenerate persons: growth in Christlikeness and church discipline.

Christ Is the Founder and Foundation of the Church

This chapter examines the teachings of Jesus concerning his church, beginning with an exploration of the church's nature. As the nature of the church is clarified the parameters for church membership are clarified as well. The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is the founder and foundation of the church. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul writes, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ will, therefore, form the foundation for this discussion of the church.

Matthew 16: 13-19 contains Jesus' only direct statement about the establishment of the church. In verses 18-19 Jesus says, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."¹ A careful reading of this verse seems to imply that Jesus intended for Peter to be the foundation of the church. However, Peter himself identifies Jesus as the "cornerstone" of the church in 1 Peter 2:4-8 just as Paul identified Jesus as the church's foundation in 1 Corinthians 3:11.²

Matthew 16:13-19 is descriptive of Christ's chosen method for building his church. Jesus builds the church through people, beginning with Peter and the other apostles. France states, "In principle all the apostles constituted the foundation, with

¹All scripture references from the New American Standard Bible.

²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 471. Hagner writes, "But to allow this passage its natural meaning, that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, is by no means either to affirm the papacy or to deny that the church, like the apostles, rests upon Jesus as the bedrock of its existence."

Jesus as the cornerstone, but as a matter of historical fact it was on Peter's leadership that the earliest phase of the church's development would depend."³ The apostle's ministry and writings were foundational to the Lord's building his church, and Peter's ministry and writings were foundational to the work of the other apostles. However, the emphasis of their ministries is that Jesus is working through them to build his church for his own glory.

Christ's character is the criteria for the materials and methods useful in building his church.⁴ In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Paul writes,

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

It is supremely important that the structure of the church matches its foundation, which is Jesus Christ. The work of God's people will be tested constantly and the works of Christ through his people will be differentiated clearly from the best works of men. Gordon Fee warns,

It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated merely on worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, "pop" psychology, managerial techniques, relational "good feelings" or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be

³R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 623.

⁴Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 145. Fee writes, "The reason for care in building the superstructure is related to the character of the foundation. . . . For Paul the 'gold, silver, and costly stones' represent what is compatible with the foundation, the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified; what will perish is *Sophia* in all of its human forms," emphasis original.

shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or gospel in it.⁵

In the final analysis, only the work of Christ done in and through his people will stand the test.

Therefore, not only is the church built upon Christ, but it is built by Christ.

The church is made up of people called out by the Lord himself to assemble in his name for the purpose of his gospel. Wayne Grudem asserts, "Jesus Christ himself builds the church by calling people to himself."⁶ The New Testament word for the church, *ἐκκλησία*, means "assembly." The word used in the Old and New Testaments refers to an assembly of God's people.⁷ In the Old Testament God distinguished his people through the covenants he made with them. The church, as the people of God, is no different. The church is God's people established in the new covenant through the blood of Christ.⁸ Luke 22:20 says, "And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.'" Jesus himself establishes his new covenant people through the pouring out of his own blood. It

⁵Ibid., 145.

⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 853.

⁷Ibid., 854. Grudem says, "However, the extensive use of the word *ἐκκλησία* in the Septuagint to refer to assemblies not of pagan mobs but specifically of God's people certainly must be taken into account in understanding the meaning of the word when used by New Testament authors. The Septuagint was the Bible that they most commonly used, and they are certainly using the word *ἐκκλησία* with awareness of its Old Testament content. . . . The New Testament church is an assembly of God's people that simply continues in the pattern of assemblies of God's people found throughout the Old Testament."

⁸D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1984), 369. Carson states, "Jesus speaks of his followers as his people – his church – who come in time to see themselves as people of the new covenant established in Messiah's blood."

important to note that the new covenant is not universal but it includes only those who are saved through faith in Jesus as Lord and savior.

The new covenant in Jesus Christ changes the constitution of God's people from a nation, Israel, to a people identified with the Messiah. Jesus arrival changes the nature of the word *ἐκκλησία* from the gathering of a nation to the assembly of God's redeemed people. R. T. France writes, "The coming of the messiah will cause 'the assembly' to be reconstituted, and the focus of its identity will not be the nation of Israel but the messiah himself: it is his assembly."⁹ Through Jesus' incarnation God personally identifies himself with his assembled people, his church. In the same way his church should reflect the identity of Christ. The church is inextricably linked to the messiahship of Jesus. It is his community,¹⁰ and it looks forward to his return. As Hagner asserts, "If Jesus is the Christ then it is natural to expect the community Jesus refers to is the messianic community or the eschatological people of God."¹¹ The church is God's assembly begun by Jesus Messiah, built upon him, by him, for his purpose and glory to be perfected by him at his second coming.

The Definition of the Church

As has already been stated, the biblical word translated as church is *ἐκκλησία*. *ἐκκλησία* means assembly. In the Scriptures it refers to an assembly of God's people. The word only appears in Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17 in the four

⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 623.

¹⁰Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 424. Morris writes, "If he [Jesus] was Messiah he would be linked with a community that followed his teachings."

¹¹Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 471.

Gospels but it is more widely used in the Epistles.¹² The word is always used to describe a group of people and never to denote any sort of physical building. Therefore, when Jesus refers to "building his church" he is speaking metaphorically about growing the assembly of his people.¹³ The church is not a static structure but a dynamic group of people assembling together for a specific purpose.

The purpose of the church is indicative of the existence of a church. In other words, in order for an assembly to constitute a church, it must be pursuing the purposes that define a church. For the reformers, the marks of the church are preaching God's word and observing the sacraments (ordinances). John Calvin wrote, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."¹⁴ For Calvin and the other reformers preaching the word was equivalent to preaching the gospel of salvation by grace alone (*sola fide*), through faith alone (*sola gratia*). The church is responsible for "purely" preaching this gospel and also correctly observing the ordinances. In both cases the church acts as a protector of the truth of God's word.

¹²John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 31. Hammett gives a complete breakdown of how the word ἐκκλησία is used in the New Testament in a chart that states, "2 times ἐκκλησία is used with reference to the Old Testament congregation. 3 times it is used for a secular assembly. 6 times it is used in a general or nonspecific sense. 13 times it is used for the universal church. 90 times it is used with reference to a local church or churches, assemblies that have a degree of order and purposefulness in their gatherings." Of those 90 times, "40 times it is found in the singular, for a local church. 14 times it is used for all the Christians in a city, who apparently met and acted together. 36 times ἐκκλησία is used in the plural for local churches."

¹³France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 623.

¹⁴John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1023.

Just as the church has a unique purpose, the church is a unique gathering of people, defined by Grudem as "the community of all true believers for all time."¹⁵ The church, then, is an exclusive group separated from the world by common beliefs. Carson states, "In Acts and in the Epistles it [ἐκκλησία] usually refers to Christian congregations or to all God's people redeemed by Christ."¹⁶ The common belief shared by the members of the church is the belief in redemption through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is the people of God separated from the rest of the world by the redemption of God's son experienced through faith. As John S. Hammett puts it, "The very distinction in the New Testament between the church and the world indicates that the church differs from the world, and does so because the church is composed of those who believe in Christ, belong to God, and are bound together by the Spirit."¹⁷ The biblical definition of the church presupposes that the church is made up of regenerate persons.

While the church is a group of individuals called out through faith in Christ, they are called into a body or a group of believers. Millard Erickson defines the church as "the collective dimension of the Christian life."¹⁸ Individuals make up the church, but no individual is the church. As has been stated, the church is an assembly that gathers together for a purpose. France asserts, "For Matthew and his readers, as members of the Messiah's ἐκκλησία, the phrase would aptly sum up their corporate identity as the new

¹⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853.

¹⁶Carson, *Matthew*, 369.

¹⁷Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 83.

¹⁸Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1036.

international people of God."¹⁹ A church, therefore, is a group of believers bonded together by common faith and a common cause. The church gathers together to build each other up in faith and spur each other on to their common goal. James Adamson states, "The church is a redemptive brotherhood."²⁰ It is a group of people who have been redeemed who work together for the redemption of others. Those who have not been redeemed cannot enjoy this common fellowship or this common purpose.

The redeemed people assembled by God for a redemptive purpose are an eternal people. Carson avers, "Because the church is the assembly of people Jesus Messiah is building, it cannot die."²¹ This eternal people have been given authority by Jesus Christ who founded the church. The church has been given authority to carry out its eternal purpose. In Matthew 16 Jesus calls this authority the "keys to the kingdom." Jesus said that the "gates of Hell" would not have victory over the church. Hendriksen states, "The real meaning of 'church' as here used has already been indicated. Jesus promised that he would always cause his people to triumph over the devil and his army."²² The authority Christ has given the church insures its victory over the enemy but also creates responsibility for the church to act in accordance with will of Jesus. The individual members of the church submit to the God given authority of the assembled church. Carson adds, "If the church, Messiah's eschatological people already gathered now, has to exercise the ministry of the keys, if it must bind and loose, then clearly one

¹⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 623.

²⁰James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 202.

²¹Carson, *Matthew*, 370.

²²William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1973), 650, emphasis original.

aspect of that will be the discipline of those who profess to constitute it."²³ Church discipline is a direct result of the authority given to the church. The First Scots Confession 1560²⁴ as well as the Belgic Confession 1561²⁵ added church discipline to the preaching of the word and the sacraments as the third mark of the true church. It is the responsibility of the church to hold its members accountable. Hagner posits, "In its primary meaning, the phrase 'binding and loosing' refers to the allowing and disallowing of certain conduct . . . and thus it concerns the issue of whether or not one is in proper relationship to the will of God."²⁶ The members of the church are held accountable in their relationship with God.

If people outside of a relationship with God are allowed as members it creates many problems. One serious problem is that of false assurance. Allowing non-regenerate persons to be church members gives unsaved persons reason to believe that they are in fact saved. Another problem is there is no standard to hold the non-believing member accountable to. A third problem is the possibility of a non-believer being entrusted with disciplinary authority only intended for believers. As Hammet puts it, "Church discipline and regenerate church membership are related in that the former can be effectively practiced only by a congregation composed of the latter, and that the

²³Carson, *Matthew*, 374.

²⁴John Knox, "The Notes by which the True Kirk shall be determined from the False, and Who shall be Judged of Doctrine," in *The First Scots Confession*, quoted from *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.)*, pt. 1, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996).

²⁵Guido de Bres, "The Obligations of Church Members," in *The Belgic Confession* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Church Press, 2011), 13.

²⁶Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 473.

former is necessary to maintain the genuineness of the latter."²⁷ Carson continues, "The church of Jesus Christ is more than an audience. It is a group with confessional standards, one of which here precipitates Jesus' remarks regarding the keys. The continuity of the church depends as much on discipline as on truth."²⁸ The unity of the church depends upon a regenerate church membership committed to the truth of the gospel submitting to the authority of the body. The church body must use its authority to maintain purity and harmony within the congregation. Morris writes, "If we take this seriously, the saying means that the Spirit-inspired church will be able to declare authoritatively what things are forbidden and what things are permitted."²⁹ The authority of the church and its effectiveness relies on the purity of the identity of its members.

While discipline is important, ultimately it serves to protect the truth of the gospel. William Mounce states, "These rules and instructions are to be followed not for their sake alone but because there is a greater reality at stake: the health of the gospel."³⁰ The condition of the church affects the perceived authority of the gospel that it claims. If the church fails to maintain its identity then the gospel message is damaged. Hendriksen adds, "As the pillar supports the roof, even better (note the climax!) as the foundation supports the entire superstructure, so the church supports the glorious truth of the gospel."³¹ The church is founded by the gospel, held together by the gospel, and the

²⁷Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 106-7.

²⁸Carson, *Matthew*, 374.

²⁹Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 426.

³⁰William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 219.

³¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 136.

mission of the church is the proclamation of the gospel. The two are so intricately intertwined. To disturb one necessarily disturbs the other. Mounce asserts, "As God's house [the church] must protect God's gospel."³² Church membership and church discipline are important because the gospel is at stake. The Reformers valued church discipline to the point that it was added to the right preaching of God's word and the ordinances as a mark of the true church.³³ Mounce continues, "[The church] must maintain its sanctity because of its essential function as a guardian of the truth."³⁴ The church must use its God given authority to discipline its flock and fulfill its victorious purpose.

Regeneration: A Necessity for Church Membership

The church is the corporate expression of the Christian faith, and as such should only include adherents to Christianity. The church, however, is not perfect, and as long as it remains a human entity, it will remain imperfect. The church is the method prescribed by God for Christians to grow in their faith and fulfill the mission of sharing the gospel with every nation. John Calvin stated, "Shut up as we are in the prison house of our flesh, we have not yet attained angelic rank. God, therefore, in his wonderful providence accommodating himself to our capacity has prescribed a way for us, though still far off, to draw near to him."³⁵ As a means of drawing near to God, the church has a responsibility to seek to remain pure and disciplined.

³²Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214.

³³See notes 24 and 25 in the chapter.

³⁴Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 215.

³⁵Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1012.

While the true church is a community of genuine believers, one must admit that the visible church contains those who are not truly reborn. Charles Hodge gave five reasons why the visible church cannot consist of only the regenerate.

1. Because men cannot read the heart; it is impossible.
2. Competent knowledge and credible profession are the requirements [for church membership] both of which can be obtained without regeneration.
3. God forbids the attempt in the parable of the wheat and tares.
4. Christ admitted Judas into his disciples.
5. All attempts at an exclusively regenerate church have failed.³⁶

It is true that the visible church will not contain only true believers, but it should remain a standard to be striven for. Erickson comments, "While perfect purity of the membership is an ideal that cannot be realized within this life, open unbelief and sin are not to be tolerated."³⁷ Unrepentant or unbelieving individuals should not be included in the fellowship of the local church. This is not to say that these types of people should not be welcome to attend the church, but they should not be recognized as members of any Christian church.

Second Corinthians 6:14-16 speaks to the necessity of seeking to maintain a pure and disciplined fellowship.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

³⁶Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, pt. III (New York: Scribners, 1872-73; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 548.

³⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1058.

These verses address the nature of relationships between believers and unbelievers. Kistemaker avers, "The passage conveys the message not to form any covenant relationships with unbelievers that violate the covenant obligations a Christian has with God."³⁸ Should a person's membership to a church be considered as a covenant relationship? It seems that a person who seeks to become a member of a church fellowship is entering into a mutually beneficial covenant. As such, no unbelieving people should be allowed to enter into church membership. Harris continues, "This is a prohibition against forming close attachments with non-Christians."³⁹ Non-regenerate people should not be allowed as members even if one does not consider church membership to be a covenant relationship. Martin states, "There is to be a distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian."⁴⁰ The church should be the location of this distinction.

This passage goes further in emphasizing the importance of a regenerate congregation by using Temple imagery. Martin continues, "The living God, the one who provides the only way to life – through rebirth – is in Paul's mind and is conveyed by a favorite element of his apostolic teaching, namely the temple-concept."⁴¹ Only those who have been reborn make up the temple of God. Barnett states, "Corporately the

³⁸Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 228.

³⁹Murray J. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1976), 359.

⁴⁰Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 196.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 203.

people whose hearts have been changed by the Spirit are the 'temple of the living God.'"⁴²

Those whose hearts have been changed make up the Christian community, or the church. Harris describes the mutuality of the temple concept stating, "Corporately the Christian community forms 'the temple of the living God.'"⁴³ The temple of the living God is those who have been changed by the Spirit, who make up the Christian community, which is the church. Barnett sums it up by writing, "Under the new covenant, however, the temple of God is the congregation of holy ones, those set apart to God in Jesus Christ and made so by God's indwelling presence, the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ The visible church should adhere as closely as possible to the true church.

