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DEEPENING COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS AT  
THE CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE  
PINE, ARIZONA

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

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
John Loren Lake  
May 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEEPENING COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS AT  
THE CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE  
PINE, ARIZONA

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To Simone,  
my partner in life and ministry

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CGM	Church Growth Movement
CORP	Church On Randall Place
DCR	Deepening Covenant Relationship
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SL	Second Life
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

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## PREFACE

The seed of this project was planted during a study on the marriage relationship described by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. As Paul describes the responsibilities of husbands and wives in chapter 5, he concludes by saying, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). Paul views the marriage relationship as a living parable of how Christ relates to his bride and how his church is to relate to her Lord. It was from this eye-opening realization that I began to meditate on the idea that the church is an integral part of God’s redemptive plan. This was a new idea for me, as I had been seduced by sincere but errant brethren who promoted the importance of the individual nature of the church rendering the activities that occur in the church building as superfluous. “I am the church” was the common mantra of my influencers, who also contended that the activities promoted at the church building were a relic of by-gone days. But as I studied the subject further as presented in the book of Ephesians, I was astounded to learn that the church is the means by which the wisdom of God is displayed to the rulers and authorities in heavenly place (3:10).

This new realization conflicted with what I was observing in the practice of the local church, and with those who spoke poorly about the Bride of Christ. How can a person say they love the Lord and then denigrate his betrothed? In practice I also saw how nonchalantly believers abandoned one fellowship for another, often for insignificant reasons. I also observed the segregation that was all too common in the congregation. The youth would sit in one section of the sanctuary; the young married in another, and concluded that while we may meet in the same building we have as little interaction with one another as possible. Though gathered together, we were thoroughly isolated. This

was in sharp contrast to the teaching of Paul that says it is through the intermingling of disparate people that the Lord would be glorified. This project is the culmination of these observations.

I owe a great debt of thanks to my wife, Simone, for her love and spiritual maturity. She is my greatest mentor in the faith, as she is radically sold out for the cause of Christ. Her example of fervent prayer, commitment to the Scriptures, and strong faith serve as an anchor. Without her in my life, I would not have progressed in the faith to the degree that I have, and so I consider her the greatest gift of grace from the hand of God, save his work of redeeming me from the domain of darkness and placing me in the kingdom of his Beloved Son.

I am grateful for the support of the Church On Randall Place, for their encouragement, support and patience. I am blessed by the leadership of the church in allowing me the necessary time to develop this project and provide hearty approval of my absence while traveling to attend the necessary seminars. I am indebted to the faithful people of the church who participated in the ministry project focus group. Finally, I would like to express gratitude for the patience exhibited in the people of the various small groups who provided assistance in the four AMEs required for this degree. I know that at times you were stretched intellectually to aid in my accomplishing these important and relevant components of my education. It is my hope and prayer that the result of this experience transcends the mere accumulating of knowledge but rather results in an ability to communicate and demonstrate the majesty and glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I would like to express gratitude to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for offering a degree focused on Applied Theology. A special thanks is appropriate to the faculty who conducted the various seminars, and all of the staff in the Doctor of Ministry office. Finally, I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. James Hamilton, whose faithful

commitment to the Word of God and ability to help me discover the wonders it contains, brought a renewed interest and love for God's self-revelation and ultimately to the God who is revealed.

John Loren Lake

Pine, Arizona

May 2013

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to deepen covenant relationships at the Church On Randall Place (CORP) in Pine, Arizona, by establishing the importance of the local church in God's redemptive purposes.

#### **Goals**

Four goals for this project served to evaluate its effectiveness. The first goal was to establish a strong biblical ecclesiology. It was the thesis of this project that one of the major obstacles to church health was an adoption of consumeristic ideals that were incompatible with the self-sacrificial model of the New Testament. The primary means of accomplishing this goal was through a ten-week teaching series addressing God's redemptive purposes being accomplished through a covenant community. This goal was measured through the implementation of two surveys to assess overall growth in this area.

The second goal was to develop a church membership curriculum and church covenant based upon the ten-week sermon series. There is a greater likelihood of healthy relationships when those who join in covenant community at the Church On Randall Place understand the vision, mission, and doctrine that comprises the essence of the church. In other words, individuals would know up front what it was that the CORP teaches and values.

The third goal was to move new-comers purposely from visitor to committed member. This goal was accomplished by providing opportunity for non-members to

attend a membership class with the purpose of committing to the Church On Randall Place in covenant community. This class affirmed the high privilege and responsibility of participating in a God-honoring community.

The fourth goal was personal. I desired as a pastor to become more intentional in assisting others to progress from spectator to participant in the life of the church. I had to actively lead the congregants from a self-centered church model to one that is Christ and other-centered. Too often in the past, I felt as though I was being coercive when taking a strong stand on active and intentional commitment. This project assisted in providing a sense of strength bolstered by scriptural underpinnings that resulted in boldness to encourage the CORP to live above mediocrity. Church health also improved as we committed to the high standards God has established for his church.

### **Ministry Context**

The Church On Randall Place is located in Pine, Arizona, a small rural community in the central mountains of Gila County. Pine was founded as a ranching and farming community in 1879 by Mormon pioneers who had emigrated from Salt Lake City, Utah.<sup>1</sup> The early history of Pine was unsettled and difficult resulting in the development of a strong community commitment that continues to the present. The town of Pine sits at the base of the Mogollon Rim, surrounded by the largest stand of ponderosa pines on the continent.<sup>2</sup> The central location to major cities in Arizona and the fact that Pine resides at an elevation of 5,365 feet make the area a popular retreat for those seeking relief from the desert heat, as well as a prime location for summer homes.

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<sup>1</sup>Pine-Strawberry Historical Society, “A Place in the Land” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from <http://www.pinestrawhs.org/history/pinehistory.htm>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>“Canyons, Cultures and Environmental Change: An Introduction of the Land Use History of the Colorado Plateau” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from [http://cpluhna.nau.edu/Biota/ponderosa\\_forest.htm](http://cpluhna.nau.edu/Biota/ponderosa_forest.htm); Internet.

Pine is a somewhat isolated community, her closest neighbor being the community of Strawberry, three miles north. The nearest city with a sizeable population and wider diversity of shopping, dining, and entertainment options is Payson (population 15,547) about fifteen miles south.<sup>3</sup> Payson is also the location of the only high school in the area.

Within a five-mile radius the current population is 3,528,<sup>4</sup> which includes the town of Strawberry. Of this population, 95 percent are Anglo and Hispanics comprise 4 percent.<sup>5</sup> The median age is about 54, with those in age ranging from 45 and above comprising approximately 68 percent of the population.<sup>6</sup> The median household income is \$36,792, while the median house/condo value is \$234,419.<sup>7</sup> Construction is the most common industry for males in the area, while health care leads the way for women.<sup>8</sup> Real estate follows closely for both men and women. This statistic is significant when considering the current economic downturn that has greatly affected the construction and real estate industries.

Both Pine and Strawberry have grown during the past decade (Pine +25.51 percent and Strawberry +5.54 percent) but are severely limited by water availability. Pine currently has a moratorium on new households until a more reliable water source is discovered, bringing growth to a standstill. The significant growth in the town of Pine

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<sup>3</sup>City-data, “Payson, Arizona” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from <http://city-data.com/city/Payson-Arizona.html>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>CLR Search, “Strawberry Demographics Summary” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from [http://www.clrsearch.com/Strawberry\\_Demographics/AZ/](http://www.clrsearch.com/Strawberry_Demographics/AZ/); Internet.

<sup>5</sup>CLR Search, “Pine Demographics Summary” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from [http://www.clrsearch.com/Pine\\_Demographics/AZ/](http://www.clrsearch.com/Pine_Demographics/AZ/); Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>City-data, “85544 Zip Code Detailed Profile” [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from <http://www.city-data.com/zips/85544.html>; Internet.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

(indicated by the 25.51 percent growth) is primarily the result of new homes being built in a private community that has formed its own water district.

The Church On Randall Place was founded and built by Cliff McCrum after his resignation as pastor of First Baptist Church of Pine. McCrum came to Pine from San Francisco in late 1977 to assume pastoral duties at First Baptist Church of Pine,<sup>9</sup> however, by February 1978 McCrum resigned from First Baptist Church of Pine and began a new independent church known as Rim View Baptist Church.<sup>10</sup> Rim View held its first worship service on February 5, 1978.<sup>11</sup> Eventually McCrum resigned, and the church was shepherded by numerous individuals throughout the 1980s. The character of these pastors varied and the church health fluctuated depending on the integrity of the leader. Rim View Baptist Church was officially recognized by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1988 and in the same year hired Sam Morgan to shepherd the congregation.<sup>12</sup> Morgan served for a brief period and Dwight Young was called as the pastor in 1989,<sup>13</sup> and remained until concerns regarding his wife's health forced a move to Phoenix in 1993.

Between 1993 and 1998 the church remained without a regular pastor. Numerous individuals were considered for the position, but they were unable to serve due either to financial constraints or to revealed moral failures and a desire to fleece the sheep.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the church depended on various individuals to fill the pulpit on

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<sup>9</sup>Letter of an extension of a call to pastorate of First Baptist Church, Pine, AZ. Sent by J. H. Norris, Chairman of Pulpit Committee, September 22, 1977.

<sup>10</sup>Bob Ritter, "Pine-Strawberry News...", *Payson Roundup*, February 8 1978, 10.

<sup>11</sup>Clifford McCrum, "Letter to Church," February 3, 1979.

<sup>12</sup>Church Letter, "Progress at Rim View Baptist Church."

<sup>13</sup>Church bulletin, Church On Randall Place, 1990.

<sup>14</sup>Lee McLanahan, deacon, interview by author, Pine, AZ, April 2002.

Sunday mornings. A partnership with the Church on Mill in Tempe, Arizona, helped with this need as well as provided assistance to host an annual Vacation Bible School at the church.

In 1998 Jerry Green, a retired school psychologist, assumed the pulpit and led the church faithfully until December 2000.<sup>15</sup> It was never Green's desire to be the pastor of this congregation, but he felt called to keep this group together until a pastor could be retained. Green's commitment resulted in a small but united congregation who was prepared to be led when the right individual was presented. It was also during this period that the name of the church was changed to Church On Randall Place.

I began to serve the church on January 1, 2001, after seventeen years in the bicycle industry. Initial reluctance to assume this position was overcome as God softened my heart, and in December of 2000 I met with the church to determine if we were to be a good fit. The people of the church were welcoming and had a desire to be more effective in reaching the town of Pine and were willing to make the necessary changes to accomplish this goal. For instance, during the interview process the subject of musical style was raised. It was the consensus of the church that a change may be necessary in this area, yet at the same time, I was encouraged to remember the long-time members as the church made a transition in musical style. Such a willingness to adopt change was refreshing.

My initial survey of the church revealed a number of positive aspects giving hope for a prosperous future. The facility was physically sound and debt free, having been paid off in the year 2000;<sup>16</sup> enabling the church to have the financial ability to hire a pastor. There was strong infrastructure, with most ministry positions being filled and we

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<sup>15</sup>Jerry Green, "Letter to form a Pastoral Alternative Committee," 5 November 2000.