It is illogical to admit knowingly members of the visible church who are not also a part of the "temple of the living God." Jonathan Edwards confronted this issue in his ministry in New Haven, Connecticut. He wrote,

In a word the practice of promiscuous admission, or that way of taking all into the church indifferently, as visible saints, who are not either ignorant or scandalous, and at the same time that custom's taking place of persons publishing their own conversion in common conversation; where these two things meet together, they unavoidably make two distinct kinds of visible churches, or different bodies of professing saints, on within another, openly distinguished one from another, as it were by a visible dividing line. One company consisting of those who are visibly gracious Christians, and open professors of godliness; another consisting of those who are visibly moral livers, and only profess common virtues, without pretending to any special and spiritual experiences in their hearts, and who therefore are not reputed to be converts. . . . But I leave the judicious reader to make his own remarks on this case, and to determine, whether there be a just foundation in Scripture or

⁴²Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 351.

⁴³Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 351.

⁴⁴Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 349.

reason for any such state of things; which to me, I confess, carries the face of glaring absurdity.⁴⁵

It is important for the church to act scripturally and logically when considering individuals for church membership. Righteous living is a sign of regeneration, but it is not the ultimate standard. In Ephesians 4:15-16 Paul writes, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." Peter T. O'Brien comments concerning this passage, "The apostle is not exhorting his readers to truthfulness in general or speaking honestly with one another, however appropriate or important this may be. Rather, he wants all of them to be members of a 'confessing' church, with the content of their testimony to be 'the word of truth,' the gospel of their salvation."⁴⁶ A regenerate membership committed to the gospel is the key to a church growing in likeness to Jesus Christ.

The church has been given authority to protect and discipline itself to achieve purity in its membership. Hagner writes, "The authority spoken of, then is in effect that of being able to declare whether a person becomes fully a part of the community of salvation or not, no longer simply on the basis of obedience to Torah, but on the basis of response or lack of response to the good news of the kingdom."⁴⁷ When the church correctly exercises its authority it builds a spiritual entity that will last forever. Mare

⁴⁵Jonathan Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 12 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 323.

⁴⁶Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 311.

⁴⁷Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 474.

asserts, "The purity and depth of such Christian teaching and a life corresponding to it are crucial, for that kind of building material will stand the test of fire on the day of the Lord's judgment."⁴⁸ Not only is it important for the church as a whole, but also for the individuals who make up the body. To admit an unregenerate person into the fellowship of the body gives him a false sense of assurance of salvation. Fee avers, "In such cases, there will also be terrible loss on the Day of Judgment, in which many who thought of themselves as God's people are revealed to be otherwise."⁴⁹ The church is "the temple of the living God" as well as a steward of the souls of its members. To include unregenerate people in church membership jeopardizes the mission and responsibility of the local church. While a completely regenerate church may be impossible it is something that is worth pursuing.

As has been stated earlier, the Reformers wrote that the marks of a true church are a right preaching of God's word and observing the ordinances.⁵⁰ The ordinances and faithful preaching of God's word provide the church with the means for obtaining purity and fulfilling its mission. The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are given as helps to the church. Grudem says, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper also serve as 'membership controls' for the church."⁵¹ Baptism serves as a "front door" to church membership. Erickson states, "[Baptism] is a testimony that one has already been regenerated. If there is a spiritual benefit, it is the fact that baptism brings us into

⁴⁸Harold W. Mare, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1976), 207.

⁴⁹Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 144.

⁵⁰See footnote 14 in this chapter.

⁵¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 865-66.

membership or participation in the local church."⁵² To admit people as church members outside of baptism is not biblical, nor is it biblical to baptize those who have not put their faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are baptized are confessing salvation, and baptism is the ordinance of admittance into church membership. If church members are not redeemed, then baptism and the Lord's Supper lose their significance as symbolic ordinances of the church. Grudem writes, "The church signifies that it considers those who receive baptism and the Lord's Supper to be saved."⁵³ If the church is not made up only of regenerate people then foundational elements of the church, such as the ordinances, are called into question.

Growth in Christlikeness: A Mandate for the Church

Erickson calls the church "the collective dimension of the Christian life."⁵⁴ The Christian life is a collective experience. Although people are saved individually, those who are saved are saved into a corporate entity called the church. The church is the setting for sanctification and discipleship. Therefore, every Christian should be involved in the fellowship of a local church. James Leo Garrett states, "Reflective of the Christian movement after the advent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the books of the New Testament canon know of no true disciples of Jesus who persist outside of the company of the believers or disciples."⁵⁵ Just as individual Christians are integral to the life and

⁵²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1105.

⁵³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 866.

⁵⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1036.

⁵⁵James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2001), 590.

ministry of the local church, the local church is integral to the life of every individual believer.

Making every attempt to restrict membership in the church only to believers is as important as involving every Christian in a local fellowship. While interaction and fellowship with unbelievers is an important aspect of kingdom growth through evangelism, the membership of the church must be limited to those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Erickson writes, "Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others. Just as no true believer should be outside the fellowship, so also there should be diligence to assure that only true believers are within."⁵⁶ To allow non-Christians as church members gives them a false sense of security as to their spiritual condition and damages the corporate experience of other members of the body. An essential part of the fellowship of the church membership is individual and corporate growth in Christ through discipleship and accountability.

In Ephesians 4:11-16 Paul tells the church that God has gifted each congregation uniquely for the growth of each local body.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

⁵⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1058.

The church is alive, and therefore it should be growing, both as individual members and as a corporate entity.

Of course, without numerical growth the church would cease to exist at some point, but new members are incorporated for their own spiritual growth, as well as the growth in maturity of the body as a whole. O'Brien states, "The exalted Christ has given his gifts to the church so that by building his body immaturity and instability will increasingly be left behind."⁵⁷ Not only must non-believers be excluded, but each member must be encouraged in spiritual growth. Andrew T. Lincoln adds, "Immaturity on the part of believers cannot be treated as a neutral state which will be outgrown in due course. It is a highly dangerous condition because it lays them open to manipulation by cunning people and the forces of error."⁵⁸ Churches should not subject themselves knowingly to the danger of immaturity.

Church members should be actively involved in this process of growth to maturity. Bruce writes that "an obligation is placed on the individual members of the body 'that we be no longer infants.'"⁵⁹ Christian growth is an individual responsibility within a corporate setting. Involvement in the community of faith is actually one of the products of growth to maturity. Lincoln posits, "Not only do silly infants contrast with

⁵⁷O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 308.

⁵⁸Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 259.

⁵⁹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 351.

the mature adult, but the plural of 'children' also contrasts with the singular of the 'mature person,' individualism being a sign of childishness, unity a sign of maturity."⁶⁰

Spiritual growth, then, must have both an individual and corporate element. Neglect of either element impedes the growth of the local church and its members. Christian growth is not haphazard nor arbitrary, but it is intentional and has a specific direction in mind. In order for the body to function correctly it must grow consistently and proportionately in accordance with Christ who is the head.⁶¹ If growth is disproportionate or nonexistent then it damages the body's fellowship with each other and with Christ as its head. O'Brien adds, "Here the growth is to be comprehensive: God's people are to grow in Christ 'in every way,' that is, in faith, knowledge, unity, and, especially in this context, in love."⁶² Christ as the head serves as the measuring rod for growth. How much more is the body in accordance with the head than it was last year, or ten years ago? The congregation must continually ask and evaluate itself based on this question.

Individuals must be seeking this type of growth, but it must be done within the context of a body that is under the authority of Christ who is the head. O'Brien continues, "This growth of the body has Christ as its goal."⁶³ Spiritual growth is not merely an individual task, but also a corporate task. The embodiment of Christ in the

⁶⁰Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257.

⁶¹Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 352. Bruce states, "In truth and love together, then, the readers are exhorted to grow up in all parts of their being so that the body of Christ may be properly proportioned in relation to the head."

⁶²O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 312.

⁶³*Ibid.*

world is not accomplished by one individual; it is accomplished by communities of faith. This truth encourages each individual to actively participate in the ministry of the local church and to keep in step with the body's growth into the likeness of the head, who is Christ Jesus.

Not only is Christ the measuring rod of growth, but he is the motivator and facilitator of Christian growth.⁶⁴ The church is given the task of growth, but it's also provided with the means and authority to accomplish the task. Growth in maturity is an individual as well as corporate task. O'Brien writes, "While the empowering for growth comes from above, members of the body themselves are fully involved in the process."⁶⁵ Individual members must cooperate with Christ in the process of growth. The growth of the body as a whole is dependent upon the growth of the individual parts.⁶⁶ Every member has a part to play in the growth of the church as a whole. Bruce states, "The body 'grows effectively' – grows by the inner strength that [Christ] supplies – according to the due measure of each separate part."⁶⁷ Growing in Christ for the purpose of incarnational ministry in a local context is the unifying bond in the local congregation. Each Christian is looking to Christ as his spiritual goal and to work with others to perform the ministry of Christ in a local setting. Christian growth is a cooperative effort. Believers cooperate with one another under the authority and empowering of Christ

⁶⁴William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 203. Hendriksen states, "The real message which the apostle is conveying both here in Ephesians and in the Colossian parallel is accordingly this, that to Christ the entire church owes its growth."

⁶⁵O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 314.

⁶⁶Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 263. Lincoln asserts, "Each part of the body receives the energizing power it needs, and the proper growth of the whole body is in proportion to and adapted to each part."

⁶⁷Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 353.

through the Holy Spirit to accomplish the goal of embodying Jesus to a local community. Wood avers, "Christ is at once the one into whom all Christians grow and out of whom the church consolidates itself in love."⁶⁸ It is a daunting task that can only be fulfilled by spiritually minded regenerated people. Hendriksen writes, "Marvelous growth in maturity, nevertheless, is certainly obtainable through human effort springing forth from, and sustained from start to finish by, the Holy Spirit."⁶⁹ Christ has set a standard and has authorized and empowered individuals within local congregations to attain the standard that has been set. The standard is not numerical but qualitative. Church growth is an increasing emulation of Christ within a given context.⁷⁰

Discipline: The Church's Corporate Responsibility

The goal of the church body is to steadily increase in likeness to Christ and in so doing work to expand the kingdom of God. In order for any local church to achieve such a goal it must be committed to discipline. No organization reaches its goals haphazardly. The church must be intentional and disciplined in order to be what Christ has called her to be. The New Testament letter of James offers practical wisdom to individuals and local churches. James concludes his letter in James 5:19-20 writing, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." The letter is filled with instructions for

⁶⁸A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1981), 59.

⁶⁹Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 200.

⁷⁰Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 261.

individual righteous living, but James emphasizes that Christianity is a communal faith by stressing Christians responsibility toward one another.

The purpose of the letter is to give instruction. It is appropriate, then, for the letter to conclude with corrective instruction. Martin observes, "The thrust of the entire epistle has been to prevent any Christian from wandering from the truth; if there is a lapse, he should be brought back."⁷¹ These truths are not negotiables but commands to the redemptive congregation. Moo asserts, "There are more imperative verbs per word in James than in any other New Testament book. So it is fitting that he would in the end turn to the community with an encouragement to intervene on behalf of fellow Christians who may be having difficulty with the spiritual matters that James has been discussing."⁷² This encouragement to the congregation reinforces the idea that discipline is a community matter.

Church discipline is to be done by the fellowship for the good of the entire fellowship. Kistemaker avers, "His intention is to show that forgiven Christians ought to work together for the mutual well-being of the church."⁷³ The local church is called out together for the mutual well-being of the body as well as the individual members. James realized that one person's sin disrupts the entire fellowship. Martin adds, "Sin, which is attacked so directly in James's letter, is both a personal and community problem."⁷⁴ It is

⁷¹Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 218.

⁷²Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 249.

⁷³Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, 185.

⁷⁴Martin, *James*, 220.

understood in a physical body that even a small problem with one part of the body affects the whole. In the same way it is readily obvious that small issues in the congregation affect the entire fellowship. Sin in the body hinders the local church from accomplishing its God-given purposes.

Knowing that even small issues can be serious should not drive the body to condemnation of individual members. Rather, it makes the congregation aware of the need to maintain health and balance within the body. Kistemaker states, "Any member of the congregation knows that he or she must care for the spiritual needs of a fellow member."⁷⁵ In many cases the congregation risks losing members if the church is not actively involved in nurturing the spiritual needs of its members. Most times, sinful members will remain in sin unless the fellowship is willing to intervene. Martin says, "James has not left the straying person to care for himself but has placed the burden of 'reclamation' upon those of the church who are still in the fold."⁷⁶ Reclaiming members from sin must be an intentional process. Kistemaker adds, "Erring members of the church are not necessarily passively waiting to be brought back to the truth . . . yet with loving concern, the church must seek out those who are wandering from the truth and urge them to come back."⁷⁷ The local church must constantly seek to return sinful saints to the truth in order to maintain health and proper function within the body of believers.

The phrase "church discipline" often carries a negative connotation, but as the letter of James shows, church discipline is intended to be redemptive and not

⁷⁵Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, 184.

⁷⁶Martin, *James*, 219.

⁷⁷Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, 183.

condemning. Church discipline is not a recommendation to the church. Discipline is an obligation for each local congregation. Grudem notes, "According to Scripture the church has an obligation to nurture those who are already believers and build them up to maturity in the faith."⁷⁸ Both those who administer and receive church discipline are those who are "already believers." Church discipline cannot apply to an unbeliever, nor can it be administered by an unbeliever. Longenecker surmises, "Central to the believers' new existence 'in Christ' is the concept of mutuality."⁷⁹ Each believer has a responsibility to be an active participant in a local congregation because he is "in Christ," and the local church is his body.

Galatians 6:1-2 echoes James's instructions to the church to restore any fallen member urging, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Fung comments, "The vocative 'Brothers' which comes first in Greek, may be intended as a reminder to the readers that their membership in the same spiritual family involves mutual obligations."⁸⁰ As brothers in Christ church members should seek redemptive restoration of fallen members, both because they are brothers, and because restoration is in accordance with the commands of Christ Jesus. Boice adds, "In this verse the reference is to helping another Christian – sharing his load – whenever temptations oppress him or life depresses

⁷⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 867.

⁷⁹Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990) 274.

⁸⁰Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 284.

him."⁸¹ In this sense discipline is preemptive. The body acts in an effort to prevent the sinful activity from occurring in the life of the individual member.

It is up to the body to maintain its health, with the aid of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Fung writes, "The burden of failure is shared by the body."⁸² The congregation does not place blame on anyone but shares the burden of sin and seeks to discipline the guilty party redemptively. Hendriksen states, "This does not mean 'tolerate each other,' or 'put up with each other.'"⁸³ Sin in the body cannot be tolerated, it must be addressed, and action must be taken to see that it ceases. Taking action relieves the burden of the sinner and involves him in a redemptive process rather than allowing him to remain alone in his sin and guilt. Fung clarifies the verse when he writes, "The Greek verb means 'to make perfect' or 'to equip,' it can refer to restoration of something to its original condition, for instance, fishing nets, or especially a fractured or dislocated bone."⁸⁴ The body steps in to mend the tear or set straight what is broken. If the body is not active the damage will remain and grow.

This passage in Galatians is not addressed to the sinner but to those who are to restore him to right fellowship. Longenecker states, "It is more the attitudes and actions of 'those who are spiritual' that Paul deals with here than the attitudes and actions of those who have sinned."⁸⁵ Only the "spiritual ones" are equipped to minister to the hurting and

⁸¹James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1976), 501.

⁸²Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 287.

⁸³Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 232.

⁸⁴Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 286.

⁸⁵Longenecker, *Galatians*, 274.

to sinning saints within the congregation. The "natural man" can only meet earthly needs, but the spiritual man can address the spiritual needs of an individual. Boice avers, "The work of restoring must be done by those who are spiritual."⁸⁶ Not only are spiritual people the only ones who can redemptively restore the sinful member of the congregation, but the work is theirs alone to do. Redemptive church discipline is a spiritual process through and through. Hendriksen posits, "The point of departure for this exhortation is the duty to extend help to the brother so that he may overcome his spiritual weakness."⁸⁷ This redemptive duty of discipline begins with discipleship and mentoring. Grudem asserts, "If church members were actively involved in giving private words of gentle admonition and in praying for one another when the first clear evidence of sinful conduct is seen, very little formal church discipline would have to be carried out."⁸⁸ The work of discipline is given to the church. It is an active process that begins with discipleship and always seeks to be redemptive. Church discipline can only be carried out by regenerated, "spiritual" people. If unregenerate people are allowed membership in the church and allowed to participate in an activity that is not theirs to carry out, it can only cause damage to the body. A regenerate church membership is the foundation of effective church discipline.

Conclusion

Seeking a thoroughly regenerate church membership finds considerable support both biblically and theologically. While a completely regenerated church

⁸⁶Boice, *Galatians*, 501.

⁸⁷Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 232.

⁸⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 894.

membership may be impossible in the visible church, it is a goal worth striving for. Jesus is the founder and foundation of the church. He called the church the *ἐκκλησία*, or the called out ones. The invisible church is made up of all of the saints for all time, and the visible church should seek to live up to the standard set by Christ and realized in the invisible church. In the Scriptures church members are assumed to be born again and are given tasks to do that can only be accomplished by a person who is "in Christ Jesus." Only a regenerated person can grow in Christlikeness, and only a regenerated person can participate effectively in the communal responsibility of church discipline. Every church should seek to achieve a purely regenerated church membership, while at the same time seeking to advance the kingdom through relevant, incarnational evangelism in their local context.

CHAPTER 3
EVALUATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
DOCTRINE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP
IN EARLY SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to teach a right understanding of biblical church membership at First Baptist Church West Columbia. The first chapter established a foundation for the project and its importance to the local church. The second chapter examined the biblical and theological basis for the principle of regenerate church membership. As a Southern Baptist church, it is important to gain a traditional understanding of why the church believes the way it does and how the church came to believe a certain way. Southern Baptist history is filled with men and women who have shaped the faith and practice of contemporary Southern Baptist life. This chapter will examine the convention and its theology during its formative years. It will focus on three very influential figures in the birth and development of the Southern Baptist convention. The chapter will outline the baseline Southern Baptist view of church membership as outlined by J. L. Dagg. It will then explore how this view was confirmed and proliferated by other pastor theologians in the convention such as B. H. Carroll. Finally, the chapter will focus on a shift in the theological center of Southern Baptist life that was founded largely upon the work of E. Y. Mullins.

John L. Dagg

John Leadley Dagg was born in 1794 in Middleburg, Virginia. He was converted at the age of fifteen in 1809 and baptized in 1812 at the age of eighteen after agreeing with Baptist convictions. He was orphaned soon after his baptism and then ordained to pastoral ministry at age twenty three. Although he had limited formal education he was able to learn Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. After pastorates in Virginia he served the Fifth Baptist Church in Philadelphia from 1825 to 1834.¹

J. L. Dagg was forced from the pulpit because of several physical infirmities. He walked on crutches, was virtually blind, and lost his public speaking voice.² After leaving the pastorate he served as the president of Haddington Institute in Philadelphia from 1834 to 1836 and then of Alabama Female Athenaeum in Tuscaloosa, Alabama from 1836 to 1844. In 1843 he was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree by the University of Alabama.³

In 1844 Dagg became the president and professor of theology at Mercer University in Penfield, Georgia. During his tenure Mercer began offering degrees in theological studies. Dagg resigned as president of Mercer in 1854 and as professor in 1856. Over the next thirteen years of his life he wrote four major works that formed the Baptist systematic theological curriculum of his time: *A Manual of Theology* (1857), *A*

¹James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 137.

²Mark E. Dever, "John L. Dagg," in *Baptist Theologians*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 165.

³Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 137.

Treatise on Church Order (1858), *The Elements of Moral Science* (1859), and *The Evidences of Christianity* (1869).⁴

Despite his physical limitations J. L. Dagg remained influential in denominational life. He was active in the Triennial Convention, Columbian College, American Baptist Home Mission Society, Baptist General Tract Society, and American and Foreign Bible Society.⁵ Tom J. Nettles wrote, “The labors of J. L. Dagg would have been outstanding for a man of extraordinary physical vigor and endurance. When one considers that such significant pastoral, administrative, educational, and literary contributions proceeded from a man who could not see, could not walk, and could not talk, the accomplishment is all the more astonishing.”⁶ John Leadley Dagg died in 1884 in Haynesville, Alabama.

J. L. Dagg’s Ecclesiology

J. L. Dagg was one of the earliest Southern Baptist systematic theologians. Mark Dever writes, “John Leadley Dagg (1794-1884) was the first Southern Baptist systematic theologian to be read widely by Southern Baptists.”⁷ Dagg laid a foundation in doctrine for a traditionally non-creedal people. His work stands as a monument to early Southern Baptist doctrinal positions and as a standard by which to measure contemporary Southern Baptist deviation. Dagg’s position on slavery has been rejected

⁴Ibid., 138.

⁵Robert G. Gardner, “J. L. Dagg,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, eds. Samuel S. Hill and Charles H. Lippy (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 244.

⁶L. Rush Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. (Nashville: Broadman and Homan, 1999), 148.

⁷Dever, “John L. Dagg,” 165.

rightfully by Southern Baptists, but his theology is otherwise grounded in Scriptural orthodoxy. His writing on ecclesiology, and specifically church membership, proves very helpful in determining a jumping off point for a historical Southern Baptist view of church membership.

Dagg was a student of the Scriptures, and his systematic theology is inherently biblical. His doctrinal statements are filled with biblical language as well as direct Scripture quotation. This is evident in his writing about church membership. Dagg surveyed the New Testament in an effort to approximate the character of those persons who made up the early church. Based upon the statements he gathered, Dagg determined that church members are truly regenerated persons. He wrote,

The character of the persons who composed the New Testament churches, may be readily learned from the epistles addressed to them. They are called ‘The elect of God;’ ‘Children of God by faith;’ ‘Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints;’ ‘Saints in Christ Jesus;’ ‘Followers of the Lord;’ ‘Beloved of the Lord.’ No doubt can exist that these churches were, in the view of the inspired writers who addressed them, composed of persons truly converted to God.⁸

Dagg differentiates between what the church is by definition (the invisible church) and what actually constitutes the local church (the visible church). The makeup of the true church is determined by God’s will and is unchangeable. The visible church is impure because it is tainted by the sin of the people of whom it is constituted. Dagg writes, “In our definition of a church, we have called it an assembly of believers in Christ. This definition tells what a church is according to the revealed will of God, and not what it

⁸John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology, second part: A Treatise on Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 79.

becomes by the criminal negligence of its ministers and members, or the wicked craft of hypocritical men who gain admittance to it.”⁹

J. L. Dagg turned to the church at Jerusalem, described in the book of Acts, as a type for the contemporary church to follow. The church in Jerusalem was distinguished by the character of its members. The character of the members was determined by their growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Dagg states, “Men who had entered the way of salvation and were making progress therein, were added to the church in Jerusalem, and all the members of the church were persons of like character, for the multitude were ‘of one heart.’”¹⁰ In order for the church to attain and maintain the character of the church displayed in the church at Jerusalem there must be specific understanding as to what constitutes a church. He proposes that “A properly organized church consists of disciples who have professed their faith in Christ by baptism.”¹¹ It is every local church’s responsibility to establish faith in Christ as the foundational requirement for church membership.

Simply setting up this basic principle will not protect the church from impurity in its membership. Local churches are made up of men and women who sin and who make mistakes. Even when the leadership of a church does their due diligence to preserve a purely regenerate church membership it is possible that non-believers could still gain membership. Dagg advises, “Since God has not endowed the members of a church with the power to search the heart, it is possible for persons, whose hearts have

⁹Ibid., 80.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 268.

not been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, to obtain admission into a local church.”¹² For Dagg the responsibility for the admission of non-believers is two-fold. First, if truly converted persons are devoted followers of Christ then their lives should be noticeably different than the life of an unbeliever. Because the lives of Christians are not always distinguishable from non-Christians, non-believing people are received unquestioned into the congregation. However, the members of the church should expect the lives of the members to reflect a viable relationship with Christ. If there is no evidence of conversion it is the responsibility of the congregation to act in an effort to preserve the purity of the membership. Dagg writes,

Were they less conformed to the world, the distinction between Christians and men of the world would be more apparent, and fewer cases of mistake in the reception of members would occur. Churches are often criminally careless, both in the reception of members, and in the discipline of them when received. If the piety of churches were very fervent, men of cold hearts could not remain happy among them, and could not continue to have their true character concealed. The possession of love to Christ is required of every one who seeks admission into a Christian church. The members who admit him are required to demand a credible profession made in obedience to Christ’s command. Beyond this they cannot go, and here their responsibility ceases.¹³

According to Dagg, the preservation of the purity of the membership of the church is the key to the success of its ministry. Not only that, but preserving a regenerate church membership is a key task in the ministry of the church. A regenerate church membership is preserved through a careful consideration of a person’s profession of faith, a pious and faithful congregation, and careful redemptive church discipline. Dagg emphasized, “It has been remarked that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with

¹²Ibid., 98.

¹³Ibid., 99.

it.”¹⁴ John L. Dagg and his systematic writings clearly illustrate the early Southern Baptist emphasis upon a purely regenerate church membership and the communal responsibility to seek to maintain it through faithfulness, piety, and church discipline.

B. H. Carroll

Benjamin Harvey Carroll was an extraordinary figure at an important time for Southern Baptists. Standing at six feet six inches he was a mountain of a man. Remarking about his physical appearance one of Carroll’s students wrote, “His bone was large, his muscles hard, his lungs healthful, his frame gigantic, his power of endurance almost superhuman. Tall as a poplar, straight as an Indian, strong as an Ursus, – he was conspicuous in any company. Looking upon Michael Angelo’s (sp.) Moses in Rome, I thought of Dr. Carroll as more nearly the model than any man I ever saw.”¹⁵ Known for a beard that hung past his waist and for smoking cigars, his powerful personality helped shape the Southern Baptist Convention, especially in Texas. Paige Patterson writes, “No more remarkable figure ever towered over the Texas plains than B. H. Carroll.”¹⁶

He was born near Carrollton, Carroll County, Mississippi December 27, 1843. At the age of six his family moved to Drew County, Arkansas, then in the winter of 1858 they moved to Burleson County, Texas. B. H. Carroll was one of McCollough’s Texas Rangers, and was a part of the first regiment sent by Texas into Confederate service.

¹⁴Ibid., 274.

¹⁵George White McDaniel, *A Memorial Wreath* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Company, 1921), 44.

¹⁶Paige Patterson, “Standing Courageously in Your Home, Church, and Community,” in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 286.

During his time as a Ranger and in military service he was “a tough, hard drinking, hard riding atheist.”¹⁷ Carroll was wounded in battle at Mansfield, Georgia and walked with a limp the rest of his life.

Although he had no interest in religion, in 1865 at age twenty two, B. H. Carroll attended a local camp meeting at the behest of his mother. On the third night of the meeting Carroll was converted, and upon reading Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* felt called to preach.¹⁸ He was ordained to the ministry in 1866 and married Miss Ellen Bell at Starkville, Mississippi.

In 1870 Carroll became the pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas. While pastoring in Waco he earned an A.M. degree from Baylor University. B. H. Carroll was pastor of First Baptist Church Waco for over 28 years. He led his church to become one of the most influential Southern Baptist Churches. He left the pastorate in 1899 to chair the Education Commission. The charge of this commission was to raise money to pay off the oppressive debt accrued by Texas Baptist colleges. He led the commission in paying down the debt to a manageable amount.

His success in the Bible department at Baylor led to the formation Baylor’s theology department which became Baylor Theological Seminary, of which he was the first president. The seminary began with Carroll training several young men in elementary theology in the living room of his parsonage in Waco in 1901. In 1908 he led the school to move to Fort Worth, and the name of the school was changed to

¹⁷Ibid., 286.

¹⁸Ibid., 286-87.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Carroll remained president of Southwestern until his death on November 11, 1914.

B. H. Carroll's Ecclesiology

B. H. Carroll consistently preached the exclusivity of church membership. For Carroll the prerequisite for church membership was faith in Christ. He stated his position on regenerate church membership clearly stating, "The church is for believers only."¹⁹ He did not only teach the necessity of a regenerate church membership, but he also taught that the church has the corporate responsibility of preserving the purity of its membership.

The Greek term *ἐκκλησία*, used in the New Testament to describe the church, provides a foundation for understanding the need for church membership as well as some specific requirements to obtain entry into the fellowship of the church. Because of the nature of the *ἐκκλησία* there must be standards in place to gain and maintain membership. Carroll defines the *ἐκκλησία* as, "An organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes or businesses to public affairs. This definition necessarily implies prescribed conditions of membership."²⁰ The church is a unique assembly in that it is not merely a gathering for public good. The church is a confessional people. The confession of the church unites its members and distinguishes it as a unique gathering. The simultaneously unifying and distinguishing

¹⁹B. H. Carroll, "The Foundation of the Church of Christ," in *Christ and His Church*, comp. by J. W. Crowder, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Dallas: Helms Printing Company, 1950), 52.

²⁰B. H. Carroll, "Ecclesia," in *Baptists and their Doctrines*, comp. by J. B. Cranfill (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1913), 39.

confession of a New Testament church is faith in Jesus Christ Son of God for salvation. As Carroll writes, “To put it in plain English then, the confession upon which the everlasting church of the Lord Jesus Christ is built, is a God revealed faith that He is the Messiah, the Son of God.”²¹ The church is a unique gathering of people that is separated from culture at large by a singular confession of faith.

It is the responsibility of the church to hold up the work of God corporately and individually as evidence of the truth of the church’s confession. Carroll affirms, “Now in the same way the church must exhibit its experiences, the dealings of God with it, the tokens of the divine presence today, and always hold up before men evidence that there is a presence – spiritual presence – with us which can be more vividly felt than any presence of the flesh.”²² The real presence of God, as evidenced through his work, distinguishes the true church from other confessional groups.

Genuine works of God also serve to draw people into the church. In fact “No one comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws him.” But the attraction of the supernatural work of God goes beyond those who are genuinely drawn to repentance and faith. Many who do not intend to be “constrained” by any confession of faith still desire to be among people where God is working. Not to mention that the enemy of God, Satan, is also the enemy of God’s church, and is actively seeking to infiltrate and divide congregations. Therefore, all who are drawn to the work of God in the church are not necessarily drawn there by God. The confession of the church and the convicting work

²¹Carroll, “The Foundation of the Church of Christ,” 40.