<sup>16</sup>"Release of Mortgage," North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Inc., 7 August 2000.

had a small but united congregation. However, there were some definite concerns as well. The primary concern was that this church was dying. Except for three individuals, none were under the age of fifty, and not one new member had joined the church in the previous three years.

My prayer at this time was not simply to add new people to the congregation, but to broaden our demographic to more accurately mirror that of the town. Despite the fact that Pine and the surrounding area are comprised of older adults, there was an elementary school across the street from the church and a strong home school community. I knew that attracting the first family would be a challenge, but through prayer and God's grace, movement in this area began. Slowly the desire for a varied demographic became a reality and today the church is comprised of newborns to individuals in their 90s, and is also a racially diverse group which is rare in a town that is primarily Anglo.

The strengths of the Church On Randall Place are many, including a good facility, beautiful location, and people who are able to unite despite differences. The congregants are also willing to endorse mission projects, the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, and various evangelistic events such as an annual block party, concerts, and service outreaches. This is truly a congregation that is less interested in building a personal kingdom, but rather, desires to see the Kingdom of God expanded.

The church also has some challenges, some of which are inherent in the community and some that can be altered. The most pressing issue inherent in the area is that Pine is a transient community. People who move to the area often leave within 2 to 4 years, this is most pronounced among young families, who desire to raise children in a small town atmosphere but due to economic pressures are forced to move to Phoenix or another large city. There is also a strong independent streak in those who come to the church. Many seek a place where the Bible is faithfully proclaimed, but the idea of being accountable to such a group is deemed undesirable. Many who retire to the area have

served in churches for many years, and now with their new-found freedom eschew commitment and accountability. It is this last point that I hope to affect with this project.

### **Rationale**

In his High Priestly prayer (John 17) Jesus calls to the Father for the unity of his followers (John 17:21-22). In this request, Jesus makes the astonishing assertion that close intimate bonds amongst the disciples would be the means by which the world would know that the Father had sent the Son. This crucial truth does not negate the need for evangelistic strategies but rather forms the groundwork for these strategies. There are many ways by which the gospel is made known to a lost and dying world, but the foundation of the gospel proclamation is that disciples are united. A related statement made by Jesus in John 13:35 is the truth that his disciples would be characterized by love for one another. These two characteristics are necessary if the church is to have long-term effectiveness in making disciples.

It should then come as no surprise that the enemy of Christ, who seeks to destroy human souls, would target this foundation in his attempt to hinder the plan of God. In the western world, churches are filled with consumers whose bond of unity is tenuous at best. Western culture is dominated by consumerism and especially prone to adopt a self-centered Christianity that has little in common with the self-sacrificing ideal set forth by Jesus. Unity and commitment to others is a foreign idea. Many in the West have also bought the lie that the church is either irrelevant or at best optional preferring autonomy over unity. But the truth of the matter is that the church is the means by which God is working out his redemptive plan. It is the community that he established, purchased with the blood of his Son, and works through for his glory.

Christians have been inundated by the dangerous message that the church can be whatever one wants it to be. Some popular authors assert that gathering as a local

group of believers on the Lord's Day is outdated, irrelevant, and entirely optional.<sup>17</sup> Syncretism with modern western culture has impacted how one selects a church to attend, as well as determines the reasons for leaving a particular fellowship. Following the principles of the marketplace, loyalty to a church is based upon how one's needs are met. Such an ideal may work well in the business community and may even lead to better products and more qualified vendors. However, in the church such thinking is in utter conflict with the self-giving, self-sacrificing call of Christ. The result is fickle consumers occupying the pews, not others-centered, eternally-minded, united disciples. The fruit is a people ready to abandon commitment when turbulence is encountered in the church. The truth, however, is that vibrant relationships, love, and unity are not attained by abandoning one imperfect community for another, but are found in enduring with the weak, loving the unlovable, and being patient with an imperfect church staff.

It was the purpose of this project to provide an antidote to this mindset resulting in a healthier church and more fruitful, gospel-centered members. The proposed remedy was to foster a strong biblical ecclesiology in the minds of the congregants at the Church On Randall Place. The desired result will be the ability to recognize worldly ideas that pervade our lives and counter them with biblical truth. Also important was the fostering of a mindset fixed on persevering through the imperfections of others, including the church leaders, in order to attain a stronger bond with one another. Finally, I sought to establish a more patient attitude towards those who are very different from ourselves, or with whom we have little in common.

It was my desire that individuals would come to appreciate the wisdom of God in choosing the church as the vehicle to accomplish His redemptive purpose. Understanding this truth is another weapon in the believers' arsenal to combat the

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<sup>17</sup>A primary example of is George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005).

insidious sway of cultural influences. Resisting the pressure to be conformed to the world was only one desired outcome. I also desired that a healthy, committed, unified, and loving congregation would serve as a city on a hill that will be a force in breaking down the barriers that shut individuals out of entering into the kingdom of heaven. By living out the words of Jesus in his prayer recorded in John 17 the CORP would bear witness that God has sent his Son into the world.

### **Definitions**

For the purpose of this project, various terms were used for which definitions are helpful to clarify the manner in which they were used in this project.

*Consumerism:* The expansion of one's wants and needs for goods and services. In relation to this project consumerism then is not about finding a community to learn the Christian faith, but rather a congregation that best expresses an identity or satisfies felt needs. Skye Jethani aptly describes consumerism as "the framework through which we interpret everything including God, the gospel and church."<sup>18</sup>

*Individualism:* For the purpose of this project, individualism carries the idea that the interest of the individual is paramount as opposed to those of the community.

Jonathan Leeman provides insight when he states,

We are all free agents, and every relationship and life station is a contract that can be renegotiated or cancelled . . . when in the course of human events it becomes necessary to dissolve the bands which have connected me to others, I cancel them.<sup>19</sup>

*Marketplace:* A sphere in which intangible values compete for acceptance.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Skye Jethani, "Leader's Insight: From Christ's Church to iChurch," *Leadership Journal.net* [on line]; accessed 10 October 2011; available from <http://christianitytoday.com/le/currenttrendscolumns/Leadershipweekly/cln60710.html?start=2>; Internet.

<sup>19</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 44.

<sup>20</sup>Miriam-Webster Dictionary, "Marketplace" [on-line]; accessed 16 September 2011; available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of this project were as follows. The length of this project was fifteen weeks; the first week was devoted to the research of attitudes toward the value of the local church by means of a pre-test. Weeks 2 through 11 centered on a ten-week sermon series focused on the nature and purpose of the church. In weeks 12 and 13, I developed a new member's curriculum and wrote a church covenant based upon the sermon series. Week 14 provided an opportunity for individuals to attend the membership class and agree to the church covenant. Week 15 included a post-test and evaluation.

A second limitation was due to the demographic of the Church On Randall Place, which limited the size and makeup of the focus group. The church had just one individual in the 18 to 34 age range as the primary age group was fifty years and older. I collected a sample group from various generations, but due to the nature of the church I was limited. Also because the church is small, the number of people able to participate reflected that reality.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal of this project was to develop a strong ecclesiology in the minds of the congregants by understanding the value of the local church. At the beginning of the project, participants completed a survey to assess their understanding of the importance of the local church as contained in Scripture. At the conclusion of the project the same survey was given and the two sets of results were compared.

The second goal was to develop a church membership curriculum and church covenant based upon the ten-week teaching series. A prerequisite of membership at the Church On Randall Place was attendance of this membership class. This curriculum

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marketplace?show=0&t=1316200756; Internet.

along with the church covenant serves as lasting components to the high calling of being united with others in covenant.

The third goal was to provide opportunity for congregants to attend this newly developed class with the aim of joining together for the purpose of united fellowship. The privileges and responsibilities of being part of a local church were highlighted, informing attendees of the expectations of being a church member.

The fourth goal was to improve personally by calling individuals to consider the high value of the local church and providing impetus to take action by committing to membership at the Church On Randall Place. Because I can be far too relaxed in calling people to a strong commitment to the church, this goal was helpful in setting a new standard at the Church On Randall Place of high commitment.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY OF GOD

#### **Introduction**

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it’” (Matt 16:17-18).<sup>1</sup> The certainty of Jesus’ words regarding the impenetrable nature of the community he establishes has proven faithful throughout the centuries. Since the day of its inception, this community that Jesus called “his church” has relentlessly besieged by the powers of hell. But what is it about this entity that garners such special attention from demonic forces? What threat could such a community pose to the “gates of Hades”?

This question regarding the threat of the church to the gates of Hades is critical, but secondary. There is another question that is more basic and therefore must have priority. The more basic question is “what is God’s purpose for his creation?” Once an understanding God’s purpose for his creation has been established, this paper demonstrates that the church is the means through which God accomplishes this task. Given the reality of the church’s threat to the powers of darkness, an exploration into the nature, structure, and purpose of this organism will follow.

God’s purpose in all that he does is to bring glory to his name. This is not a novel assertion and this paper is not the first to voice this reality, as many godly

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

individuals have argued the same position.<sup>2</sup> Before demonstrating the scriptural foundation to this assertion, a brief description of what is meant by the phrase “glory of God” is in order. What is the glory of God? The glory of God is simply the display of God’s infinite worth and beauty. Consider this definition from a missionary, who for security reasons must remain anonymous. “The glory of God summarizes the seriousness, the perfection, and the infinite significance of all of the attributes of God. It sums up who He is, in the awesome brightness and weightiness of all His perfections.”<sup>3</sup> The glory of God is the public manifestation of God as he truly is.

Scripture abundantly bears witness to the fact that God’s purpose is to glorify his name: “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made” (Isa 43:6-7) or “He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I will show My glory” (Isa 49:3). Even in judgment God displays his glory so that those who are his enemies are without excuse: “Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD” (Exod 14:4). The prophet Habakkuk joins the chorus of inspired authors when he declares, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14; cf. Num 14:21). Considering these verses one can know with certainty the purpose of God in creation.

Having concluded the purpose of God in creation, one might ponder the means

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<sup>2</sup>An example of a contemporary look at this position is John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003).

<sup>3</sup>“The Glory of God: Our Supreme Passion,” *Founders Journal* (Fall 2000): 21-22 [journal on-line]; accessed 26 August 2012; available from <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj42/article3.html>; Internet.

God will use to accomplish his plan. After all, if God has determined an end, he has also determined the means. It should come as no surprise that God has a blueprint for completing his plans, what may be surprising, however, is that the means God uses is his human creation.