²²B. H. Carroll, “The Testimony of Good Works,” in *Saved to Serve*, comp. by J. W. Crowder, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Dallas: Helms Publishing Company, 1941), 119.

of the Spirit, then, also serve to repel people from the church. In this way the purity of the body is preserved. Carroll states, “If [the church] did nothing but draw, then it would become corrupt through irreligious material brought into the church; but it has a repulsive force that drives those away who ought to be driven away.”²³ Church growth is achieved, and regenerate church membership is maintained, by the work of God in the church and the church’s singular confession of faith in Christ.

Unfortunately a lack of faith and the sin of pride regularly cause church leaders to emphasize the drawing characteristics of the church to the neglect of those characteristics that repel. Churches often emphasize technique over faith and some attempt to manufacture the appearance of works of God in order to draw in a crowd. Churches avoid difficult doctrines and teach positive life lessons to please the masses. While these methods can be successful in accumulating numbers, they are detrimental to the church’s health and its distinct witness. Carroll states, “If you will quit preaching the necessity of regeneration, if you will quit preaching salvation by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, if you will lower the doctrine, why you can get the multitude.”²⁴ Unfortunately, in gaining the multitude, these churches have given up the very things that protect its sanctity.

Carroll called on the church of his day to return to preaching conviction of sin and salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He summoned them to seek to regain purity in their membership for the health of the church and for the

²³B. H. Carroll, “Judgment at the House of God,” in *Christ and His Church*, comp. by J. W. Crowder, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Dallas: Helms Printing Company, 1950), 121.

²⁴Carroll, “Judgment at the House of God,” 132.

furtherance of the gospel. He wrote, “The church today needs to invoke all the repelling power of the cause of Christ, in order to shut out the unregenerate, those who are not at heart Christians, those who have never been drawn to Jesus by the father who sent Him, those who have never been really breathed upon by the Holy Spirit from on high.”²⁵ It is the responsibility of the church to seek a purely regenerate membership. The church must be active in this pursuit. The church must act corporately, knowing that God is also actively working to separate true believers from unbelievers. Carroll uses the illustration of sifting wheat to describe the church’s role in this process. He states, “In the direct agency God Himself continually sifts his people as wheat, in order that the chaff may be separated from the wheat. And for the same reason God permits Satan to sift his people as wheat. . . . We need now to stand right there with a sieve, and as representatives of Jesus Christ to sift the people as wheat, in order to separate the chaff from the wheat.”²⁶ The church is called to participate with God in actively seeking to distinguish between regenerate and unregenerate persons.

This effort goes beyond simple ecclesiology to soteriology. What is at stake is not merely church governance, but the heart of the gospel. The gospel of Christ transforms lives and incorporates them into a unit fit for the purposes of God. Carroll writes, “The object of the gospel, committed to the particular assembly in time, is to call out or summon those who shall compose the general assembly in eternity.”²⁷ The gospel, then, serves as the formative means of the church. To form a church based on another

²⁵Ibid., 123.

²⁶Ibid., 122.

²⁷Carroll, “Ecclesia,” 43.

standard, or via another means, is prideful at best and heretical at worst. Biblically there is no other basis for incorporation into the church other than through faith that comes by hearing. Carroll concurs, “Whatever you may say of it, it is true that when men believed that Jesus was both Lord and Christ they were received into the church; that so long as they rejected that, and did not, from their hearts, accept that, they were not admitted into the church.”²⁸ So the gospel is the only means of drawing the church together and the only true test of church membership. Carroll described this singular test when he wrote, “As has been intimated, all organized assemblies have prescribed terms or conditions of membership . . . correspondingly the conditions of membership in the church on earth are regeneration and baptism.”²⁹ When the test of faith in the gospel for salvation becomes the foundation for the local church it undergirds the church with authority to stand for righteousness and against sin. Ultimately the primacy of the gospel empowers the church in its communication of the gospel. “The law of God gives knowledge of sin and nowhere is that law such a perfect mirror to reflect as when it is embodied in the saints of God.”³⁰ But a church that depends on any other standard for membership undermines the gospel effort. A church that refuses to actively seek purity in its membership stands hypocritically off balance without any firm foundation. Carroll went further writing, “Until a church is able to convict sinners of rebellion against Jesus Christ, it convicts itself, and the only way for the shame of condemnation to be lifted off of the church is to

²⁸Carroll, “The Foundation of the Church of Christ,” 41.

²⁹Carroll, “Ecclesia,” 49-50.

³⁰B. H. Carroll, “The Convicting Power of the Church,” in *Christ and His Church*, compiled by J. W. Crowder, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Dallas: Helms Printing Company, 1950), 103.

put it on sinners.”³¹ The church stands redeemed in a world that is condemned already. Carroll abides to the importance of a wholly regenerate congregation for the defense and power of the gospel as communicated by the body of Christ, the church.

The Decline of Meaningful Church Membership

The concept of a wholly regenerate church membership is a traditional Baptist doctrine. Southern Baptists have consistently espoused conversion as a prerequisite to membership in a local church. And yet as time has passed the trend in Southern Baptist life has been away from a meaningful church membership. In 2004 the Southern Baptist Convention reported a total of 43,465 churches, with a total of 16,267,494 church members. But the average Sunday morning attendance at these churches was only 6,024,289. The average attendance in the SBC in 2004 was 37 percent of its total membership. Of course poor church attendance does not make a person unregenerate, but it is symptomatic of a larger issue within Southern Baptist churches. There is little to no compulsion or expectation for members of many churches to live a changed life. Walking an aisle or filling out a card and being immersed in a baptistry have become the sum total of the requirements for perpetual membership in most Southern Baptist churches.

In his work *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, John S. Hammett identifies a few different causes of the decline in meaningful church membership. The first is lowering standards to increase growth. The idea being, if the fences are lower more sheep can get in. Another cause is assimilation to culture. Churches attempt to

³¹Carroll, “The Testimony of Good Works,” 115.

redeem secular culture rather than transform culture. A third cause of the diminishing value of church membership is the improvement of the socio-economic status of church members.³² Hammett writes, “A declining rate of growth or commitment tends to accompany a socioeconomic rise.”³³ Along with these three social causes there is an ecclesiological cause. The decline of meaningful church membership mirrored the relaxation of its safeguards, baptism and church discipline.³⁴

Underlying all of these social and theological causes to the decline in meaningful church membership is the rise of individualism in the church. It is difficult, and possibly dangerous, to identify one person or organization that led to the rampant individualism present in the contemporary church. But there is one figure whose life and work began a shift from the more communal teachings of early Southern Baptists such as J. L. Dagg and B. H. Carroll. His ideas have significantly shaped the development of the Southern Baptist identity over the last one hundred years. While he cannot, and should not, bear the blame for the loss of the importance of regenerate church membership among Southern Baptist churches, his influence is undeniable. He is E. Y. Mullins.

Edgar Young Mullins was one of the most important Baptist in the twentieth century. Harold Bloom in his book *The American Religion*, placed Mullins in most impressive company.

Edgar Young Mullins I would nominate as the Calvin or Luther or Wesley of the Southern Baptists, but only in the belated American sense, because Mullins was not the founder of the Southern Baptists but their refounder, the definer of their creedless faith. An endlessly subtle and original religious thinker, Mullins is the

³²Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 110-11.

³³Ibid., 111.

³⁴Ibid., 111-112.

most neglected of major American theologians. Pragmatically he is more important than Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, and the Neibuhrs because Mullins reformulated (perhaps first formulated) the faith of a major American denomination.³⁵

Who was he? Why were his ideas so influential, where did they come from, and what did it mean for Southern Baptists? The rest of this chapter will consider these questions.

E. Y. Mullins

Edgar Young Mullins was born January 5, 1860, in Franklin County, Mississippi to Seth Granberry and Cornelia Blair Tillman-Mullins. Mullins was born into a Baptist family, the fourth of eleven children. Both his father and grandfather were Baptist preachers, and his mother's family had a Baptist heritage. Education was held in very high regard in the Mullins' household as Mullins' father had an M. A. from Mississippi College and had founded a school and the First Baptist Church in the town where E. Y. Mullins grew up. As a boy he worked to put his sisters and then himself through college. He graduated from Texas A & M University at age nineteen.

Despite his upbringing in the home of a Baptist pastor, Mullins was intellectually tentative about the Christian faith. While working to begin law school, Mullins attended a service at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. The speaker was a former lawyer, Major William Evander Penn, who used reason and persuasion in his presentation of the truth of the Gospel. In that service E. Y. Mullins was converted. His conversion experience would help to shape his theological framework for emphasizing Christian experience. Concerning his conversion he states, "My act of surrender to the will of Christ produced a new attitude toward my intellectual problems and difficulties.

³⁵Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 199.

These were simply transcended by the new spiritual experience.”³⁶ Mullins was baptized by his father in his home church and immediately felt a call to ministry. He attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, for three years, although he originally intended to only stay for one year.

While attending Southern Seminary, Mullins underwent three significant changes in his life. First, he excelled in administrative skills and became a popular leader of his class.³⁷ Second, he felt a call to missions in Brazil. He wrote to the Foreign Mission Board requesting an appointment, but his letter was never answered.³⁸ In spite of this disappointment, his commitment to missions sealed his connection with Southern Baptists. The third change was his marriage to Isla May Hawley who proved to be a worthy counterpart for Mullins.³⁹ They were married during his first pastorate upon graduation from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at a church in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. They had two sons, both of whom died in childbirth.⁴⁰

Mullins first inclination was to return to Texas to a pastorate in San Antonio after his graduation and marriage. His wife’s health, however, prevented him from filling that pastorate, and instead he took a pastorate in the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland, at Lee Street Baptist Church. While in Baltimore Mullins sought to bring Baptists of the

³⁶E. Y. Mullins, “Why I am a Baptist,” in *Twelve Modern Apostles and their Creeds*, ed. William Inge (New York: Duffiel and Company, 1926), 91.

³⁷Timothy D. F. Maddox, “E. Y. Mullins: Mr. Baptist for the 20th and 21st Century,” *Review and Expositor* 96 (Winter 1999), 88.

³⁸Ernest C. Reisinger and D. Matthew Allen, *A Quiet Revolution: A Chronicle of Beginnings of Reformation in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2000), 7.

³⁹Maddox, “E . Y. Mullins,” 89.

⁴⁰Reisinger and Allen, *A Quiet Revolution*, 7.

North and South together while he maintained his interest in international missions.

Mullins worked with Annie and Alice Armstrong and other significant Southern Baptist personalities in promoting missions.

This interest in promoting worldwide missions led directly to his next position as the associate secretary of the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. He took this position in 1895. His popularity throughout Southern Baptist territory grew as he traveled promoting world missions, and it led to his acceptance of the pastorate at Newton Centre Baptist Church.

Newton Centre was a church in an affluent suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, and was also home to Newton Theological Institute, the first Baptist seminary in the United States. Its president, Alvah Hovey, was a member at Newton Centre. While in Boston, Mullins found himself near some of the most influential scholarship in the country. Borden Parker Bowne at Boston University was birthing the Personalism movement and William James was teaching Pragmatism at Harvard University. Mullins was also exposed to the theology of Friedrich Schliermacher in his readings at Newton Theological Institute. Mullins' interest in scholarship and his involvement with the students attending his church often led him to the campuses of these universities.⁴¹ Elements of the philosophies of Personalism and Pragmatism based in the thought of Friedrich Schliermacher were adopted by Mullins in his theological development.

In the summer of 1899 E. Y. Mullins was elected to replace W. H. Whitsitt as the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Whitsitt had been forced to resign in the midst of a dispute with the Landmarkers. In addition to Mullins's election

⁴¹Maddox, "E. Y. Mullins," 91.

as president, he was intended to teach church history, specifically Baptist history. But upon Mullins's election F. H. Kerfoot resigned as professor of theology. Mullins then took on the professorship of theology instead.

The Southern Baptist Seminary was in the midst of several crises upon Mullins' arrival as president. The seminary had growing physical and financial needs amidst growing demand. Then there was the issue that brought him to the seminary, that of the debate between the Landmarkists and Whitsitt. There were also the issues facing Southern Baptists in general, the rise of scientific thought, the influence of enlightenment philosophies, and the issue of the theory of evolution. Mullins would spend the majority of his tenure attempting to balance the needs of his seminary and at the same time confront the major issues assailing Baptists.

During this time Mullins wrote a book entitled *Why is Christianity True?* He used this book to meet the growing challenges to the Christian faith from science and philosophy, as well as to bring Baptists together with the larger community of evangelicals. Mullins, in part, wrote this book in reply to the Pragmatism of William James. He used much of the same language as James and even sent him a copy of the book when it was first published.⁴²

E. Y. Mullins went on to be the president of the Southern Baptist Convention as well as the Baptist World Alliance. He continued to seek to bring Baptists together with each other and with the evangelical community as a whole. Edgar Young Mullins died November 23, 1928 in Louisville, Kentucky, after a debilitating stroke.

⁴²Ibid., 93.

E. Y. Mullins' Theology

E. Y. Mullins is a watershed figure in Southern Baptist history. The major shift in the faith of Southern Baptists initiated by Mullins was a move from communalism to individualism. Curtis W. Freeman wrote, "Mullins' individualism was closely in harmony with the rugged individualism of the era of Theodore Roosevelt, and he brought it to bear upon the *earlier communitarianism* of Baptist life in the South."⁴³ The change in the thought may have been inevitable and Mullins was merely a product of his time, but he was definitely the major conduit between secular individualist philosophy and the Southern Baptist faith.

For better or worse, E. Y. Mullins was the consummate student. When he had the best universities at his disposal he did not waste his opportunity to further his education. During his time at Newton Centre, Mullins encountered two burgeoning secular philosophies as well as the anthropocentric theology of Friedrich Schliermacher. Mullins did not retreat from these liberal schools of thought, but embraced them in an effort to redeem some of their content. Russell Dilday stated, "For example, in Mullins' day, three contemporary popular theories were William James' Pragmatism, Borden Bowne's Personalism, and Friedrich Schliermacher's Empiricism. Mullins found elements of truth in all three which were compatible with the distinctive Baptist theological vision."⁴⁴ There is a question as to whether Mullins was able to find elements of these philosophies that were compatible with the historical Baptist faith, or if he

⁴³Curtis W. Freeman, James William McClendon Jr., and C. Rosalea Velloso Ewell, eds., *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1999), 283. Italics mine.

⁴⁴Russell Dilday, "Mullins the Theologian: Between the Extremes," *Review and Expositor* 96 (Winter 1999): 77.

formulated and instituted a new Baptist distinctive. The title of Dr. Mullins' most popular work, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*, does not give the impression that he rescued the tried and true Baptist ideals from these contemporary theories. Mullins' redemption of the ideas of these secular philosophers is much less evident than the incorporation of these secular philosophies into his theology. Jane S. Hardenbergh observes, "It has been generally recognized by students of Mullins that he had become influenced by Schliermacher and his students Borden Parker Bowne and William James."⁴⁵ Albert Mohler describes the philosophy of Schliermacher, writing, "The Enlightenment's famed 'turn to the subject' set the foundation for a revolutionary emphasis on human experience and the centrality of individual experience in all questions of knowledge. Thus for Schliermacher, theology was not, in essence, the systematic expression of revealed truth, but reflection upon religious experience."⁴⁶ Mullins eagerly embraced the philosophies of Pragmatism and Personalism. Pragmatism, he wrote, "renounces the idea that truths are ready made and given to us independent of and apart from our experience."⁴⁷ Personalism, he explained, "takes the individual and personal life of man as its starting point, the highest datum possible for any form of philosophy."⁴⁸ If this is applied directly to theology Scripture has to be replaced by personal experience as the highest authority.

⁴⁵Jane S. Hardenbergh, "E. Y. Mullins: Man of Vision," *American Baptist Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1992): 251.

⁴⁶R. Albert Mohler Jr., Introduction the *Axioms of Religion*, by E. Y. Mullins, ed. Timothy and Denise George, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 3.

⁴⁷E. Y. Mullins, "Pragmatism, Humanism, and Personalism – The New Philosophical Movement," *Review and Expositor* 5 (1908): 510.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

Mullins's theology of experience contributed directly to his development of the concept of the competency of the soul in religion under God. The optimism of his day, along with his appeal to contemporary philosophy, became the foundation for a principle that would lead to the reinterpretation of Baptist theology. James Dunn wrote, "Professor Mullins held to a sort of positive perception of the power of soul freedom for humankind. . . . He also shared with many secular and religious thinkers of his time a political ethic that almost equated Democracy with Christianity."⁴⁹ The power of the individual was a theme that colored the theology of E. Y. Mullins and its most obvious statement is in his idea of "soul competency." This idea has proven to be his most significant and controversial. Albert Mohler observes,

The emphasis on soul competency is, as Mullins must have both hoped and expected, the most enduring element of Mullins' legacy. The concept does underscore the necessity of personal religious experience – including repentance and faith – to the Christian life. But soul competency also serves as an acid dissolving religious authority, congregationalism, confessionalism, and mutual theological accountability. This, too, is part of Mullins' legacy.⁵⁰

E. Y. Mullins' Ecclesiology

Much of Mullins's writing is focused on the individual and his or her faith. For that reason Mullins did not write extensively on the church or on ecclesiology. It is possible to gather a general idea of Mullins's ecclesiology through the gleanings of his writings that mention the church.

Mullins defined the church as "a community of autonomous individuals under the immediate lordship of Christ held together by a social bond of common interest due

⁴⁹Dunn, "State, Church, and Soul Competency," 70.

⁵⁰Mohler, Introduction to *Axioms*, 15.

to a common faith and inspired by common tasks and ends, all of which are assigned to him by a common Lord.”⁵¹ It is immediately evident that the center of the church, for Mullins, is not the community but the individual. The binding principle is not mutual responsibility and dependence but commonality. Accountability to the church is replaced with direct accountability to the Lord, and therefore church discipline is individualized and marginalized. Mullins’s consistent theme is the exaltation of the relationship of individual members of the body to the head to the detriment of the relationship of the members to one another. He wrote,

The nature of Christ’s church is determined by the twofold relationship of the believer, one to Christ himself, the other to the brethren. Christ is Lord. The believer in Christ belongs to an absolute monarchy, the most absolute indeed the world ever knew. But the monarch is in heaven and relates himself to his subjects through his Spirit. The subject has fellowship directly with th monarch. All his dealings with his subjects are individual. He delegates his authority to no one.⁵²

In Mullins’s eyes the community exists for the individual. Individuals have an obvious relationship with one another because of common interests, but there is no inherent authority in the community or responsibility of the individual thereunto. Ultimately for Mullins, it is the right of the individual that holds sway. Participation in the church is more of a democratic right than it is communal responsibility. For Mullins the church appears to be more of a civic organization than a covenant community. He suggests, “It is because men have an equal right to direct access to God that they are entitled to equal privileges in the church.”⁵³ Therefore, for Mullins, the polity of the church also serves the individual. Rather than preservation of Scriptural authority or Biblical community it

⁵¹E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1908), 129.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 128.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 127.

is the freedom of the individual that determines church government and organization. Mullins posits, “The direct relations of men to God and their equality as brethren require a democratic church polity. No other polity leaves the soul free.”⁵⁴ The rights of the individual in Mullins’s church supercede responsibility to the congregation. Each person submits only to the principles and purposes of Christ, but because those are individually apprehended there is no insistence upon true unity in the body. Mullins writes,

The individual precedes the group logically as well as in order of time, and the organization and government of the local church proceeds on the principle of voluntary association of free individuals in obedience to Christ and for purposes set forth by him. Church discipline is simply the group protecting itself against the individual. The individual stands or falls to his own master and is judged only by him. The right of the church, however, to protect itself against the disorderly individual is an unalienable right in Christ.⁵⁵

The body exercises a corporate right only out of self defense. There is, therefore, no proactive church discipline but only reactive. And because the church exists only by voluntary association, there is no actual authority to enact discipline. Therefore, tolerance of one another’s interpretations and applications of spiritual things represents true unity, and “church discipline” is exercised against intolerance because it threatens the individual.

Taken to its logical end Mullins’s church is absolutely consumer driven because the individual reigns. Church shopping is the norm, anonymous church attendance is preferred, and accountability and discipline are avoided. There is no genuine attachment to the body. The church is a product to be used and disposed of at

⁵⁴Ibid., 134.

⁵⁵E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1925), 65.

the individual's discretion. Needless to say, church membership is practically meaningless in Mullins's church.

Conclusion

E. Y. Mullins is not solely to blame for the condition of the Southern Baptist denomination today. But the redefinition of the church and the reorientation of the faith around the individual were significant factors in the marginalization of church membership, the ordinances of baptism and communion, and church discipline. The challenge for contemporary Southern Baptists is to reintroduce the Biblical ecclesiology that our denomination was founded upon. The goal of this project was to take a step in that direction at First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas.

CHAPTER 4

A PLAN FOR TEACHING THE DEFINITION AND VALUE OF REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WEST COLUMBIA, TEXAS

Introduction

This chapter reports the implementation of the ministry project conducted at First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas. The system for training the membership grew out of a study of the theological and biblical principles for a regenerate church membership, an historical study of regenerate church membership in the Southern Baptist Church, and contextual understanding of First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas. A method for teaching the congregation the meaning and value of regenerate church membership emerged from the utilization of these three sources.

The Initial Study

The initial study was motivated by a congregational survey that was conducted in the fall of 2007. According to that survey, 50 percent of the congregants did not feel that personal conversion was necessary for church membership. At the time the church was in a period of stagnation. There was no growth and little motivation to pursue methods and strategies that might produce church growth. Moreover, the church had just gone through a division, and the hurt caused by that episode remained fresh on the

church's mind. The purpose of the church at that time was to keep the doors open and the lights on. If the church remained "open for business" then the church was achieving some degree of success. In large part, the church was acting as a social organization rather than a spiritually redeemed body formed for a predetermined purpose. At the time of the project's conception the congregation's chief need was to gain a biblically and theologically correct identity. The church needed to understand a correct definition of the church and to correctly understand the role and responsibility of the individual church member within the context of a biblical church. The core understanding of identity would provide a foundation for purpose, vision, intentionality, and growth.

Changes Since the Initial Conception

The congregation and leadership of First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas, have changed dramatically since the aforementioned survey in 2007. In 2009 the senior pastor resigned and moved on to another ministry context in another city. He had led the church through a tumultuous time of division, and at the time of his leaving he had calmed the waters for the most part. The church, however, was no closer to moving toward growth or outside of a social mind-set than it had been two years before. Upon his leaving the church went through a lengthy search for a new pastor. During that time the church brought on an elderly pastor as an interim. He had been interim at this church two times previously. He is beloved by the church family, and he truly loves the church. Under his leadership the church came together as a family. A feeling of mutual love characterized the church, and the hurt feelings of the past were pushed aside.

During this interim period I took on the role of Associate Pastor and helped our interim with the day to day operation of the church, as well as overseeing our

committees and Sunday School programs. I essentially had all of the pastoral responsibilities without the title or the pulpit. I was, however, able to learn much about leadership during this one year interim. During this period of time the church was led through two different prayer efforts. The first was a commitment to pray one hour per day every day for forty days. Thirty or forty congregants turned in commitment cards and the resulting change in the church was palpable. There was a definite spiritual emphasis in the church that had been absent for years before. Many lives were changed through the process of the forty day prayer effort and the heart of the church began to soften toward spiritual things. The second prayer effort was an overnight prayer vigil. The church prayed for twenty four hours for the pastor search committee and the man who would be the next pastor. Again the church was unified spiritually, seeking the Lord's face in one accord.

After a year-long search, the church called me to be the Senior Pastor. I began in this new role April 1, 2010. My new role greatly aided in the initiation and completion of this project because it allowed me freedom in the pulpit and an existing forum in which to present the small group portion of the study. Since I have taken over as pastor, the church has begun to see some growth. We have added over eighty new members in just under two years. The challenge now has changed from focusing on growth to retaining the members we are adding. One of the keys to retention is for our church members to understand their role and responsibility as church members and to gain an appreciation of their importance to the church as well as the church's importance to them. Despite the change in the attitude of the congregation and its leadership since the

conception of the project, the study proves to be equally as valuable as originally conceived.

Developing the Ministry Project

There were three elements of the project that required development. The first were the pre- and post-project surveys (appendices 1 and 2). The pre- and post-project surveys were identical because they were intended to both gauge the church's understanding of church membership as well as measure the success or failure of the project. The surveys were divided into three sections. The first section asked the congregation to respond to general questions about individual church membership. The second section evaluated the church's understanding of the individual church member's responsibility to the congregation. The third section measured the church's comprehension of the role of the congregation in the life of the individual church member. There were 10 questions in each section for a total of 30 questions. The post project survey included five additional questions intended to evaluate the presentation of the material.

The second element of the project was two five-week Bible studies on church membership (appendices 3 and 4). The first five-week study covered the responsibility of the individual church member to the congregation. The second five-week study covered the responsibility of the congregation to the individual church member. Originally, the project was to include the recruitment of a small group in which to teach the developed curriculum; however, because I am now the pastor, I was able to present this ten-week study on Sunday nights in our Sunday night worship service. That service

was attended by 20-30 church members ages 30-80. This group is much more diversely representative of the church than I would have been able to recruit as the youth pastor.

The third element of the project was four sermons preached to the congregation in Sunday morning worship services. These four sermons were preached in weeks five through eight of the Sunday night study. The Sunday morning sermons were modifications of the Sunday evening study with two sermons covering the responsibility of the individual church member and two covering the responsibility of the congregation. The information presented was largely the same in both the sermons and the ten-week study, though the ten-week study was much more intensive and in depth.

Implementing the Project

Two separate groups were involved in the implementation of the project. The first group went through the ten-week Bible study. The first group met on Sunday nights and consisted of 15-20 church members ages 25-85. This meeting was held during the regular Sunday night worship service, so there were more people in attendance than actually participated in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and any participant could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants in the study completed the pre- and post-project surveys. Those who chose not to participate were exposed to the information but chose not to offer feedback in the form of a survey.

Sunday Evening Pre-Project Survey

The Sunday night study began with the distribution of the pre-project survey (appendix 1). The participants were given one week to complete and return the survey. Twenty-five surveys were distributed but only 19 were returned. The survey consisted of

three sections with 10 statements in each section. The first section asked the group to respond to statements about individual church membership. For the most part, the Sunday night group responded very well to the first section of the survey. The only area of concern from this section was 26 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, “Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member.” One-fourth of the most faithful members of this church did not feel there were any requirements attached to church membership.

The second section of the survey contained ten statements about the responsibilities of an individual church member. The second set of statements again displayed a consistently orthodox view of the church and church membership by the majority of the respondents. Two statements caused some concern. The first was, “It should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible.” Of those surveyed, 32 percent were uncertain and 26 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fifty eight percent of the respondents had a minimal, if not uncertain, value attached to church attendance. The other concerning statement was, “Some church members have special gifts and should be expected to use those gifts within the church.” 21percent of those surveyed were uncertain about this statement and 16 percent disagreed with the statement. It was discovered after the post-project survey that there was some confusion about the statement. Some disagreed with the statement because they felt it should have stated that all church members have special gifts. This confusion is especially shown in the post-project results.

The third section gathered responses to statements about the corporate responsibilities of the congregation to the church member. This section proved to be the

most frustrating, both in the pre- and post-project phase. Six statements were cause for concern in the pre-project survey and more after. In response to “The pastoral staff is expected to meet most of the immediate needs of the church,” 32 percent agreed. Sixteen percent disagreed and 16 percent more were uncertain whether “every church member should have a part in corporate accountability and church discipline.” Fifty-eight percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed that “a non-attending member should be publicly called to repentance.” Thirty-three percent disagreed and another 32 percent were uncertain whether “the Lord’s Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins.” The respondents were largely uncertain about all three statements regarding church covenants. All in all, the church showed much less understanding about the corporate aspect of the church than they did the individual.

Sunday Morning Pre-Project Survey

The Sunday night study began with the distribution of the pre-project survey (appendix 2). The participants were given one week to complete and return the surveys. A hundred surveys were distributed but only 61 were returned. The survey consisted of three sections with 10 statements in each section. The first section asked the group to respond to statements about individual church membership. The responses to several of the statements in the first section were notable.

In response to the statement “Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member,” 27 percent agreed and 10 percent strongly agreed. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents agreed that there were no requirements attached to membership at First Baptist Church. Of those surveyed, 36 percent disagreed with the statement “Baptism is required in order to become a member

of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.” Three percent more strongly disagreed.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents did not understand the value of baptism for church membership.

The responses to two correlating statements in the first section are also worth noting. Of those surveyed, 16 percent disagreed that “salvation is required to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.” Twenty-six percent disagreed and 7 percent strongly disagreed that “only saved persons can be members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.” Either way the statement reads, a portion of the respondents did not understand the necessity of regeneration for church membership. These two statements were the main focus of the project and probably serve as the best measure of the success or failure of the study.

The second section of the survey included statements regarding the responsibilities of the church member. There were a few notable responses in this section. Twenty-one percent disagreed and 5 percent strongly disagreed with the statement, “It should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible.” Of those surveyed, 15 percent agreed with the statement, “Not every person has a gift to use within the ministry of the church.” Another 5 percent strongly agreed with this statement.

The third section asked those surveyed to respond to statements regarding the congregational responsibility to the individual church member. Again, there were a few notable responses. Twenty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Even an unbelieving person can be a good church member.” In response to the statement, “A non-attending member who does not repent should be removed from the

fellowship of the church,” only 13 percent agreed. Only 18 percent agreed and 7 percent strongly agreed, “The Lord’s Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins.” Similar to the Sunday night survey, the responses to the statements regarding church covenants displayed little understanding of the concept.

The Responsibilities of a Church Member

The next step in teaching the meaning and value of regenerate church membership was to teach two five week Bible studies to the Sunday evening small group. The first five week study (Appendix 3), entitled “The Responsibilities of a Church Member,” focused on the individual church member and their role in the church. The goal of this study was to help the small group understand through the study of Scripture the biblical mandates directed toward every member of every local church.