### **The Biblical Concept of “Community”**

Foundational to the premise of God working through human agents to accomplish his purpose is a comprehension that he works through individuals in community. Therefore, a brief understanding of community is in order. Two Hebrew words are briefly considered before a look at how this word is dealt with in Greek. Two different words are used in the Old Testament to designate the gathering of the people of God. Of first significance is the Hebrew term **לְקָהָל**, which can refer to any assembly but is especially an assembly for religious purposes (1 Kgs 2:3; Prov 5:14; 1 Sam 17:47).<sup>4</sup> In this root one finds the understanding of an organized group gathered together for the purpose of hearing the Word of the Lord as well as instruction and admonition (Deut 23:34, 31:30; Neh 13:1). The second term of significance in the Old Testament is **קְהָל**, which is consistently translated as “community.” Wright finds a distinction in these two words stating, “*ēdā*, may mean the representative body of elders as the legal or social authorities . . . *qāhāl*, may mean the wider community gathered for worship.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the distinction that has been demonstrated between these two terms, one should be cautious in ascribing a sharp separation in meaning as the words can also be used synonymously, as summarized by Wright:

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<sup>4</sup>Jack P. Lewis, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1999), s.v. “**לְקָהָל**.”

<sup>5</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *Leviticus*, in *The New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century ed., ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), in *Logos Library System*.

A distinction between *'ēdā* and *qāhāl* seems to be intended in “if the whole congregation (*'ēdā*) commit sin . . . and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly” (*qah* Lev 4:13). Here the *qāhāl* is the judicial representatives of the community. There is also the case where certain Israelite persons cannot enter the *qāhāl* (Deut 23:2). But elsewhere the two words are used in successive clauses in the same sense (Num 16:3) and are joined together (Prov 5:14). In general, the terms are synonymous.<sup>6</sup>

Considering that the New Testament uses the word *ἐκκλησία* to denote an assembly, one can easily comprehend how the early Christians discovered a term that expressed their gatherings accurately. Stanley Grenz affirms this understanding by stating, “The early Christians found in this term a helpful means for expressing their self-consciousness. They saw themselves as a people called together by the proclamation of the gospel for the purpose of belonging to God through Christ.”<sup>7</sup> First generation believers understood themselves as a community gathered and assembled, not as a civic organization but as individuals who were united by a common salvation through the work of Jesus, bound by a covenant relationship. The church is a people, a special people, a called out, united people who realize that they participate in a great salvation, secured by the redemption found in Jesus Christ. The New Testament assembly is never equated with a building, or an individual; the church is corporate, it is a community.

Further clarity is provided by the early believers regarding their understanding of this new entity by the images they used to describe it. Due to space limitations and the fact that the New Testament has no fewer than ninety-six images for the church<sup>8</sup> this paper identifies a few to provide a closer view of the first century understanding of the topic. The church is often referred to as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Eph 1:22, 23; Col 1:18; 2:19), emphasizing the vital union between Jesus Christ and those who belong to

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<sup>6</sup>Lewis, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “קָהָל.”

<sup>7</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 465.

<sup>8</sup>See Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

Him. William Evans correctly states, “There is a vital relation between Christ and the Church, both partaking of the same life, just as there is between the physical head and the body.”<sup>9</sup> The union between the head and the body is most significant in this picture, yet one should not overlook the importance of the interdependency of the various body parts (see 1 Cor 12), which demonstrates the importance of the corporate nature of the organism. The New Testament also speaks of the church in architectural language as a temple, a building, or a habitation of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:20, 21; 1 Cor 3:9–17; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:4–8; Rev 21:3; 1 Cor 6:19). The reference in Peter’s first epistle regards the church as a building and the members as living stones joined together. Following this metaphor it is clear that a single stone or individual brick is not in itself the building, but only becomes so when joined with others. Finally, the church is understood as the household of God. Household imagery is pervasive in the New Testament (Gal 3:26; 4:6, 7) as a metaphor for the church. The image of God as Father of children who are adopted into his family by faith in Jesus Christ and reception of the Spirit is important to the New Testament authors. Believers are identified as “brothers” or “brethren” as the most common word for Christians, elevating the concept the community and eschewing the priority of the individual. Given these images and the evidence of the preceding etymological considerations, it is evident that the church is a covenant community called out of the world by Christ.

### **The Community of God in the Old Testament**

It is the purpose of God to display his glory, to publically display his perfections and beauty, that the world would have an accurate view of those perfections. The psalmist makes clear that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:1), yet his glory is also accomplished through a community, an assembly that is called by his name.

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<sup>9</sup>William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, enl. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 186.

Given this reality, one can ascertain why the powers of darkness would take notice and wage war against the community God establishes. Turning attention to the nature of this community and understanding that the Lord's assembly is not just any gathering of people who do whatever is right in their own eyes. Beginning with the Old Testament, this paper demonstrates that the Lord's assembly was a holy, worshiping, missional group assembled by God for the glory of his name. Following this overview, consideration of the New Testament assembly follows, demonstrating both continuity and discontinuity with the Old Testament model. Certainly much more can be written regarding both Old and New Testament assemblies, but the purpose of this project is to show that God uses a community to push back against the gates of Hades.

### **The Community of God Is a Holy Community**

First and foremost among the qualities of God's people is holiness. Because God is holy so his people are to be a reflection of him on the earth. The book of Leviticus is arguably the greatest testament of God's holiness in the entire corpus of Scripture. Wenham asserts, "'Be holy, for I am holy' (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26) could be termed the motto of Leviticus. Certainly 'holy,' 'clean,' 'unclean,' and cognate words are among the most common in the book."<sup>10</sup> Holiness characterizes Yahweh and all that belongs to him, especially those created in his image. Holiness is prescribed for both the individual as well as the community. The idea of holiness as represented by the term קדוש connotes that which is sacred, over against that which is common.<sup>11</sup> The sacred and

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<sup>10</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 18.

<sup>11</sup>Brown, Driver, and Briggs present this adjective as "being set apart, separate, and so sacred and holy as well as separate from impurity and sin." See Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Library System, 2000), s.v. "קדוש."

the profane were to remain in separate spheres and therefore it was impossible for the ancient Israelites to serve Yahweh while continuing in idolatrous practices. Yahweh's stipulations to his people were provided that they would not merge the two spheres, mingling pagan practices with worship of the holy God. McComiskey proves helpful with the following insight:

They were to be separate from all that was unholy (Lev 11:44–45; Deut 14:21). Stipulations were imposed on them that they might not engage in practices common to other peoples (Lev 19:2; 20:7; Num 15:40). Their call to holiness was based on the fact that they had become God's possession by virtue of his separating them from the nations (Lev 20:26; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:19).<sup>12</sup>

It is in holiness that the community can expect the presence of Yahweh. By taking on his character they are united with him and he with them. As a result of remaining free from the defilements of the surrounding cultures, the Israelites are promised the enduring presence of Yahweh. Leviticus 26:11-13 offers the blessing of taking up residence among the people as he resided in the tabernacle. "I will make My dwelling among you" (11) might be more literally translated "I will give my tabernacle among you." Peter-Contesse and Ellington smooth this somewhat awkward phrasing by highlighting the residence of Yahweh among his people: "The meaning is that God will take up residence among the people of Israel. Moffet approaches this idea with 'I will pitch my tent among you.' But one may also consider 'I will make my home with you,' or 'I will come to live with you.'"<sup>13</sup> In mercy Yahweh provides a place for his people to come to him, a promise of his immanence further emphasized by the contrasting statement in verse 11b that God will not abhor (reject) his people. Wenham summarizes this passage well by stating,

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas E. McComiskey, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1999), s.v. "שִׁדְדָה."

<sup>13</sup>René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Leviticus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), in *Logos Library System*.

The tabernacle was designed to be the place where God dwelt among his people (Exod 25:8), but Israel's sins could make it an empty shrine (Exod 33:14ff.; cf. Lev 16:16). The blessings reach a great climax in reassuring the people that if they are faithful, all the promises included in the covenant will be fulfilled.<sup>14</sup>

Yahweh's presence is not limited to the tabernacle, for in verse 12 he promises to walk among his people. The unusual Hithpael form of  $\text{הִלְכָה}$  used here can be rendered "to walk up and down"<sup>15</sup> or "to walk to and fro."<sup>16</sup> God is not only in their midst but he walks among them, he is intimately involved in their activities, he is not a God far off but one who is near, even outside their tent. The intimacy of God's presence is highlighted by this short phrase leading Hartley to state, "Yahweh will watch over, care for, and bless every family."<sup>17</sup> Walking among his people refers to the continual fellowship of God and the community that bears his name. This imagery of walking with his people harkens back to the garden, prior to the fall of Adam and Eve alluding to a promise of return that prior relationship. The blessing of God walking among his people points to the conditions before the fall. It is in this intimate relationship that the covenant promise is realized, namely that Israel will be the people of Yahweh, and he will be their God.

This intimate relationship is expressed concretely in the breaking of Egyptian slavery. By breaking the bars of their yoke, Yahweh communicates that he has delivered his people from slavery and oppression. "The bars of your yoke" is a symbol of servitude offering the picture of the means by which both animals and slaves were anchored together serving as a symbol of subjugation. To break the bars would indicate liberation

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<sup>14</sup>Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 330.

<sup>15</sup>Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Library System, 2003), s.v. "הִלְכָה."

<sup>16</sup>Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 330. Harris refers to the studies of Speiser on a similar Akkadian form of this word expressing continuous action and duration. See R. Laird Harris, *Leviticus*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 644.

<sup>17</sup>John E Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 2002), in *Logos Library System*.

from this burdensome load. Hartley's words prove enlightening at this point,

He broke the bars of the yoke that enslaved them (cf. Ezek 34:27; Nah 1:13). This bar is the heavy crosspiece resting on an oxen's back, forcing it to pull a heavy load. Not only has Yahweh freed his people; he causes them to *קוממיות*, "walk upright." Slaves are bent over under the heavy burdens they must bear. But Yahweh will heal the stoop produced by the heavy loads Israel carried while enslaved to the Egyptians. Not only will he ease the burden of his people; he will give them dignity so that they may walk upright, i.e., with confidence (cf. Deut 4:6–8). Yahweh desires that his people have honor and dignity.<sup>18</sup>

From this brief overview, one discovers that Yahweh has called forth a community that bears his image, chiefly by being holy as he is holy. In this holy community, God's beauty and perfections are truly manifested. The blessings for Israel of bearing the image of the one who delivered them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage is a nearness and intimacy with the God of creation. This nearness to their God is the most precious of all blessings (Pss 16:2, 5; 63:3; 73:25).

### **The Community of God Is a Worshiping Community**

The community that Yahweh creates is one that is designated for worship made evident by the words spoken by Yahweh to Moses as he stood on holy ground before the burning bush (Exod 3:12). God's acts are purposeful and therefore his deliverance of Israel from bondage had purpose: this purpose was worship. Kaiser states,

There was also more than a hint in this sign that the mission of Moses went beyond a mere deliverance of a nation from bondage; Israel was set free to 'worship' God. Divine worship called for more than sacrifice; it was basically a calling on God's name in adoration and petition.<sup>19</sup>

The arrival of released captives for the purpose of corporate worship (note the plural form of *עֲבָד*) is important in demonstrating the movement from bondage to freedom, from Egypt to Sinai, and from a land of idols to faith in the one true God. Thus Douglas states,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 319.

“They would get to Sinai, but more importantly they would get to saving belief in the only true and living God.”<sup>20</sup>

The priority of worship was an ever-present reason for the exodus as Yahweh repeatedly declared<sup>21</sup> that deliverance was for the purpose of worship (Exod 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:7). The word עָבַד rendered in this passage as “worship” is often used in regard to forced labor (Exod 1:14; Lev 25:39; Jer 22:13; 30:8), however it is best to understand the meaning as service to God in the form of worship. Because there is freedom and liberty in service to Yahweh, it is important to maintain the differentiation between service to Yahweh (which may include ceremonies and cultic rites) and the idea of servitude or an unfavorable burden. Quoting Walter Kaiser, “When the service is offered to God, however, it is not bondage, but rather a joyous and liberating experience (Exod 3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26; 10:26; Ps 22:31; Job 21:15; Jer 2:20; Mal 3:14).”<sup>22</sup>

Yahweh calls his people out of bondage and into his assembly, the great company of people who would stand in his presence and hear his voice. As Israel is about to enter into the Promised Land at the end of their wilderness wanderings, Moses calls them to remember the climatic event of Sinai:

Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, “Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.” (Deut 4:10)

Hearing the Word of the Lord is a key element of the assembly. The assembly at Sinai was not a perpetual one, but served as a blueprint for later gatherings. Most notable of these gatherings is Joshua’s assembling of the people on Mt. Ebal and Mt.

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<sup>20</sup>Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), in *Logos Library System*.

<sup>21</sup>Yahweh used both Moses and the servants of Pharaoh to proclaim his message.

<sup>22</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), s.v. “עָבַד,” in *Logos Library System*.

Gerazim to read the Word of the Lord, the blessings and curses of the covenant from the law inscribed by Moses (Josh 8:34-35). Under Ezra and Nehemiah the people gathered to hear the Word of the Lord (Neh 7:73b-8:12). Clowney remarks that this assembly served as the prototype of the synagogue: “This assembly was regarded in later times as the prototype of the synagogue. The reading of the law in the synagogues and the prayers that were offered found their precedent in this post-exilic assembly.”<sup>23</sup>

God has created a separate people who are called for the purpose of worship. This was not a time for entertainment or attracting the pagan nations with attempts at relevance. It was a time to worship as Yahweh commanded with a focus on hearing his Word.

### **The Community of God Is a Missional Community**

Yahweh’s community was to be a holy, separate group, but one should not conclude from this fact that the people were to be an isolated people. Israel was set apart not for the purpose of monastic isolation but for the purpose of demonstrating the majesty and glory of the God who formed them. The blessings of God to Israel were not to be hoarded for herself: she was called to be a testimony to the nations of the workings of Yahweh. Missions should not be considered a New Testament concept, an after-thought of God that was suddenly introduced to those living in the post-resurrection age. From very early on in her life, Israel was designated to be a blessing to the Gentile nations, observed clearly in the promise to Abraham when Yahweh revealed to him that “by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 26:4). While scholars such as Blauw or Bosch correctly assert there is an absence of any direct claim for Israel to

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<sup>23</sup>Edmund Clowney, “The Biblical Theology of the Church (Part 1),” *Beginning with Moses* [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2012; available from <http://beginningwithmoses.org/bt-articles/221/the-biblical-theology-of-the-church-14>; Internet.

cross cultural boundaries to convert the nations, one should not conclude that Israel had no responsibility to display the splendor and glory of Yahweh to others for their blessing and salvation.<sup>24</sup> Kaiser is correct when stating,

God never elected Israel only to be engrossed in “navel-gazing”—only to receive the blessing herself. She had been called and elected for service unto the nations of the earth. Certainly with Moses, the stage had been set for a whole nation to be involved in a ministry of being priests and witnesses to all the peoples of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

While the Old Testament is replete with passages declaring God’s desire to reach beyond a particular ethnic group (Deut 28:10; Josh 4:24; 1 Sam 17:46; 1 Chr 16:24; Ps 18:49), difficulties arise if one concludes complete continuity between the two Testaments regarding missions. Despite the differences of opinion on this matter, what is easily agreed upon is that God intends to make his ways known in all the earth. In this light, the primary difference between Old Testament missions and New Testament missions might be summarized by understanding that OT missions were mainly centripetal while NT missions are primarily centrifugal. In the OT, the presence of God and his law would attract other nations while in the NT disciples are given the task of engaging the nations.<sup>26</sup>

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 speaks to the attraction model of missions. Israel was

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<sup>24</sup>Blauw states, “When one turns to the Old Testament to find justification and basis for missions in the current meaning, that is, as ‘foreign mission,’ one is bound to be disappointed.” Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 42. Bosch asserts, “There is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh.” David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology and Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 17.

<sup>25</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Great Commission in the Old Testament,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 1 (1996): 5. Most scholars would see more discontinuity between missions in the Old Testament and the New Testament than Kaiser.

<sup>26</sup>There are hints in the Old Testament of centrifugal missions. The book of Jonah would provide the clearest example, along with the possibility of Ps 67 and Isa 49:6. Similarly, there is the reality of centripetal missions in the New Testament. Matt 5:17 provides the most obvious example.

commanded to hear the decrees and laws that were being repeated for the purpose that the people would do all that were embodied in these essential stipulations. Moses also reminds the nation of a recent incident at Baal-Peor that resulted in the death of those who violated God's high standards of covenant conduct. The message communicated by Yahweh was that hearing his word is more than learning to live in his blessings. The lesson for the people was one of life and death.

God's words to his people however are for more than providing helpful guidelines for successful living. They would certainly do this, but God has a broader purpose. Eugene Merrill adds,

By obeying them, God's people would also display before the nations what it means to be the people of the Lord and to have him in their midst (vv. 6–7). In a clear linkage with wisdom thought, Moses argued that keeping and doing the commandments of the Lord is in itself a definition of wisdom (*hokmâ*) and understanding (*bînâ*). That is, the very essence of wisdom is conformity with the will of God.<sup>27</sup>

Following the imperatives of God's law would bring enjoyment, life, and peace to this newly formed nation and it would speak to her neighbors that they are the depositories of true wisdom and knowledge. The enjoyment of this blessing was because their God was close to them, hearing their cry and coming to their aid unlike the gods of the nations. Far from advocating mindless conformity to another transcendent deity, these neighbors would see the nearness of Yahweh, whose immanence is such that he is present when his people call on him. Christensen writes, "It is ready access to God through his 'righteous' Torah that makes Israel unique among the nations."<sup>28</sup>

From the time of mankind's first transgression, God has been seeking the lost (Gen 3:8, 9). Numbers 14:21 provides evidence of this in a somewhat unexpected

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<sup>27</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 116, in *Logos Library System*.

<sup>28</sup>Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Dallas: Word, 2002), 80.

manner. The background of this text is the report of the twelve spies who journeyed into the Promised Land. Because of unfaithfulness and distrust by the majority, as well as the people's assent to the majority, God in his justice rebuked the nation. The glory of the Lord is observed in the twin arenas of justice and pardon. Through the intercession of Moses, the Lord sovereignly forgave the nation's rebellion. On the other side of this pardon is the judgment of God. There is little difficulty in understanding how the mercy of God would be a testimony to the nations, but how does his judgment manifest his glory? For the answer to this question, one must consider the words of Hamilton:

The *holiness of God* is an attribute of God that is put on display particularly when he judges (e.g., Lev. 10:1-3, 10). As such, when God judges he *reveals himself as a holy God*. . . . *The holiness of God* is for the glory of God, and it is most commonly revealed in judgment.<sup>29</sup>

### **Summary**

The plan of God is that the glory of God would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. The means by which he accomplishes this goal is through his chosen people, a holy, worshiping, and outward-focused community. In holiness, the community of God bears the image of God. In worship, the people of God appropriately respond to the deliverance he effected and recognizes the vertical relationship of man to God. In missions, the assembly bears God's image to those who are in need of his saving grace. Yahweh demonstrates his glory by his immanence and holiness reflected in both forgiveness and justice.

### **The Community of God in the New Testament**

The New Testament continues the theme of the people of God as an assembled community for the purpose of holiness, worship, and mission. As such, there is continuity between the workings of God in both testaments. Recognizing these parallels should not

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<sup>29</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 53-54. Emphasis original.

lead one to overlook the discontinuity of the New Testament community. Specifically, the church is not based upon ethnicity but upon Yahweh dwelling within each believer in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). Like the previous section, the focus of this segment remains on the three themes of holiness, worship, and missions. The church that Jesus builds is a distinct assembly, removing impurity from among its midst, having God as their focus as they gather together, and reaching out with the gospel to those who are blinded by the schemes of Satan. Prior to considering these three emphases this paper demonstrates the importance of the church in God's plan of redemption, revealing that it is the means by which his glory is displayed in heaven and earth.

### **The Church Is the Means by Which God Displays His Glory**

A strong ecclesiology is crucial. As the doctrine of the church is diminished by many of her spokespersons,<sup>30</sup> Christians must be able to withstand the onslaught of arguments presenting the church as optional for modern believers.

Both continuity and discontinuity are evident between the *לְקָהָל* of the Old Testament and the *ἐκκλησία* of the New. God continues to call his people to holiness. He still requires his people to worship and to be a light shining before men that God would be glorified. Certainly the greatest area of discontinuity is found in the sacrificial system, as Jesus has provided a once for all sacrifice accomplishing what the blood of bulls and goats could not. Another area of discontinuity is found in the make-up of the community that God works through to bring about his purposes. No longer does God work through an ethnic community but through a new assembly that is identified not by heritage but by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). In referring to the people of God, George Brooke considers Jeremiah 31:31-34 as quoted by the author of Hebrews in 8:8-12:

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<sup>30</sup>This subject will be addressed more comprehensively in chap. 3.

The Lord says there will be a new covenant . . . ‘and I will be their God and they shall be my people.’ The Old Testament text clearly refers to Israel and Judah as the people of God, but in the context of Hebrews it is applied to the people of the new covenant, those who believe in the one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (Heb 8:1).<sup>31</sup>

Numerous biblical texts refer to New Testament assembly as comprised of Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, male, female (see 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

Nowhere in Scripture is the inclusion of disparate people being joined to the community of Christ more explicit than in Ephesians 2:11-3:12. The main thrust of this section of Scripture revolves around the truth that the people of God are no longer Jew or Gentile, but Christian, and this is the mystery of God that Paul refers to in this text. Utley states correctly, “This has always been God’s plan (Gen 3:15). God chose Abraham to choose a people, to choose a world (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:5–6). This is the unifying theme of the Old and New Covenants (Testaments).”<sup>32</sup> The unity found in this new community has more than tranquility as its essence. Jesus in his High Priestly prayer stated that the unity of his disciples would be the means by which the world would know that the Father had sent the Son (John 17:23). Prior to this prayer, the Lord also affirmed that love between the disciples would identify them as his followers (John 13:35). In other words, it is by joining together once hostile groups into a fellowship that the glory and wisdom of God would be displayed to the world. Andrew Lincoln summarizes,

This new community is, as we have seen, characterized above all by its unity (“one” in v 14, “one new man” in v 15, and “one body” in v 16). It is the sphere in which hostility has been overcome, reconciliation has been achieved, and peace bears its fruits, and, as such, forms a visible sign of unity for the world. The Church is not only the place of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, it is also the place where reconciliation between humanity and God is experienced, where harmony between heaven and earth has been restored, and where access to the Father is enjoyed. The high God of heaven has chosen to make it his dwelling place on earth, and the

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<sup>31</sup>George J. Brooke, “Laos: A Biblical Perspective for a Theology of ‘The People of God,’” *Modern Churchman* 32, no. 3 (1990): 34.