Discipleship. The first session, “Discipleship,” used various New Testament Scriptures and was taught on the evening of October 16, 2011. The study defined discipleship as following Jesus. In John 10 Jesus calls himself the good shepherd. In verse 4 Jesus says, “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” The illustration of a sheep following his loving shepherd is a helpful illustration in understanding discipleship. Ultimately, the sheep follows because he is the shepherd and he follows his shepherd’s voice. But Jesus is not just any shepherd. He is the good shepherd who “lays down his life for the sheep.” In Revelation 14:4 it is clear that those who follow Jesus are the ones whom he has redeemed. Every believer, therefore, is responsible to be a follower of Jesus.

The beginning of following is submission. For a believer there is a dual submission in biblical discipleship. A disciple must submit to Christ to whom has been given “all authority” (Matt 28:16-20). Colossians 1:15-18 also describes Christ’s absolute authority over all of creation. The authority of Jesus demands submission. The believer, in submitting to Christ, should also submit to the local church. In Matthew 16:13-19 Jesus establishes the church and gives it earthly authority. Every believer is a part of the universal church and should find a local church to be a part of. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the necessity of our membership in Jesus’s house built upon him. When the church submits to Christ and the authority of the congregation in their lives it results in unity (Ephesians 4:11-16) and accomplishes the goal of redemption, to be presented “holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (Col 1:21-23). Ultimately, a proper understanding of discipleship serves as the foundation for the study of the responsibilities of the individual church member. The other four are dimensions of or expressions of discipleship.

Evangelism. The second session “Evangelism” outlined another responsibility of the church member and was taught on the evening of October 23, 2011. Based on the foundational understanding of discipleship the second session focused on the church member’s responsibility to be a disciple-maker. Every believer is to be a disciple and every disciple is commissioned by Jesus to make disciples (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8). Hebrews 5:12-14 describes the need for Christian maturity so that one might teach others. Mature disciples arm themselves with the full armor of God (Eph 6:13-17) and make

disciples. As far as methodology every Christian is unique in his or her gifts, abilities, and preferences. There is no set curriculum for disciple-making.

Disciple-making evangelism goes beyond canned presentations that end in repeated prayers. True disciple-making is a life investment. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 the Apostle Paul describes how, in an effort to make disciples, he and those with him “were ready to share with you, not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” More than that, Paul gives us an example of generational discipleship when he writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Therefore Paul has an eye to future generations when he is discipling Timothy.

So evangelism is a life investment that seeks to train men and women who will be able to train other men and women how to follow Jesus. It is also important to see that this discipleship happens within the context of the local church, as Paul wrote to Timothy the things he had been taught he had heard “in the presence of many witnesses.”

Service. The third session, entitled “Service,” was taught on the evening of October 30, 2011. Service, like evangelism, is not distinct from, but is an element of true discipleship. Service is a key element of discipleship and, therefore, church membership. Matthew 25:31-40 shows how disciples of Jesus are identified according to their service to others. Throughout the gospels Jesus emphasized service as one of his core teachings through his example (Matt 19:30-20:16; 20:25-28; Mark 9:33-35) and through parables such as the one recorded in Matthew 24:42-51.

Based on Jesus's teachings and his example church members should actively engage in serving others. The study next covered five guidelines for effective service in and through the church. First, Christ-honoring service is supernatural. Romans 7:25-8:8 describes the part that the Holy Spirit plays in effective service. Second, Christlike service is not motivated by legal obligation (Rom 7:6). Instead one should serve out of love (Gal 5:13). Fourth, the attitude of the servant should be filled with gladness (Ps 101:2; Deut 28:45-48). Finally, each church member should serve according to his or her own gifts (1 Pet 4:10).

Stewardship. The fourth session, entitled "Stewardship," was taught on the evening of November 6, 2011. The discussion of stewardship naturally followed out of the discussion of service, because stewardship is a specific service to the church by the church member. Malachi warns Israel not to rob God by refusing to bring in their tithes and at the same time reminds them of the blessings that will follow if they are faithful to give. The tithe, ten percent of income, is the baseline for giving described in the Scriptures. The concept of the tithe is developed in the Old Testament. The study first addressed the question as to whether this Old Testament guideline is applicable in a New Testament context.

The first mention of the tithe is in Genesis 14:17-20 which describes Abram offering a tithe to the priest Melchizedek after a significant victory in battle. The law of the tithe is given in Leviticus 27:26-34 and the tithe is described as "devoted to the Lord" and "holy to the Lord." The tithe, then, is the Lord's and should be given toward his purposes. Numbers 18:20-24 describes the destination of the tithes in the Old Testament context. The Levites received the tithes for their provision as they were the only tribe not

to receive an inheritance in the Promised Land. The tithes also provided for the tent of meeting and then the Temple. The tithe was set apart by God to provide for the place of worship and those who would facilitate the worship of the people.

As Gentile believers in the twenty-first century there is no need to consider the needs of the Levites or the Tabernacle. The study looks to the teachings of Jesus to discover a contemporary understanding of the principle of the tithe. Jesus taught that the attitude of the giver is equally important, if not more important, than the tithe given. Jesus warned against giving hypocritically (Matthew 23:23) and against giving self-righteously (Luke 18:11-14).

The tithe itself is the question addressed in the remainder of the study. There is an ongoing theological debate as to whether or not the tithe is applicable to New Testament believers. This study was not intended to be exhaustive in its treatment of the subject of the tithe. This study took the position that the tithe is beneficial and permissible to the church based on passages such as Matthew 5:16-20 and Hebrews 7:1-10. Whether or not he or she tithes, the church member has two motivations for giving. The first is for the furtherance of the ministry of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:1-12). The second, is that faithful giving is for their individual benefit (2 Corinthians 9:5-15).

Fellowship. The final session discussing the responsibilities of the individual church member, entitled “Fellowship,” was delivered on the evening of November 13, 2011. Fellowship is more than a responsibility for each church member, it is a need. Fellowship is a responsibility because the believers are commanded in Hebrews 10:25 to meet together in community. The early church set the example for fellowship as is described in Acts 2:42-44. Jesus’s metaphors for describing the church establish the

believers' need for one another. First Corinthians 12 describes the church as a body with many parts that function together. Each part needs the other part in order to function well. Jesus further established the importance of community through the institution of the communion meal. First Corinthians 11:23-24 lays out the guidelines for observance of communion. Communion itself establishes and demands community. First John 1:1-7 teaches that fellowship does not only bond believers together but joins them to God himself.

The Responsibilities of the Congregation

The second five-week study (appendix 4) was entitled "The Responsibilities of the Congregation." This study changed the perspective from that of the individual to the perspective of the body as a whole. The goal of the study was to identify and describe the corporate responsibility of the congregation toward the individual church members. While the congregation is made up of individuals, it should function together for the good of the membership and the ministry of the Gospel.

Discipline. The first and second sessions of this study, entitled "Discipline," were taught on the evening of November 27, 2011. These two sessions were delivered together because they were intimately related, and because time allowed. There are two aspects of church discipline, instructive and corrective. Corrective discipline is founded upon the instruction of the church. Instructive discipline becomes authoritative with the institution of consistent corrective discipline. Both are corporate responsibilities within the church.

The first session focused on instructive discipline. In order for any corrective discipline to take place the church must have known expectations and values. Hebrews 12:1-14 compares the discipline of God to the discipline of a parent. Parents discipline their children according to the instructions they have given those children. A parent who does not instruct his child, and then disciplines the child for not following instructions, is not acting justly toward his child. The church should act as a just parent under the authority of Christ to instruct in righteousness and hold one another accountable in the pursuit of holiness.

Ephesians 4:11-16 establishes the roles of pastors and teachers for equipping the believers to do the work that Christ has called them to do. Pastors and teachers are responsible for equipping the church so that the congregation can attain spiritual maturity through faith and knowledge. The responsibility for preaching and teaching falls on called individuals, but the responsibility for gaining faith, knowledge and maturity falls on the congregation. The congregation must seek to gain proper understanding and hold its pastors and teachers accountable for sound, comprehensive, biblical teaching.

The second session outlined instructions and guidelines for corrective discipline within the church. Jesus gives a model for church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17. The believer should first confront the offending party in confidence, accompanied by one or two brothers, and only then bring the issue before the church. Galatians 6:1 reminds the church that the goal throughout the process is repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. First Timothy 5:19-20 is clear that if the offending church member refuses to repent the church must act to protect the congregation. First Corinthians 5:1-11 gives a specific example of how sexual immorality should not be

tolerated within the church. Second Thessalonians 3:6-15 gives instruction about reproving those who are idle. Titus 3:9-11 addresses divisiveness and other accompanying sins that should not be tolerated in the church. Titus emphasizes that the church is not condemning the member for his or her sin, but that unrepentant church members are self-condemned.

The ordinances. The third session, entitled “The Ordinances,” was presented on the evening of December 4, 2011. The congregation is responsible for offering the ordinances of baptism and communion to the congregation consistently and correctly. Baptism, a Jewish custom performed on Gentile proselytes, was adopted by John the Baptist and confirmed by Jesus and the apostles as the sign for repentance in believers. John 3:22-4:2 describes baptism performed by John the Baptist and Jesus’s apostles. In Matthew 3:1-17 John describes the baptism of repentance and its relationship to the spiritual baptism that comes through Jesus. Acts 18:24-19:5 describes how baptism for repentance outside of faith in Christ for salvation is incomplete and ineffective. In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus instructs and gives authority for his disciples to baptize and teach those who become followers of Jesus. It is clear in the New Testament that baptism must be offered by the church to those who have believed in Jesus as a testimony of their repentance and faith.

The church must also consistently and correctly offer communion to the membership. Jesus instituted the Lord’s supper in Luke 22:19-20. He instructed the disciples to continue observing the meal until he returns. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 Paul clearly outlines the correct attitudes and actions with which the church member should approach the communion table. The gravity of the communion table should not be

underestimated or undervalued by the congregation. Communion is an observance where the believer is intimately connected to the death of Christ, and introduced to the hope of resurrection. The church must protect the sanctity of the Lord's supper and offer it consistently for the spiritual health of the body.

Help. The fourth session, entitled "Help," was offered on the evening of December 11, 2011. First Thessalonians 5:12-28 encourages the church to submit to the elders in the church, encourage one another, and help the weak in the congregation. The ministry of helps can take many different forms within the ministry of the church. The church, from the beginning, has come together to help meet the tangible needs of church members as they arise. But the ministry of helps goes beyond food, clothing, and money. Encouragement, teaching, worship, giving, righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, and prayer are all different types of helps to the membership of the church. The congregation should be active in ministering to the various needs of the individual church members as they arise.

Perhaps the greatest ministry of help in the church is the ministry of prayer. In 2 Corinthians 1:11 Paul admonishes the church that they must help him by their prayer. Prayer results in successful ministry, faithfulness in the congregation, provision in times of need, comfort in times of mourning, and countless other outcomes. One of the chief roles of the congregation is to intercede for one another. Prayer must be an essential part of the life of the church.

Equipping and commissioning. The final session in the study of the responsibilities of the congregation, entitled "Equipping and Commissioning," was

delivered on the evening of December 18, 2011. The congregation is responsible for the equipping and commissioning of the church members. Ephesians 4:11-12 describes the offices of pastor and teacher given to the church for the purpose of equipping believers for ministry. The tool given to the church is the word of God. Second Timothy 3:16-17 describes the authority of the Scriptures and their uses in the church. First Peter 5:1-11 encourages the church leaders to humbly lead the congregation and for the congregation to follow the selfless leadership of the elders.

Sunday Morning Sermon Series

The next phase of the study was a four-part sermon series intended to teach the meaning and value of regenerate church membership to the congregation at First Baptist Church, West Columbia. The sermon series was a condensed version of the ten week Bible study presented on Sunday evenings. Each sermon focused on two or three elements of church membership discussed in the Sunday evening study. Because the content of each study has already been discussed above the descriptions of the sermons will be limited to highlighting the elements of church membership discussed in each sermon.

The first sermon, entitled “Church Membership 101,” was delivered Sunday, November 27, 2011 and discussed discipleship and evangelism as responsibilities of individual church members. The second sermon, entitled “Church Membership 102,” was preached Sunday, December 4, 2011, and covered service, stewardship, and fellowship as essential elements to church membership. The third sermon, entitled “Church Membership 103,” was given Sunday, December 11, 2011 and covered discipline and the ordinances. The sermon also sought to describe the connection

between the two. The fourth sermon, entitled “Church Membership 104,” was delivered on Sunday, December 18, 2011 and covered equipping and helping.

Sunday Evening Post-Project Survey

The study concluded with the distribution of the post-project survey (appendix 1). Twenty-five surveys were distributed, but only 11 were returned. The post-project survey was identical to the pre-project survey so as to measure the progress of the group. There was some measurable change in the responses of the Sunday night group. Most of the change demonstrated a better understanding of church membership, but there were some statements where the responses showed some regression.

The first section of the survey included statements about individual church membership. In the pre-project survey 26 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, “Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member.” After the project none of those surveyed agreed with this statement. This is encouraging considering the fact that the study was entitled “The Responsibilities of a Church Member.”

The second section of the survey included statements about the responsibilities of individual church members. In the pre-project survey 21 percent of the respondents agreed that “it should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible.” Five percent of those surveyed strongly agreed with the above statement and 32 percent were uncertain. After the study, none of those surveyed strongly agreed with the above statement and 27 percent agreed. The number of those who were uncertain about this statement declined to 18 percent. Although the total percentage of those who

disagreed with this statement increased, the movement of the group was toward agreement.

Another statement that caused some concern in the pre-project survey was the statement, “Some church members have special gifts and should be expected to use those gifts within the church.” Sixteen percent of those surveyed disagreed with this statement and 21 percent were uncertain. In the post-project survey 45 percent of respondents disagreed with this statement. This statement proved to be unclear and somewhat confusing. Some respondents disagreed with the statement because they felt that all church members have special gifts and not “some church members.” Others disagreed that church members should be expected to use their gifts within the context of the church.

The third section of the survey contained statements regarding the responsibilities of the congregation to the church member. In the pre-project survey 32 percent of those surveyed agreed that “the pastoral staff is expected to meet most of the immediate needs of the church.” In the post-project survey only 9 percent of the respondents agreed, although they did strongly agree.

Before the study 16 percent of the group disagreed with the statement, “Every church member should have a part in corporate accountability and church discipline.” Sixteen percent more were uncertain about the above statement. After the study none of the respondents disagreed and only 9 percent were uncertain. The statement, “It is important for a non-attending member to be publicly called to repentance,” proved to be one that the members of the study were uncertain about. In the pre-project survey 21 percent were uncertain and 27 percent were uncertain in the post-project survey. The

uncertainty was due to the public call to repentance. Most of the small group felt that, while it is necessary to call someone to repentance for nonattendance, it would be better handled in private.

Another statement regarding church discipline showed some regression in the understanding of the study group. In the pre-project survey 32 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “The Lord’s Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins.” After the study 46 percent of those surveyed disagreed with the statement. There was no issue with the clarity of the statement. This is a troubling finding as to the study group’s understanding of communion as a part of church membership.

As in the pre-project survey the respondents showed little appreciation or understanding of church covenants in the post-project survey. The study only very quickly mentioned the covenant as a standard for discipline and adequate time was not given to the topic, thus the survey statements concerning the church covenant revealed very little progress, if not regress, in the group’s understanding.

Overall the Sunday night group responded very well to the survey. I was disappointed that participants did not grasp some of the key concepts of the study. If nothing else, the study and survey caused the study group to think about church membership and consider its implications.