<sup>32</sup>Robert James Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, Then Later, Philippians)*, Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 8 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 91, in *Logos Library System*.

Christ who has been exalted to heaven forms the crowning stone in its structure. The Church is where men and women experience a sense of being at home, of belonging, not only to one another in a unified humanity as fellow citizens, but also to God himself as part of his household or family.<sup>33</sup>

It is not difficult to understand how the attributes of love and unity would demonstrate God's glory to the world, but Paul takes this to another level by revealing that this mystery, this church, would demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God in the heavenlies as well. In chapter 3, Paul expands on what he terms a mystery,<sup>34</sup> namely, that disparate people are called into fellowship with one another. He does so by describing the inclusion of Gentiles into the new community with the use of three adjectives each beginning with the prefix *συν*. They are "fellow-heirs," (*συγκληρονόμος*), fellow-members of the body (*σύσσωμος*) and fellow-sharers (*συμμέτοχος*) of the promises of Christ (v. 6), leaving no room for spiritual class warfare. Paul appears to be astonished that he of all people would be given the grace to make known this mystery hidden in the wisdom of God only now to be revealed. Lincoln states, "The grace given to Paul equipped him not only to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ but also to enlighten all about how God has chosen to work out his secret purpose."<sup>35</sup>

Coming to verse 10, Paul makes the most astounding claim that this mystery, this community that includes former hostiles, is the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. The exact

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Μυστήριον*, as used by Paul in this text, refers to that which is hidden or secret to humans and can only be known by revelation of God. "In the writings of Paul, the word *mustērion* is sometimes applied in a peculiar sense to the calling of the Gentiles. In Eph 3:3-6, the fact that Gentiles could be fellow-heirs and of the same body and partakers of Christ by the gospel is called 'the mystery' and 'the mystery of Christ.' In other generations, such a thing was not made known to the sons of man as it has been revealed to His apostles and prophets by the Spirit (cf. Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9; 3:9; 6:19; Col 1:26, 27; 4:3)." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga: AMG, 2000), s.v. "*μυστήριον*."

<sup>35</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 184.

identification of these rulers and authorities has been much discussed,<sup>36</sup> but regardless of one's understanding of this phrase, it is clear that God's wisdom is on display through the church, resulting in the admission of heavenly hosts that having Jews and Gentiles in one body is evidence of God's wisdom. Andrew Lincoln again proves helpful: "It is through this new entity, the one Church out of Jews and Gentiles that the mystery is made known, as God's wisdom is demonstrated to the principalities and authorities."<sup>37</sup>

Through the love and unity of Christ's disciples (John 13:35; 17:21), who are no longer identified by ethnicity, gender or social position, the glory of God will be manifest to mankind as well as to angelic forces. In other words, the church demonstrates God's manifold wisdom across the universe. Hodge summarizes,

This gives us our highest conception of the dignity of the church. The works of God manifest his glory by being what they are. It is because the universe is so vast, the heavens so glorious, the earth so beautiful and teeming, that they reveal the boundless affluence of their maker. If then it is through the church God designs speedily to manifest to the highest order of intelligence, his infinite power, grace and wisdom, the church in her consummation must be the most glorious of his works.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Church Is a Holy Community**

Acts 2:42 presents an ideal image of the church in her early days, but Jesus and the apostles were aware that sin would enter this camp, despoiling the purity of the community. Despite modern pleas to "not judge," or statements such as "we are under grace," both of which broaden the boundaries of the purity of God's people, there is a remedy to address those who would be persistent in willful, knowing sin.

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<sup>36</sup>Utley claims these principalities and powers are unfallen angels whose interest in man's redemption is highlighted in 1 Pet 1:12. Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound*, 101. Hoehner posits that "rulers and authorities" refer to both good and evil angels as seen in 6:12 (cf. 1:21). Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), s.v. "Ephesians 3:10-12," in *Logos Library System*.

<sup>37</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 186.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics, 1996), 174, in *Logos Library System*.

In a day of redefined tolerance,<sup>39</sup> where judging another is considered a sin unto death, the topic of church discipline has become just another “proof” of the narrow mindedness of God’s assembly. Likewise, it is not uncommon to discover the antinomian idea that because believers live in the age of grace that no act or teaching should be dismissed, no matter how out of sync it may be with the clear teaching of Scripture. But the church is still a holy assembly and those who refuse to dwell in the purity of Christ will need to be put outside the camp until there is repentance and hence purification allowing for re-admittance.

Like the  $\text{לִקְוֹ}$  of the Old Testament, the Lord dwells intimately with his people. Unlike that ancient community, God no longer dwells in a tent situated in a physical location but dwells within individuals by means of the Holy Spirit. Now the believer is the temple of God (2 Cor 6:16). Refraining from discipline is unfounded in biblical practice whether one is examining the Old Testament texts or the New. Israel was called to be holy, for that is the nature of Yahweh who delivered them from the land of Egypt (Lev 11:44; 19:2) and holiness would serve as an obvious distinction between themselves and the nations that surrounded them. This line is continued by Peter who calls believers to a separation from their former lusts, and into conformity with the nature of the God who saved them (1 Pet 1:14-16). Peter further reminds the community to which he writes of their connection with Israel by reminding that they are a “holy nation” set apart for the purpose of “proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Schreiner writes,

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<sup>39</sup>Tolerance by definition demands difference in belief or practice. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the word “tolerance” is defined as sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own. The word is gradually changing to have the meaning of all ideas being equally good. This “new tolerance” essentially means no one can disagree. No one’s ideas are better than any others because there is only opinion. See Matt Guerino, “Worldview 101 (part 5)– Postmodernism and the New Tolerance” [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2012; available from <http://summitperspective.blogspot.com/2008/06/worldview-101-part-5-postmodernism-and.html>; Internet.

The purpose of the people of God is now explained. God has chosen them to be his people, established them as a royal priesthood, appointed them as a holy nation to be his special possession, so that they would “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. . . . As God formed Israel to praise him, now the church has been established to praise his wonders. God’s ultimate purpose in everything he does is designed to bring him praise.”<sup>40</sup>

The community of believers founded by Jesus is similar to Israel in that it is to be distinct from the nations that surround; it is a community that takes on the character of her Lord: it is a holy, pure community. To realize this purity, those who would bring defilement must be addressed. For those who would eschew such judgmental ideas as no longer relevant in this day of grace, a quick summary of the New Testament should provide ample evidence that this was and is entirely appropriate.<sup>41</sup> Calling fellow believers to flee sin and pursue godliness is not a practice that twists the image of God, but is in fact compatible with the Lord who disciplines those he loves (Heb 12:4-17).

It should be noted that not all church discipline is negative. In fact, most discipline occurring in the church would not be categorized as such by most in the congregation because it is formative in nature. Mark Dever has well defined this manner of church discipline:

In the broadest sense, church discipline is everything the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin. Preaching, teaching, prayer, corporate worship, accountability relationships, and godly oversight by pastors and elders are all forms of discipline.<sup>42</sup>

However, in order to maintain a distinction of the church from culture there are times of corrective discipline that may lead to excommunication. Dever again provides helpful insight:

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<sup>40</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 115-16, in *Logos Library System*.

<sup>41</sup>See Rom 16:7, Gal 6:1, and 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15 for examples of this teaching. Consider also Paul’s public and immediate rebuke of Peter in Gal 2:11-14.

<sup>42</sup>Mark Dever, “What Are the Nine Marks: Discipline?” [on-line]; accessed 22 March 2012; available from <http://www.9marks.org/what-are-the-9marks/discipline>; Internet.

In a narrower sense, church discipline is the act of correcting sin in the life of the body, including the possible final step of excluding a professing Christian from membership in the church and participation in the Lord's Supper because of serious unrepentant sin.<sup>43</sup>

Although excommunication is a last option, it can nevertheless become a reality in the life of the church to protect her from corruption.

Matthew 18:15-17 provides the church with the basic outline of the practice of church discipline, and 1 Corinthians 5:1ff demonstrates discipline in action. It should be noted at this point that the practice of church discipline is not primarily retributive but restorative, that discipline is the means by which the corporate body of Christ restores and trains her members while remaining separate from corruption. Sin is rarely an individual issue; it affects the entire body (2 Cor 2:5) and therefore is to be addressed with vigor. Not only does sin breed sin, but when unchecked threatens the very presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (Rev 2:5).

### **The Church Is a Worshiping Community**

The traditional concept regarding the essence of the church is founded upon the Apostle's Creed,<sup>44</sup> while Calvin declared that the church's essence is wherever the Word of God is sincerely preached and the sacraments administered.<sup>45</sup> Like the *קְהָל* of the OT, so the new community established by Christ is a worshiping one. Acts 2:42 is the driving force for understanding this topic. This passage informs that early believers committed themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. John Polhill comments, "This section comprises the first extensive 'summary' in Acts. . . . It provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>The essence of the church in the Apostle's Creed is that it is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

<sup>45</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.9 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

were incorporated into the believing community.”<sup>46</sup> Because these are the marks delineated by the inspired author they will be the marks considered in this project.

The apostles’ teaching is first to be considered. Early believers were faced with core questions regarding their newfound faith. As people responded to the teaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and others were being added to the church, these new converts surely pondered the question; “What are we to believe?” Considering there was no written New Testament, they became wholly dependent upon the apostles teaching. The apostles had been taught by Jesus and were commissioned to pass this teaching on to new believers. The exact nature of this teaching is unknown, but certainly it would have included subjects such as the resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The importance of clinging to this witness becomes clear very early in the life of the church as various heresies and threats of aberrant teaching began to infiltrate the community. As the church began to impact new regions, the peril of spurious ideas was a constant threat. For this reason the New Testament writers admonish their audiences to hold fast to that form of teaching declared by the apostles (2 Pet 2:21; 3:1; Jude 3). There will always be those who claim new revelation, secret knowledge, or fresh scintillating insight, but the essence of the church of God is not founded on novelties, but on the sure Word of God delivered once and for all to the saints.

Fellowship may be the most misunderstood mark of the church, and it is to this aspect attention is now given. This essential mark is too often associated with coffee and doughnuts, socializing, and afternoon teas. Fellowship in the New Testament is much more than these elements and a great disservice is done to God’s plan for his people by reducing this truth solely to such superficial activities. A careful study of this New

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<sup>46</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), in *Logos Library System*.