Sunday Morning Post-Project Survey

Following the final sermon a post-project survey (appendix 2) was distributed to the congregation. One hundred surveys were distributed but only forty-six were

returned. There was a perceived improvement in understanding in some areas, but for the most part, the post-project results were disappointing.

The statements that addressed the key component of the study were encouraging. The responses to the statement, “Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member,” moved toward disagreement. Before the study 37 percent agreed or strongly agreed and after the sermon series only 29 percent agreed in any way. The responses to the statement, “Baptism is required in order to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia,” moved significantly toward agreement. Before the sermon series 51 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, but afterward 59 percent were in agreement. The responses to the two statements addressing regenerate church membership were also encouraging. Before the study 16 percent disagreed that “salvation is required to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.” Afterward only 9 percent disagreed. As to the statement, “Only saved persons can be members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia,” 33 percent disagreed before the series but only 23percent disagreed after. The survey gives the overall appearance of improved understanding regarding the importance and value of regenerate church membership.

The other sections of the survey did not contain equally encouraging results. The second section of the survey contained at least two troubling responses. The percentage of those that agreed with the statement, “It should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible,” declined by 9 percent. The percentage of the ones agreeing with the statement, “It is important that every church member is able

to share his or her testimony about the time that he or she came to faith in Christ,” declined by 16 percent.

The third section, concerning the responsibilities of the congregation, offered more areas of concern. The percentage of those who agreed with the statement, “Even an unbelieving person can be a good church member,” increased by 8 percent. Those that agreed that “A non-attending church member who does not repent should be removed from the fellowship of the church,” decreased by 9 percent. The responses to the statement, “The Lord’s Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins,” moved toward uncertainty. Before the series 18 percent were uncertain, and after 33 percent were uncertain.

Evaluations

Both the Sunday evening study group and Sunday morning congregation were given the opportunity to evaluate the presentation of the material. They were asked to respond to five different statements about the presentations: “The information presented in this study was valuable to me as a church member,” “The presentation of this information was clear and understandable,” “The presenter made good use of time during the presentation,” “The presenter seemed to have a good understanding of the material presented,” and “I feel like I better understand church membership because of this study.” The Sunday evening evaluations (appendix 5) were overwhelmingly favorable. Each member of the study group agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The evaluations of the sermon series (appendix 6) were not as consistently favorable, but the majority of those who were surveyed were satisfied with the presentation of the material. There were some who disagreed with each statement. Two

percent disagreed with the first statement. Ten percent disagreed with the second and third statement. Five percent disagreed with the fourth statement, and 12 percent disagreed with the final statement.

Conclusion

The process of preaching the sermons and teaching the Bible studies proved to be beneficial personally and congregationally. Much was learned through preparation and delivery of these studies that cannot be quantified statistically. Overall, the congregation reacted well to the study, although the statistics do not depict a clear view of their understanding. The church was encouraged by the reminder that they are not alone in their faith. Every Christian has a responsibility and a need to be a part of a church, because God designed them that way.

CHAPTER 5
PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter presents an evaluation of the project. The stated goals of the project are compared with the data presented in chapter 4 to gauge the project's success. I will examine the methodology of the project and propose some of its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I reflect upon the project theologically and personally. I will examine the effect of the project upon First Baptist Church, West Columbia. This chapter is a valuable opportunity for me to maximize the project's benefit to my church and me and to think upon how to proceed next in my ministry. I hope that the members of First Baptist Church have benefited from this study, but I know that I have been changed ministerially and personally through the process. This project has been invaluable to me in my development as a pastor and follower of Christ.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this project was to develop a system for training the congregation of First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas, in the definition and value of regenerate church membership. The first question in evaluation is whether or not the purpose was appropriate given the ministry context. The original rationale for the project was based on a survey conducted in 2007. The survey revealed

that 50 percent of those surveyed did not believe personal conversion was necessary in order to become a church member. Despite the delay between this initial survey and the project, the purpose remained appropriate because the population and mindset of the church did not change dramatically over the interim period. Given the importance of a proper understanding of church membership, the purpose would have remained appropriate even with major changes in the church's makeup.

The strategy for implementation, preaching, and teaching, was the one that best suited my personality, beliefs, and giftedness. The methodology of the project also allowed for the comparison of the success of a ten-week intensive study versus a four-week comprehensive sermon series.

The second evaluative question is whether or not the project succeeded in accomplishing its purpose. A method for training was developed, so that portion of the purpose was accomplished. The effectiveness of the developed method is best measured based upon the data collected as part of the project. The formation of the method took much longer than expected. Many of the delays were unavoidable and the integrity of the project was not compromised by the timeliness of its completion. The content of the study adhered closely to historically orthodox Baptist theology and was arranged logically and practically. It was expected for the project to be successful.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The overarching goal of the project was to develop my pastoral leadership ability through the process of training the congregation in biblical church membership. The standards for personal evaluation are the project's three established goals.

The first goal of the project was to establish a biblical understanding of church membership among the congregation as a whole. The survey results showed little to no positive change in congregational understanding of the definition and value of regenerate church membership. The percentage of those who strongly agreed with the statement, “Salvation is required to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.” increased in both the Sunday morning and Sunday evening surveys. The increase, however, was small and there were other statements that showed regression in understanding rather than improvement. There was also a very small degree of change in regards to defining the church as a mere building or address. Overall, the change in understanding of the discipleship group was disappointing.

The second goal was to establish the value of church membership through understanding of the responsibilities of a regenerate church member. While the small group showed some improvement in comprehension of the responsibilities of an individual church member the change in congregational understanding was almost nil. The results were scattered and inconsistent from statement to statement. Because the Sunday night group received more in-depth teaching the results were more consistent, but the changes were not dramatic. The second goal of the project was more successful than the first but again did not accomplish the intended results.

The third goal of the project was to teach the body of believers about their corporate responsibility to one another. The Sunday night small group showed solid improvement in the general understanding of congregational responsibility. There was no positive change, however, in their understanding of church covenants or church discipline. The Sunday morning study again showed very little positive change. While

the third goal showed the highest degree of success it was not was expected or desired at the outset of the project.

Strengths of the Project

In evaluating the project some strengths were discovered. At least three are worth noting. The first strength of the project was that the teaching was biblical. Every point and sub-point were anchored to a biblical text. It was challenging to avoid proof-texting for certain points, but great effort was made to present each text in its own biblical context. While the project itself may not have achieved its ultimate goal, the Scriptures are powerful and trustworthy. It is unquestionable that ten weeks of biblical teaching plus four biblical sermons, all dealing with church membership, resulted in positive outcomes for the congregation.

The second strength of the project was that it inspired conversations about church membership throughout the congregation. The general sentiment among the church was a desire for more teaching about church membership rather than less. More than one Sunday school teacher asked if I could present the study to their class in a more condensed form. Also, the study encouraged the desire for a church membership class that would build a foundational understanding of biblical church membership at First Baptist Church.

The third strength of the project is the bond that it created between church members. Though there is much work to do as to the theology of church membership, the resounding response to the study has been a shift towards a communal understanding of church. The members seemed glad to hear that they are not alone in faith. The

continual reminder of the congregation's individual and corporate responsibilities has inspired this church to do great things together. The unity of fellowship that has resulted from the power of the Scriptures carrying out God's intended purpose is incredible.

Weaknesses of the Project

Evaluation of the project revealed several weaknesses, four in particular. The first weakness was the time it took from the project's conception to its implementation. There were avoidable and unavoidable delays that caused the process to drag on beyond its premium relevance and effectiveness. While an accurate view of church membership is always relevant, the climate of the church changed before and during the time that I became pastor. Another effect of the length of time take to implement the project was the tendency to lose focus and direction. The emphasis of the project shifted to the responsibilities of the church and its members and away from the theoretical focus on teaching regenerate church membership. This was due in part to the needs of the congregation and in part to the historical and theological study at the beginning of the project. While an emphasis on regeneration is inherent to a proper understanding of the responsibilities of a church member, it was not originally the primary practical emphasis of the project.

The second weakness of the project was the inconsistency in attendance on Sunday mornings and the lack of perseverance in the Sunday evening group. Sunday morning attendance varied greatly during the four-week sermon series. Part of the cause of the haphazard attendance was the fact that the project took place during the holiday season. Sunday morning attendance tends to be inconsistent for many of our members no matter what the season, and the holidays proved to make inconsistency the rule rather

than the exception. This contributed to the lack of improvement in the Sunday morning survey results although I do not believe it was the primary cause.

Those that began and completed the Sunday evening course were consistent in their attendance and attention. The problem with the Sunday evening group was that nearly half (8 out of 19) of those who began the course did not complete it. Two factors contributed to the inconsistency. One was the time of year. The project was conducted during the fall holiday season. Many church members travel during this busy season. The second factor was a sense of inadequacy felt by some of the older church members. A few of the older ladies expressed concern that they would not be able to complete the survey due to a lack of theological understanding. Even after reassuring them that all that was required to participate was church membership, a few of these ladies chose not to complete the final survey. The dedication of the group over all was varied. Only a few attended every session, and several of those mentioned above attended every session but opted not to participate in the post-project survey. This diminished number from pre- to post-project skewed the survey results and impaired my ability to accurately gauge the success or failure of the project.

A third weakness of the project was the attempt to present a wide view of church membership, rather than focusing on an in-depth analysis of a few aspects of church membership. The breadth of the study reduced the overall understanding of the material. If the goal was to effect change in belief, a more narrowly focused approach should have been preferred.

A fourth weakness was that the survey was too long and some of the statements proved to be difficult to understand. Many respondents commented as to the

length of the survey with several turning it in after replying to only a few statements. Partial surveys were not counted in the results of the project. The length of the survey did not contribute to the successful measure of change in the understanding of the congregation. The difficulty of some of the statements became obvious in two ways. First, many of the participants stated their lack of understanding of the survey statements. Second, the great number of “uncertain” responses testifies to the difficulty some had understanding what was intended.

Methodological Reflection

Upon completion of the project I have taken time to reflect upon the process and how I managed it. I would attempt to do four things differently if I had the project to do over again. The first would be to maintain focus on the goals. One issue that contributed to the failure to accomplish the project’s goals was my lack of focus. Because I did not constantly keep the end in mind, some potential successes were not achieved.

The second change would be the timeliness of the project. If I could go back, I would attempt to not let personal and professional hardships get in the way of adhering to deadlines. The length of time required to complete this project was perhaps its greatest weakness.

The third change would be to narrow the focus of the teaching as well as shortening and clarifying the survey. This change would have made a significant difference in the outcome of the project. I have learned that small bites are better digested.

The fourth change would be a practical change. I would meet somewhere other than the sanctuary for the Sunday evening Bible study. This would change the atmosphere of the study and inspire and encourage more questions and discussion. Furthermore, I believe it would have built a greater bond among the group, increased accountability, and encouraged perseverance.

Theological Reflection

The project required me to focus on a doctrine that I had always assumed was understood widely and consistently throughout our church. I was somewhat surprised by the theological confusion of some of our most faithful members regarding the doctrine of church membership. I was equally surprised by the number of church members who commented that they had never been taught about church membership before. The church members' seemed even more confused when the ideas of baptism, communion, and church discipline were discussed in connection to church membership.

The discussion of this doctrine did not result in a measurable change in belief in the church. However, it did inspire great conversation and a hunger to know more. I was reminded of the importance of teaching the most basic doctrines, and the importance of not assuming understanding among the older saints. This project confirmed to me the importance of connecting regeneration, baptism, communion, discipline, and membership in my teaching so that these concepts will be connected in the minds of the congregation.

The project also inspired in me a careful consideration of the church as a community of believers. To understand this factually was foundational, but to seek to apply it in my ministry and the ministry of the church has been transformational. I am

constantly reminded of my need for the body, so that I do not go to church and attend to my duties solely because I feel that the church needs its pastor or because together we need communion with the Lord through His word. I am faithful to the church for those two reasons but also because I need the church deeply. God did not institute and empower the church because he needed her but because we needed her. I am therefore drawn to the body out of necessity rather than out of duty.

Finally, I was reminded of a congregational approach to ministry. This church is not my ministry field, but instead it constitutes the minister in the field. The body needs leadership, vision, encouragement, equipping, and discipline to accomplish its task. Every member is gifted to participate in the work of ministry and the building up of the body, but no member's gifts, not even those of the pastor, can accomplish the full ministry of the body. The church must be called, equipped, and compelled to accomplish a congregational mission within their given missional context. This mission is one that can only be accomplished by a community of saints empowered by God. Individuals acting individually for the kingdom can, and will, effect individual change, but a community of believers acting for kingdom purposes can, and will, effect community-wide change. This project, if nothing else, has impressed upon me the great value of the body for the kingdom and for my personal, spiritual health and growth.

Personal Reflection

During the time taken to complete this project I have endured several monumental challenges. First, our pastor left while I was still in the research phase of the project. I went over a year completely uncertain of my future at First Baptist Church. After this time I was called as the pastor, and my ministry dynamic changed from student

ministry to pastoral ministry. My family life also changed greatly during this time. Two new children were born into our family during my project making us a family of five. My youngest son was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect the day after his birth. He underwent successful open-heart surgery as a six month old to correct this defect. These have been trying times. I know life always presents challenges, but these few years have been especially challenging. I have learned a great deal about myself through this process. Many of my personal weaknesses have been brought to bear upon the project itself. Despite my weaknesses I have sought perseverance to the end. Through it all, I have discovered again God's sufficiency and faithfulness through the best and worst of times.

Conclusion

Over a fifteen week period in 2011 I attempted to develop a system for training the congregation of First Baptist Church, West Columbia, Texas, in the definition and value of regenerate church membership. The project consisted of a four-week sermon series and a ten-week small group Bible study, designed primarily to teach the need for regeneration for church membership and the responsibilities of regenerate church members both individually and congregationally. The implementation of the project took longer than expected, but the themes of the project remain relevant to the ministry context.

By the measure of the pre- and post-project surveys it appears that the project was ineffective, but by the measurements of church unity, ministry awareness, and desire to know more the project could be viewed as a success. Church-wide outreach and

community groups have indirectly arisen out of this study of church membership. The church also now has a sense of its local and global mission. My own ministry and love for the church was deeply impacted by the project. I look forward to leading this church in fulfilling its congregational purpose as the spotless bride of Christ.

APPENDIX 1

SUNDAY EVENING SURVEY AND RESULTS

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

Individual Church Membership

1. Any person can become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 37%	11%	0%	37%	16%
Post: 27%	37%	0%	18%	18%

2. Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member.

Pre: 26%	37%	11%	26%	0%
Post: 36%	55%	9%	0%	0%

3. All church members are Christians.

Pre: 26%	21%	26%	5%	21%
Post: 36%	28%	0%	9%	27%

4. The Lord's Supper should be taken by every member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia when offered.

Pre: 5%	58%	11%	11%	16%
Post: 27%	28%	9%	18%	18%

5. Salvation is required to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 0%	0%	11%	37%	53%
Post: 9%	9%	0%	18%	64%

6. All saved persons should be members of a church.

Pre: 0%	5%	5%	32%	58%
Post: 0%	9%	0%	27%	64%

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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7. All saved persons should be baptized following their faith in Christ.