Testament cornerstone will be both enlightening and challenging. The Greek word used in this instance is *κοινωνία* and is often used by Paul, but is unique to this verse in the entire corpus of Luke-Acts. At its core, the word carries the idea of “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”<sup>47</sup> While Paul uses this word frequently to describe a close association with Christ in his sufferings (Phil 3:10), prohibiting the association of the righteous with the unrighteous (2 Cor 6:14), or the acceptance by other disciples (Gal 2:9), Luke uses this word in a completely different sense.

As the author of the book of Acts, Luke does not leave his readers wondering in what sense the word *κοινωνία* is to be understood. After listing this mark as one of the four key areas of church life he begins to unpack its meaning in verses 44-45: “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.” Luke’s idea of fellowship is that of believers being so united with one another that wherever one was in need the others felt no right to live on in prosperity while another lacked, resulting in the selling of property to meet the needs of the poor in the church. John Piper rightly assesses the danger this understanding may have on those who have attained many possessions:

This text is threatening to most of us who own a lot of things and believe that the right of private property is assumed in the command, “Thou shalt not steal.” And so when we read this story, we are very quick to defend ourselves and point out that there is no coercion here. The selling of property is all voluntary. (This is even plainer in 5:4.) And we like to point out that there is no command here that we should do it this way just because the early church did it.<sup>48</sup>

Piper continues to warn of the ease of writing off threatening texts to justify

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<sup>47</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*κοινωνία*.”

<sup>48</sup>John Piper, “The Fear of God and the Freedom from Goods” (sermon presented to Bethlehem Baptist Church, 2 December 1990) [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2011; available from <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-name-made-this-man-strong>; Internet.

lifestyles that have become consumed by a materialistic worldview. However, Luke's words should be thoughtfully and prayerfully received as an antidote to the consumeristic mentality that threatens western Christianity. One should be careful at this point not to confuse what Luke is describing with communism. Luke is not promoting any political system, and a disservice is done to the biblical text when modern governing methods are imposed upon the text. After all one finds in Luke's writings that individuals had the right to private ownership (Acts 5:1-10). The giving referenced is a voluntary act to assist those in need because they were family. To summarize, this second mark is that individuals who comprise the assembly hold all of their lives and rights with an open hand, that those who are without will be benefitted by those who have much. Fellowship therefore transcends the monthly potluck or a spiritual conversation at the local coffee shop. It may include these gatherings but is not limited to them.

The third mark or essence of the early church discovered from Acts 2:42 is the breaking of bread. Some confusion exists regarding exactly to what these early believers had devoted themselves. Was this a common meal, was this the Lord's Supper, or could this possibly be a combination of the two? A primary source of this difficulty is found in the existence of the article in this first expression (*the* breaking of bread); while in verse 46 the same phrase is present lacking the article. Considering the other references in Acts to breaking bread (Acts 20:7) it is most likely that this refers to a the Lord's Supper. However, considering Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11:18-26) that has direct correlation to both the Lord's Supper as well as a common meal it can be concluded that the early church included the Lord's Supper with a fellowship meal.

The final mark of the newly formed community of believers is identified by Luke as a devotion to the prayers. References to prayer are frequent in Acts, which indicates the foundational nature of this discipline. However, two grammatical issues provide a challenge to the interpreter. Luke uses both the article and the plural form of the noun *ταισ προσευχαῖς*, suggesting some type of formal or regimented time of prayer.

Given the Jewish background of these early believers it would not be unreasonable to surmise that they continued in the set times of formal prayer (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30). However one should not limit the prayers of these believers to temple worship alone, but conclude that as time passed and temple attendance was prohibited, new opportunities for prayer were recognized. Longenecker provides welcome insight in this matter.

His [Luke's] use here of both the definite article and the plural in 'the prayers' . . . suggests formal prayer, probably both Jewish and Christian. The earliest believers not only viewed the old forms as filled with new content, but also in their enthusiasm they fashioned new vehicles for their praise.<sup>49</sup>

It is not surprising that prayer was a cornerstone of the fledgling church since it was fundamental to the Lord Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry. What is surprising is how prayer has become optional in practice by the modern western church.

No longer is the blood sacrifice of bulls and goats the central component of the worshipping community, it is now the worship of Christ who has offered himself as the once for all sacrifice (Heb 10:4-10). Worship is expressed by means of learning of his teachings, corporately gathering and sharing with other saints, remembering through the Lord's Supper the sacrificial events that led to redemption, and the expressing of dependency through prayer.

### **The Church Is a Missional Community**

The marching orders of the church are given clearly by the Lord himself prior to his ascension into heaven and faithfully recorded in Matthew's gospel. Matthew 28:18-20 brings the reader to the climax of the earthly life of Jesus as he now prepares his disciples to take up the work that he began. This work will be the declaring of the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth; they will be empowered by the very presence of

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<sup>49</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, *The Book of Acts*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 290.

Jesus himself (Acts 1:8) to accomplish the seemingly impossible command.

The prelude to the command that will govern the remaining days of the disciples and the church that is yet to be created is in regard to the ultimate authority that Jesus has over all of the created order. The passive use of the verb *δίδωμι* (to give) assumes that his authority is derived from the Father who would be the acting subject in this verse.

Matthew consistently presented Jesus as the one who has authority (7:29; 8:9; 9:6, 8; 21:23, 24, 27), so too in this passage, there appears to be a new comprehensiveness in what this authority entails.<sup>50</sup> The disciples see clearly the true identity of Jesus, having been vindicated by his resurrection, as the Son of Man referenced by Daniel (Dan 7:14), and the one to whom all creation is subject (Eph 1:20-23).

The authority expressed in verse 18 now finds directive in a command to the disciples and to the church that would be birthed not far in the future. A distinct connection exists between the authority of Jesus and the command made clear by the use of *οὖν* (therefore). The primary command that Jesus gives is to make disciples. Students make two mistakes at this point and one should use caution when approaching this verse. The first mistake is to undervalue the “going” commanded in this verse. The dangerous pitfall of indifference to engage others due to the passive voice of this verb, leading to the false idea that one can make disciples without a plan or outside of any structure should be recognized and avoided. Blomberg advises, “Too much is made of it when the disciples’ ‘going’ is overly subordinated, so that Jesus’ charge is to proselytize merely where one is.”<sup>51</sup> The second mistake is to make too much of this command as is often witnessed in

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<sup>50</sup>John Nolland understands this authority in two ways. First, he finds a newness and a heightening of authority marked by the achievement of the cross and resurrection. Second, Nolland also rightly finds allusions to authority in Daniel’s reference to the Son of Man who is given all authority and an everlasting kingdom. See John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek New Testament: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), in *Logos Library System*.

<sup>51</sup>Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 431.

the appeals of those recruiting foreign missionaries. Followers of Jesus are to make disciples and this involves “going.” The church far too often adopts the mindset of “come and see,” in direct contrast to the Lord’s command of “go and be.” Because the main verb (μαθητεύσατε) has πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as its object the implication is that the borders to which the disciples are to go is “into all the world.”

The primary command is to “make disciples” and this has certainly been the cause of much discussion in the church for two thousand years, centering on exactly what it means to make a disciple. Fortunately, the Lord was neither unclear nor confused as he related exactly what is meant by this command. The two subordinate participles following the command inform that the making of a disciple includes “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” and “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” Blomberg is correct when he states,

The truly subordinate participles in v. 19 explain what making disciples involves: “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task.<sup>52</sup>

Teaching believers all the commands of Jesus naturally falls into the modern idea of discipleship, but how does the rite of baptism factor into the process? This question is especially relevant today when baptism is often considered an afterthought or optional action. What place does such a work have in this age of grace? Providing an answer to these questions prove enlightening as attention is given to the purpose and meaning of baptism in Acts. Without providing a detailed history of baptism one finds in the early chapters of Acts that baptism has an intimate connection with repentance and conversion (Acts 2:32; 8:12, 36-38; 10:47, 48; 16:15; 18:8; 22:16). Due to this close association, it is evident that baptism is the outward affirmation that one has indeed converted and now lives no longer for self but for Jesus. Dockery summarizes this fact

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

well when stating, “In the early chapters of Acts, beginning with Pentecost, baptism is closely associated with repentance as a qualification for membership in the Christian community (Acts 2:37-41).”<sup>53</sup> This conclusion may sound foreign to modern believers who have relied upon the altar call, walking down the aisle, and saying the sinners’ prayer as the outward token of conversion. Yet even a cursory glance at the Scriptures reveals that none of these acts was ever part of the conversion experience. Baptism was the public act of attesting that one had passed from death to life. What is not being said at this point is that baptism saves, for salvation is only by faith in Christ (Rom 4:4-5; Gal 3:2-11; Eph 2:8-9). In other words, baptism is not a saving ordinance any more than coming forward in a revival meeting has salvific power. Baptism is the powerful expression that one has died with Christ, been purified, and raised again to new life. How unfortunate that many have exchanged the powerful expression of baptism for the tame and benign act of signing a membership card or raising a hand “with every eye closed, and every head bowed.”

Teaching believers is the second element of discipleship. This teaching role should not be limited to sermons declared from the pulpit or even small group opportunities. One should not overlook the teacher-disciple relationship modeled by Jesus. Jesus has been the teacher and now his disciples are to take up the task that he has equipped them to do. Nolland states, “Matthew shares the general Jewish impulse to view true religion as involving a way of life and not simply a pattern of beliefs. So what is to be taught is to keep—that is, to implement in obedience—what has been commanded.”<sup>54</sup>

With this brief exegesis of Matthew 28:18-20, it is concluded that the mission

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<sup>53</sup>David S. Dockery, “Baptism in the New Testament,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 43, no. 2 (2001): 12.

<sup>54</sup>Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1270.

of the church is to be a baptizing, teaching organism. In obedience to these two fundamentals, an individual is born anew and guided to maturity. The mission of the church therefore is to proclaim the gospel through which new converts will be made, and to make sure these new converts grow to adulthood.

### **The Church Is a United Community**

The church is more than a loose conglomeration of individuals: it is a community joined by one Spirit. Again a distinction is to be made that a person enters into the universal church upon regeneration by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). It is less clear, however, the procedure for joining into fellowship with a local expression of that universal assembly. While there is no explicit protocol for joining a local church mentioned in the New Testament, it is abundantly clear that a distinction is made between those who are inside and those who are outside this community. Such a distinction finds continuity from the Hebrew Scriptures, where God reveals clearly that there are some who are included in his community and some who are excluded. For instance, there were those inside the ark and those outside; there were those inside of the nation of Israel and those outside. To be outside was to be separated from God and his blessings while to be inside was to be united with him with all the accompanying benefits. While the New Testament never speaks directly about church membership, it does refer to those who are inside the church and those who are outside.

As one now considers the biblical underpinnings of church membership, he should begin by stating that church membership is countercultural, where one is no longer a consumer to be served, but a provider engaged in the difficult job of loving one another. Church membership is also a testimony of Christ to both the Christian community as well as the world. Jonathan Leeman proves insightful on this matter:

When a church receives someone into membership . . . they are saying to the individual and to the whole world, “One of us—a Christ follower! A Christ

representative. World, you have our endorsement as a church to look at this individual as a picture of what Jesus is like. Right here in this person you can witness the holiness, love, and wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10).<sup>55</sup>

For those who would seek a proof-text to demonstrate the existence of some form of church membership in Scripture, disappointment will follow. However, there are a variety of biblical truths that cannot be established by means of a specific Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity is foremost, as there is no single passage of Scripture to which one can point to prove this important truth,<sup>56</sup> yet by careful study of the Bible one recognizes the Trinitarian claim as consistent with Scripture. Such is the case regarding church membership. In fact, two clearly taught functions of the church make absolutely no sense unless church membership is affirmed.

The first of these functions is church leadership. Jesus established his church and called individuals to lead local congregations. It is the responsibility of believers to hold these leaders in high esteem as a God-honoring act (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17). The question that arises from this biblical admonishment is; which leaders should a believer submit to? Are Christians to obey any elder, from any church? Or are there recognized elders over a specific group of people to whom respect and honor is due? Likewise, church leaders are to steward the flock God has given them, to act as under-shepherds of the flock of Jesus (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Pet 5:1-5). Are local pastors responsible for every believer in the area in which they minister? Will an elder give and account for teaching that occurs in every small group, every financial decision or mission strategy? Apart from the concept of a local church, joined together by covenant where believers place themselves under the authority of elders, the passages on church leadership are unworkable.

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<sup>55</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 292.

<sup>56</sup>This conclusion denies the authenticity of the Johanne comma of 1 John 5:7 (KJV).

The second function of the church that requires some form of membership is the area of church discipline. First Corinthians 5:11-13 is the first stop in demonstrating that the Bible calls Christians to become a part of a local community of believers. This passage makes clear that there are those who are inside, and those who are considered outside this community. Evidently Paul has in mind some marker to make such a distinction. After all, the church can only discipline those who have made some formal commitment (the terms “inside,” and “outside” indicate an understanding of commitment).

Second Corinthians 2:6 is the next destination into the biblical evidence for church membership. In this passage, one discovers the immoral person referenced in 1 Corinthians 5, as repentant and in need of restoration. Paul exhorts the church to forgive and comfort this repentant brother by stating that the “punishment by the majority is enough.” This statement forces the question, “What majority is Paul speaking of?” It must be a majority of a defined whole. Paul has defined a group (those inside) and now refers to a percentage of that defined group. In order to have a majority, one must first have a means of delineating the group. This group is those who are “inside.” They are members.

Matthew 18 provides an interesting insight into the manner in which Jesus viewed his church. Verses 18-20 are the famous words of Jesus detailing how to deal with a person who sins against another. The penultimate stage of discipline is to take the matter to the church. The church is more than just the leaders, and yet it does not include every brother or sister who may have happened to visit on a particular day. It is a defined group of individuals who have made a commitment to one another. The final action to be taken is to treat the offending brother as an unbeliever or to state it another way, “to put him outside.” This person is no longer considered a brother: he is outside the community.

Church leadership and church discipline demonstrate that the church is

composed of people joined together in some form of recognized commitment to one another. The church is structured with identified leaders to whom honor is due, leading a specified group of people in godly fear. Likewise, church discipline demands some accountability to an established group of like-minded individuals. Such clear teachings demand some form of church membership.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding material is an attempt to demonstrate the biblical and theological basis for the importance of deepening covenant relationships. Living in a culture that exalts the principles of the marketplace<sup>57</sup> has led to a skewed understanding of the church in God's plan of redemption. The people of God are not disjointed individuals without association to a larger group. God has always worked out his purposes through a community. Certainly he uses individuals who are included in that particular group but he does not primarily work in those detached from his community.

The Bible identifies the characteristics of the community that God creates. They are a people who are holy, that is, they are set apart from the corruption of the ungodly. They are a worshiping people as well, giving homage to the God who delivered them out of bondage and into liberty. In the Old Testament this is most clearly seen in the exodus of Israel from Egypt, while in the New Testament it is clear in the delivering of an individual from the domain of darkness, transferring him to the kingdom of God's beloved son. Finally, the people of God are those who seek to influence their surroundings with the message of this gracious God who saves those who will turn from their idols to serve him above all. In other words, God's people are given to mission.

The siren call of autonomy and independence is in direct contradiction to the theme of the Body of Christ that is so prominent in the writings of the apostle Paul. The

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<sup>57</sup>This assertion will be more fully developed in chap. 3.

antidote of the consumer mindset that weakens the community is a strong understanding of the local church and how God is using this imperfect organism to bring about his plan of redemption. A healthy, committed, unified, and loving congregation serves as the means by which the world will know that the Father has sent the Son and this is truly a threat to the gates of Hades.

CHAPTER 3  
CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES SHAPING  
THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Introduction**

“Every 500 years the Church holds a giant rummage sale and casts off the things that restrict its growth.”<sup>1</sup> This statement from noted author Phyllis Tickle communicates the thoughts of many today who have observed the decline of church loyalty leading to the conclusion that the church must fundamentally change or die. In the view of Tickle, the church periodically engages in self-examination and sheds that which is old and irrelevant. Tickle believes a new style of Christianity is necessary today: that a purging is needed as creeds and beliefs are burdening the church, sapping her of vitality. She states, “This new style of western Christianity is not hierarchal or based on a certain doctrinal system. It’s more about community and conversation, not about a set of beliefs and creeds. They are incarnational, not creedal.”<sup>2</sup> Tickle is not alone. Brian McLaren, who is recognized as a leader in this “new reformation,”<sup>3</sup> is calling for a less rigid set of doctrinal beliefs in exchange for a more generous orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> It is not just popular authors who are promoting the idea that the church

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<sup>1</sup>John Longhurst, “The Times They Are A-Changing: A conversation with Great Emergence Author Phyllis Tickle,” *Christian Week.Org* 23 (2009) [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://www.christianweek.org/features.php?id=59>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), back flap.

<sup>4</sup>See Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

must change or die. More and more pastors are molding their congregations to be more consumer friendly and less “stodgy” in the belief that God is in need of better public relations. At the root of such thinking is that Jesus is great, but the church is not.

This chapter is not questioning the sincerity or motive of those who claim the necessity of “deeds not creeds,” but will call into question this evaluation. Individuals live out their beliefs, and their deeds follow their creeds. Jesus spoke to this truth when stating, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:45). Therefore if the creed is askew so too will the deeds that follow be flawed. Michael Horton writes,

I think our doctrine has been forgotten, assumed, ignored, and even misshaped and distorted by the habits and rituals of daily life in a narcissistic culture. We are assimilating the disrupting and disorienting news from heaven to the banality of our own immediate *felt needs*, which interpret God as a personal shopper for the props of our life movie: happiness as entertainment, salvation as therapeutic well-being, and mission as pragmatic success measured solely in terms of numbers.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, creeds are being lived out, but these creeds are more akin to the “American dream” than to biblical truth.

The previous chapter attempted to demonstrate the biblical underpinnings regarding the importance of the church in God’s redemptive purposes. The church is a community bound together by covenant to bear the image of God in the world that the glory of God might cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Believers are called to love as the distinguishing mark of their loyalty to Jesus (John 13:35), and to unity as a testimony that the Father has sent the Son (John 17:35). The current chapter will address some forces that exalt the individual over the corporate, paving the way for a lopsided understanding of what it means to love the brethren and walk in unity. The two areas of concern for this project will focus on the creeping threat of consumerism and

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 21.

individualism as destroyers of God's perfect plan. Like carbon monoxide that kills silently and without alarm, so these two paradigms threaten Western Christianity, by transforming the sacred into the common. This chapter will explore how consumerism and individualism affect one's view of the local church, as well as ascertain how some church leaders are attempting to use these two areas to "save the church."

### **The Influence of the Marketplace**

From birth to death a person is the target of marketers hoping to make a lifelong supporter of a particular product or service. An environment completely free from the siren call to become more likeable, dateable, sexier, or intriguing by simply purchasing the newest cell phone, soda, insurance plan, or deodorant is becoming more rare. One is never informed exactly how that new extended warranty will actually create an irresistible desire in members of the opposite sex: but that is beside the point, the emotional connection is all that matters. Recognizing that the consumer has choices regarding purchases; sellers are quick to seize upon felt needs to sway one's decision. One of the most effective means of selling is to appeal to one's sense of self.

The church of Jesus has always been under assault. Whether one considers the early church facing extermination by Rome, or the heretical formulations of Arius, there is no time in the life of the church that some form of offensive has not been waged. While Western Christianity has not faced physical attack and has experienced great freedom to worship, one should not conclude that there is no need to be vigilant. This paper will not attempt to address all the perils that may compromise the local assembly in the West, but will seek to consider two barely visible issues that lead to a weakening of the powerful witness the church should have in transformation.

### **Individualism**

The first area to consider is the threat of individualism. The primacy of the individual, so highly prized in American culture, has come to have a detrimental effect on

the corporate nature of the local church. Soong-Chan Rah reflects on this matter:

The American church, in taking its cues from Western, white culture, has placed at the center of its theology and ecclesiology the primacy of the individual. The cultural captivity of the church has meant that the church is more likely to reflect the individualism of Western philosophy than the value of community found in Scripture. The individualistic philosophy that has shaped Western society, and consequently shaped the American church, reduces Christian faith to a personal, private and individual faith.<sup>6</sup>

A distinction should be made at this point between individualism that exalts the individual to the exclusion of others, and individuation which recognizes God-given and God-honoring differentiations in people, which allows them to make decisions independent of a community. Individuation recognizes the immanence of God and personal salvation, as well as one's ability to express faith in the God who is near. Individuation is a valuable tenet of Western culture and is separate from the excessive individualism that has gripped many. However, individuation does not need to come at the expense of corporate solidarity. Rah states, "Excessive and hyper-individualism contrasts the healthy process of individuation by enslaving the individual to the tyranny of individualism."<sup>7</sup>

Such views stand in sharp contrast with the very nature of God who is a Trinity, bound in loving relationship, in community. As such, the Triune God creates humanity to live in communion with one another. Corporate unity is evidenced immediately with God creating the first community in Adam and Eve who bear his image. How humankind bears the image of the Creator is a vast subject but certainly there is the reality of relationship. In the brief paper "Roots of Individualism," Yung Suk Kim correctly assesses that the image of God is relational love: "The image of God is love in which the Triune God is relationally bound together. This divine love is the cause of

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<sup>6</sup>Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 29-30.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 33.

human existence. So, we are asked to live in a community, loving one another without claiming our individual rights all the time.”<sup>8</sup>

The thrust of this project is not to diminish the idea of self-reliance, which forms the backbone of American culture. Nor is it to assert the superiority of collectivism as a governing principle. The purpose is to consider how an individualistic mindset so prevalent in Western culture impacts the local church that is by definition a community.<sup>9</sup> Robert Hovda expresses tersely the consequences of hyper-individualism, in an article bluntly titled, “Individualists are Incapable of Worship”:

The awesomely corporate act of public worship assume, requires, demands a celebrating assembly of believing persons who have not lost the sense of being part of humanity, the sense of relation to, interdependence with, even identification with every other human being-as consequences of the love of God. People who approach that act, who gather on Sunday as self-contained units, individuals for whom all others are merely competitors or marks, are simply incapable of it.<sup>10</sup>

## **Consumerism**

In a free market society, choice between one product or another, between one businesses or another, brings value and quality to the end user. Such a system can be beneficial when deciding to purchase insurance, breakfast cereal, or any other service or commodity. But the church is not a commodity, and the congregation is not a group of potential consumers to be enticed to purchase that which they feel will be most beneficial to their lives. Leeman writes, “Consumerism has caused us to focus on the desirability of the object of love, rather than the process of loving. We view churches like products

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<sup>8</sup>Yung Suk Kim, “Roots of Individualism” [on-line]; accessed 3 June 2012; available from <http://www.youaregood.com/rootsofindividualism.pdf>; Internet. See also “The Church is a Worshipping Community” on p. 32 of this project.