Pre: 0%	0%	0%	37%	63%
Post: 0%	0%	0%	27%	73%

8. Baptism is required in order to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 0%	26%	5%	37%	32%
Post: 18%	18%	0%	27%	37%

9. Baptism should be offered to unsaved persons desiring to become members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia without a profession of faith in Christ.

Pre: 74%	16%	5%	0%	5%
Post: 73%	18%	0%	0%	9%

10. Only saved persons can be members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 0%	16%	21%	21%	47%
Post: 9%	36%	0%	18%	37%

The Responsibility of the Church Member to the Church

1. The church exists to meet the needs of each church member as best as it can.

Pre: 16%	26%	0%	42%	16%
Post: 0%	18%	9%	45%	27%

2. The church can be defined as the building in which the fellowship of believers meets.

Pre: 53%	21%	0%	11%	16%
Post: 45%	36%	0%	0%	18%

3. Each church member has a responsibility to support the church financially.

Pre: 0%	0%	0%	37%	63%
Post: 0%	0%	0%	27%	73%

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
4. It should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible.					
Pre:	5%	21%	32%	16%	26%
Post:	0%	27%	18%	45%	10%
5. A person who regularly attends and gives to the church financially has fulfilled their responsibility to their church.					
Pre:	37%	58%	5%	0%	0%
Post:	36%	46%	0%	0%	18%
6. The pastor is a servant to the congregation employed by the church.					
Pre:	16%	42%	5%	32%	5%
Post:	18%	18%	9%	36%	18%
7. Some church members have special gifts and should be expected to use those gifts within the church.					
Pre:	0%	16%	21%	42%	21%
Post:	0%	45%	0%	27%	28%
8. Not every person has a gift to use within the ministry of the church.					
Pre:	32%	47%	5%	16%	0%
Post:	55%	18%	0%	18%	9%
9. Because some church members are not Christians, it is okay that they are not active in the church.					
Pre:	26%	37%	32%	5%	0%
Post:	36%	55%	9%	0%	0%
10. It is important that every church member is able to share his or her testimony about the time that he or she came to faith in Christ.					
Pre:	0%	16%	21%	47%	16%
Post:	0%	18%	9%	64%	9%

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The Responsibility of the Congregation to the Church Member

1. The pastoral staff is expected to meet most of the immediate needs of the church.

Pre: 16%	53%	0%	32%	0%
Post: 36%	55%	0%	0%	9%

2. The congregation's greatest responsibility it to provide for the church financially.

Pre: 11%	53%	26%	5%	5%
Post: 18%	64%	0%	18%	0%

3. Even an unbelieving person can be a good church member.

Pre: 42%	26%	16%	16%	0%
Post: 27%	55%	9%	9%	0%

4. Every church member should have a part in corporate accountability and church discipline.

Pre: 0%	16%	16%	42%	26%
Post: 0%	0%	9%	82%	9%

5. It is important for a non-attending member to be publicly called to repentance.

Pre: 11%	47%	21%	16%	5%
Post: 9%	27%	27%	27%	9%

6. A non-attending member who does not repent should be removed from the fellowship of the church.

Pre: 5%	32%	32%	21%	11%
Post: 9%	45%	28%	9%	9%

7. The Lord's Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins.

Pre: 11%	21%	32%	32%	5%
Post: 9%	37%	18%	18%	18%

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
8. Every church member should be required to sign a covenant that clearly states their responsibilities to the congregation and the consequences if they are negligent in fulfilling said requirements.					
Pre:	16%	16%	37%	26%	5%
Post:	9%	55%	27%	9%	0%
9. Church covenants are legalistic and creedal.					
Pre:	5%	47%	42%	0%	5%
Post:	9%	9%	45%	36%	0%
10. Baptist churches do not need covenants because each one is autonomous (governs itself).					
Pre:	11%	53%	32%	5%	0%
Post:	9%	45%	9%	36%	0%

APPENDIX 2

SUNDAY MORNING SURVEY AND RESULTS

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

Individual Church Membership

1. Any person can become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 8%	16%	2%	29%	45%
Post: 7%	15%	0%	24%	54%

2. Nothing is required of a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia to remain a church member.

Pre: 23%	34%	6%	27%	10%
Post: 20%	39%	12%	20%	9%

3. All church members are Christians.

Pre: 14.5%	24%	13%	34%	14.5%
Post: 26%	37%	11%	5%	21%

4. The Lord's Supper should be taken by every member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia when offered.

Pre: 8%	35%	15%	16%	26%
Post: 11%	41%	4%	28%	15%

5. Salvation is required to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 0%	16%	7%	28%	49%
Post: 7%	2%	7%	22%	57%

6. All saved persons should be members of a church.

Pre: 0%	3%	5%	31%	61%
Post: 2%	13%	2%	33%	48%

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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7. All saved persons should be baptized following their faith in Christ.

Pre: 0%	2%	3%	33%	61%
Post: 0%	7%	7%	33%	54%

8. Baptism is required in order to become a member of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 3%	36%	10%	18%	33%
Post: 7%	26%	9%	46%	13%

9. Baptism should be offered to unsaved persons desiring to become members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia without a profession of faith in Christ.

Pre: 56%	33%	2%	2%	7%
Post: 65%	28%	0%	0%	7%

10. Only saved persons can be members of First Baptist Church, West Columbia.

Pre: 7%	26%	9%	38%	20%
Post: 9%	14%	9%	46%	22%

The Responsibility of the Church Member to the Church

1. The church exists to meet the needs of each church member as best as it can.

Pre: 10%	23%	10%	34%	23%
Post: 7%	28%	4%	43%	17%

2. The church can be defined as the building in which the fellowship of believers meets.

Pre: 50%	20%	0%	20%	10%
Post: 35%	26%	2%	15%	22%

3. Each church member has a responsibility to support the church financially.

Pre: 0%	3%	7%	30%	61%
Post: 0%	0%	4%	39%	57%

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
4. It should be required that every church member attend church if at all possible.					
Pre:	5%	21%	7%	48%	20%
Post:	0%	26%	15%	39%	20%
5. A person who regularly attends and gives to the church financially has fulfilled their responsibility to their church.					
Pre:	16%	66%	7%	10%	2%
Post:	22%	57%	9%	9%	4%
6. The pastor is a servant to the congregation employed by the church.					
Pre:	7%	44%	5%	34%	15%
Post:	4%	22%	9%	41%	24%
7. Some church members have special gifts and should be expected to use those gifts within the church.					
Pre:	0%	15%	8%	56%	21%
Post:	0%	13%	11%	54%	22%
8. Not every person has a gift to use within the ministry of the church.					
Pre:	31%	44%	5%	15%	5%
Post:	25%	1852%	7%	9%	7%
9. Because some church members are not Christians, it is okay that they are not active in the church.					
Pre:	26%	43%	23%	8%	0%
Post:	24%	43%	20%	9%	4%
10. It is important that every church member is able to share his or her testimony about the time that he or she came to faith in Christ.					
Pre:	0%	5%	11%	54%	30%
Post:	2%	11%	20%	48%	20%

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

The Responsibility of the Congregation to the Church Member

1. The pastoral staff is expected to meet most of the immediate needs of the church.

Pre: 5%	38%	10%	43%	5%
Post: 4%	39%	20%	30%	7%

2. The congregation's greatest responsibility it to provide for the church financially.

Pre: 10%	51%	18%	13%	8%
Post: 11%	52%	15%	22%	0%

3. Even an unbelieving person can be a good church member.

Pre: 23%	31%	21%	20%	5%
Post: 17%	33%	17%	26%	7%

4. Every church member should have a part in corporate accountability and church discipline.

Pre: 2%	15%	21%	49%	16%
Post: 2%	13%	28%	50%	7%

5. It is important for a non-attending member to be publicly called to repentance.

Pre: 28%	48%	14%	8%	2%
Post: 33%	48%	11%	4%	4%

6. A non-attending member who does not repent should be removed from the fellowship of the church.

Pre: 23%	44%	20%	13%	0%
Post: 35%	35%	28%	4%	0%

7. The Lord's Supper should be withheld from church members who are unrepentant from known sins.

Pre: 16%	41%	18%	18%	7%
Post: 28 %	22%	33%	17%	2%

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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8. Every church member should be required to sign a covenant that clearly states their responsibilities to the congregation and the consequences if they are negligent in fulfilling said requirements.

Pre: 21%	54%	10%	11%	3%
Post: 33%	46%	15%	7%	0%

9. Church covenants are legalistic and creedal.

Pre: 13%	26%	44%	13%	3%
Post: 11%	37%	37%	15%	0%

10. Baptist churches do not need covenants because each one is autonomous (governs itself).

Pre: 8%	34%	36%	20%	2%
Post: 4%	35%	39%	20%	2%

APPENDIX 3

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHURCH MEMBER

Discipleship

I. Following

A. John 10

B. 1 Pet 2:21

C. Rev 14:4

II. Begins with Submission

A. To the Authority of Christ

1. Matt 28:16-20

2. Col 1:15-18

B. To the Authority of the Church

1. Matt 16:13-19

2. Eph 2:19-22

III. Results in Unity

A. Eph 4:11-16

B. Col 1:21-23

Evangelism

I. Evangelism is “Disciple Making”

A. All Believers are to be Disciple-Makers

1. Matt 28:19

2. Acts 1:8

B. Mature Disciples make Disciples

1. Heb 5:12-14

2. The Full Armor of God: Eph 6:13-17

C. How do we make Disciples?

1. 1 Thess 2:1-8

2. 2 Tim 2:2

Service

I. Service is a Mark of a True Disciple

A. Mal 3:13-18

B. Matt 25:31-40

II. Service is a Core Teaching of Jesus

A. Jesus set the Example

1. Matt 19:30-20:16

2. Matt 20:25-28

3. Mark 9:33-35

B. A Parable: Matt 24:42-41

III. The Spirit of Service

A. Service is Supernatural: Rom 7:25-8:8

B. One should not Serve out of Legal Obligation: Rom 7:6

C. Serve out of Love: Gal 5:13

D. Serve with Gladness: Ps 100:2; Deut 28:45-48

E. Serve According to your Gifts: 1 Pet 4:10

Stewardship

I. Stewardship is an Act of Service

A. Mal 3:1-12

1. The Concept of the Tithe

a. Began with Abraham: Gen 14:17-20

b. The Law of the Tithe: Lev 27:26-34

1. “Things devoted to the Lord”

2. Holy to the Lord

c. The Tithes Given to the Levites: Numbers 18:20-24

1. The Levites had no Inheritance

2. For their Provision and for Provision for the Tent of Meeting

(Temple)

B. Jesus and the Tithe

1. Attitude is important

a. Against Hypocrisy: Matt 23:23

b. Against Self-Righteousness: Luke 18:11-14

2. Legalism or Grace

a. Jesus and Law: Matt 5:16

b. Jesus and Melchizedek: Heb 7:1-10

C. Why Give?

1. For the Ministry of the Gospel: 1 Cor 9:1-12

2. For One’s Own Good: 2 Cor 9:5-15

Fellowship

I. Why Believers Need Fellowship

A. It is Commanded: Heb 10:25

B. The Example of the Early Church

1. Acts 2:42-44

2. 1 Cor 12: The Body

C. Communion: 1 Cor 11:23-34

D. Fellowship with One Another in Christ: 1 John 1:1-7

APPENDIX 4

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONGREGATION

Discipline 1

I. Formative Discipline

A. Discipline Begins with Instruction

1. Parental Discipline Illustration

2. Heb 12:1-4

B. God has Given Some to the Church for Instruction

C. The Congregation is Accountable to one Another for Growth into Maturity

D. The Congregation must Demand Biblical Instruction

Discipline 2

II. Reformative Discipline

A. Founded Upon Formative Discipline

B. Jesus Gave Specific Instruction Regarding: Matt 18:15-17

C. Jesus's Instruction Confirmed in the Epistles

1. 1 Tim 5:19-20

2. Titus 3:9-11

D. Specific Examples of Discipline in the Early Church

1. 1 Cor 5:1-11

2. 2 Thess 3:6-15

E. The Goal of Discipline is Redemption: Gal 6:1

Ordinances

I. Baptism

A. The Baptism of Repentance of John the Baptist Matt 3:1-12

B. Jesus's Baptism by John the Baptist: Matt 3:13-17

C. The Ministry of Baptism from John the Baptist to the Apostles: John 3:22-4:2

D. John's Baptism of Repentance vs. Baptism of Repentance and Faith: Acts 18:24-19:5

E. Jesus's Commission to Baptize all Believers: Matt 28:16-20

II. Lord's Supper

A. Established by Jesus: Luke 22:19-20

B. Instructions for Observance: 1 Cor 11:23-34

Help

I. The Congregation is Responsible for Helping One Another

A. The Church is Commanded to Help the Weak: Acts 20:22-38

B. Christian Conduct is a help to the Church: 1 Thess 5:12-28

II. Help through Prayer

A. 2 Cor 1:11

B. Phil 1:19-20

Equipping and Commissioning

I. All Believers are to be Equipped

A. Equipped by the Scriptures: 2 Tim 3:16-17

B. Equipped through the Ministry of the Pastors and Teachers within the Church

1. Eph 4:11-12

2. 1 Pet 5:1-11

II. All Believers are Comissioned

A. Matt 28:16-20

B. Acts 1:8

APPENDIX 5

SUNDAY EVENING EVALUATIONS

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Evaluation					
1. The information presented in this study was valuable to me as a church member.	0%	0%	0%	64%	36%
2. The presentation of this information was clear and understandable.	0%	0%	0%	82%	18%
3. The presenter made good use of time during the presentation.	0%	0%	0%	73%	27%
4. The presenter seemed to have a good understanding of the material presented.	0%	0%	0%	45%	55%
5. I feel like I better understand church membership because of this study.	0%	0%	0%	64%	36%

APPENDIX 6

SUNDAY MORNING EVALUATIONS

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Uncertain	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Evaluation					
1. The information presented in this study was valuable to me as a church member.	0%	2%	14%	57%	26%
2. The presentation of this information was clear and understandable.	0%	10%	12%	52%	26%
3. The presenter made good use of time during the presentation.	0%	10%	10%	55%	29%
4. The presenter seemed to have a good understanding of the material presented.	0%	5%	7%	40%	48%
5. I feel like I better understand church membership because of this study.	0%	12%	17%	40%	31%

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING THE DEFINITION AND VALUE OF REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WEST COLUMBIA, TEXAS

Ryan Richard Lintelman, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Supervisor: Dr. Adam W. Greenway

This project attempts to create a process for training the members of First Baptist Church West Columbia, Texas, concerning the meaning and value of regenerate church membership. Chapter 1 introduces the project and First Baptist Church West Columbia. This chapter discusses recent church history, demographic studies, and leadership issues within the church.

Chapter 2 addresses the biblical and theological issues concerning the definition and value of church membership. This chapter surveys various biblical texts in an effort to construct a scriptural view of church membership.

Chapter 3 traces the early history of the development of the doctrine of church membership in the Southern Baptist Convention. This chapter focuses on the work of J. L. Dagg, B. H. Carroll, and E. Y. Mullins.

Chapter 4 recounts the process of the project in detail. It describes the people addressed and the methods used for instruction. It also outlines the methodology used in gathering the research and describes the results of the research.

Chapter 5 focuses on analysis and evaluation. This chapter evaluates the purpose, goals, and methodology of the project as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

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