<sup>9</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*ekklesia*.” *Ekklesia*, the Greek word translated “church” in the NT, is an assembly, congregation, or gathering.

<sup>10</sup>Robert W. Hovda, “Individualists are Incapable of Worship,” *Worship* 65 (1991): 69.

which satisfy or not.”<sup>11</sup> The danger presented by a consumer mentality is that relationships are not bound together by a commitment to a covenant or common objective, but are united only by perceived personal benefit. Unsurprisingly this does not foster the kind of love exemplified by Jesus, nor does it create a healthy church environment.

Despite the explosion of tirades against the threat of consumerism, not all have such a negative view. Rodger Nishioka, in a paper entitled “Life in the Liquid Church: Ministry in a Consumer Culture,”<sup>12</sup> encouraged the reader to recognize that the consumer mentality is the norm and that Christian leadership should accept this reality and find ways to adapt in order to survive. Nishioka defines the modernistic church as “solid church,” signifying that solids hold their shape and have clear spatial dimensions, preferring to stay the same over time. A liquid church in contrast is fluid, flowing, and not susceptible to breaking because they do not hold their shape under pressure. These churches are more closely associated with Post-modernity. The author continues,

In the solid church, we presume to know what you need, and we do what we can to deliver it. Need in this sense is prescribed and paternalistic. It may have worked well for a generation bound by duty and responsibility, but it will not work for a generation of shoppers. In the liquid church, we must take seriously person’s desires. Desire is not imposed or prescribed.<sup>13</sup>

Further in a section of the article calling for the recognition of a spiritual marketplace where consumers will choose the most relevant product, the author states, “In the spiritual marketplace, the shopper will choose the distinctive over the routine, the vibrant

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<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 50.

<sup>12</sup>Rodger Nishioka acknowledges he drew the image of a liquid church from Pete Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God’s People in Worship and in Mission-A Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).

<sup>13</sup>Rodger Nishioka, “Life in the Liquid Church: Ministry in a Consumer Culture,” *Journal for Preachers* 26 (2002): 35.

over the mundane, and the authentic over the going-through-the-motions.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite some rather compelling insights, Nishioka simply feeds into the idea of discovering what a person feels they desire and attempts to meet that need. The reason the solid church presumes to know what an individual needs is not due to some prescribed paternalistic intrusion, but is founded upon the needs of all humans revealed by God in the Bible. In the liquid church the attendee says, “I’ll determine my needs and stay as long as I feel those needs are being fulfilled.” But Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). The sinful nature inherent in mankind recoils at such words, for no sinful creature willfully pursues such a course. As marketers allow the consumer to create individualized products, the church stands in sharp contrast. Sidey, concisely affirms, “[The Kingdom of God] is the one institution we cannot create in our own image.”<sup>15</sup> Jethani concurs,

Traditionally, the Christian life has been marked by releasing one’s desire, submitting to a spiritual mentor or community, and learning to take up the cross and deny oneself. . . . These values are not championed in our consumer culture, and they certainly don’t prove popular among church shoppers seeking a comfortable religious experience. But surrendering control and embracing self-denial ensured that believers received what they *needed* to mature in Christ, not simply what they *wanted*.<sup>16</sup>

Before proceeding to consider how the church is affected by individualistic consumer-oriented congregants, a word should be provided regarding a related topic that becomes relevant if it is true (as Nishioka and others suggest): in order to impact an individual for the Kingdom of God, one must first adopt the principles of the marketplace. The end result of such a strategy is that the church becomes a commodity

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth H. Sidey, “Boomer, Boom and Bust,” *Christianity Today* 37 (1993): 15.

<sup>16</sup>Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity: Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 112.

and people are reduced to consumers who need to be convinced that what is being offered is the best value. For the purposes of this project the term commodification, as it relates to the Christian faith, is understood as the treatment of Christianity as something that can be acquired or marketed like other commodities. More specific to the purpose of this paper, commodification treats the local church as a product that will provide a perceived personal benefit. Nathan Mitchell warns,

Consumerism produces a twin-*commodification*, a social process in which the habits, practices, and attitudes learned from buying and consuming products carry over into our relationships with *all* the other persons, places and things in our culture.<sup>17</sup>

The essence of a consumer society is the belief that anything can be assigned a value that can then be exchanged. The result is that the thing itself has no intrinsic value, only that for which it can be exchanged for, based upon its perceived usefulness. Such thinking has devastating effects when applied to both people and truth. Viewing people as a commodity has weakened culture, as the life of a child can be terminated by reason that he or she is a liability. People recoil in horror when exposed to the horrific treatment of Africans in the dark days of American slavery, as human beings were reduced to a price based upon their usefulness. Disgust and shame are appropriate responses to such demeaning practices, but how does one respond when this same attitude is brought into the sacred?

Is God a commodity? What is the value given to the sacrifice of Christ? What is the correct exchange for worship? What will one give in exchange for his soul? Commodification of the sacred offers a false promise that does not and cannot result in increased satisfaction. To understand why commodification of the sacred will not satisfy, one must grasp that the heart of a consumer mindset is the promotion of the new and improved, with the attendant implication that what one is currently possessing is old and

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<sup>17</sup>Nathan Mitchell, "Consuming Liturgy," *Worship* 79 (2005): 177.

no longer useful. In other words, marketers must create a dissatisfied customer. The concept of the dissatisfied customer goes beyond the idea that what one possesses is inadequate to the feeling that who one currently is, is inferior. Brunk summarizes this sentiment well: “To be truly effective, the creation of dissatisfaction has to go beyond the notion that what one has is inadequate to the notion that who one is, is inadequate.”<sup>18</sup> The message received by the end user is that “you are inadequate, so buy more things.” The goal of the marketers is to target an audience and discover their desires in order to meet their self-perception. Goods have meaning; they convey a message of what “tribe” a person identifies with. Brunk again proves helpful: “What one consumes signifies who one is, which is to say with which group one should be identified.”<sup>19</sup>

Cultivation in the art of dissatisfaction might be one explanation for the general apathy towards the “solid” church. The church is old and in need of upgrading to a new version. To keep consumer interest, products need constant revision and improvement lest they fall victim to the plague of irrelevancy. To counter the fear of irrelevance, churches have adapted the same desire-inducing methods in order to capture the attention of their target market. Therefore it is imperative to discover the felt needs of the potential audience and do all that is necessary to meet what is felt to be lacking:

Today, marketing strategies and advertising methodology are pervasive in American ministry. . . . They must convince a sustainable segment of the religious marketplace that their church is “relevant,” “comfortable,” or “exciting,” while at the same time creating a desire for church among a population that does not feel the need.<sup>20</sup>

Certainly churches and ministries should be concerned with the felt needs of others; however, like a child who feels she needs ice cream for dinner, so those in charge of ministry to the soul must understand the true need of a balanced spiritual diet.

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<sup>18</sup>Timothy Brunk, “Consumer Culture and the Body: Chauvet’s Perspective,” *Worship* 82 (2008): 292.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>20</sup>Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*, 109.

Reducing the church to a commodity to be inspected and rejected if deemed inferior or unsuitable to one's personal desire, and viewing people as consumers to be cajoled to purchase what the church is selling, ultimately is a denial of the power of God in transformation. Albert Mohler, in an excellent three part series entitled "The Whole Earth Is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship" quotes the late A. W. Tozer, who said,

It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people, a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend the meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with Him for they must be wooed to meeting with a stick of striped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, the worship of God as an appropriate response to his faithfulness and mercy, is not enticing enough to draw a sufficient audience. Perhaps the focus of ministry has been misplaced! The commission given by the one who founded the church called his followers to make disciples (Matt 28:19). As stated previously in chapter 2, this includes the proclamation of the gospel which is the power of God to salvation and to teach all that the Lord commanded. Disciples are to be brought to maturity, and the market-driven approach is ill-equipped to deliver. Being driven by the idea that big is superior to small, some have attempted to attract a crowd with superficiality *and then* give the gospel that saves, which is a reversal of the biblical model. It should come as no surprise then that too many American Christians are woefully malnourished.

### **The Effect of Individualism and Consumerism on the Church**

The following section of this paper addresses how the influences of

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<sup>21</sup>A.W. Tozer as quoted in Albert Mohler, "The Whole Earth Is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship" [on-line]; Albert Mohler.com, blog entry posted February 6, 2006; accessed 14 June 2012; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2006/02/06/the-whole-earth-is-full-of-his-glory-the-recovery-of-authentic-worship-part-one-2/>; Internet.

individualism and consumerism affect various areas of church life. Three primary topics will be considered as a brief reflection of the growth-stunting outcomes of these two influences. The three topics to be considered are relationships, theology, and worship.

## **Relationships**

A worldview centered upon self is not only unhealthy in the culture at large but is devastatingly so in the smaller confines of a local church where community should have priority. A consumer culture has altered what it means to be with others as has been noted by a number of observers. One such individual who has captured this phenomenon is Vincent Miller who coined the phrase “jogging together alone,” after observing a couple in his neighborhood each listening to their own personal music mix via their MP3 music players. Individual playlists and little interaction between partners yet in one sense together.<sup>22</sup> Jethani observes the same phenomena exemplified in suburban living as a natural extension of consumerism:

In many ways the suburb is the topological manifestation of consumerism, the ethos of commodification lived out in architectural form. Suburban living means dividing life into clearly discernable parts. . . . Socioeconomic zones are separated by neighborhoods and school districts. Family zones are demarcated by fences. And within the home, family members are zoned into private bedrooms—each with a television, Internet connection, and a telephone. The suburb like the consumer worldview from which it came, forms us to live fragmented and isolated lives of private consumption.<sup>23</sup>

True fellowship (described in chapter 2) cannot be a reality when we are “together alone,” for it demands the opening of one’s life to others and holding one’s possessions with an open hand. True fellowship runs the very dangerous risk of experiencing the potential pain of loving and being loved. Harvey Pothoff states,

The “Church idea” is the idea that in the religious life there are some values which can be found in association which cannot be found in solitude. Someone has

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<sup>22</sup>See Vincent Miller, “The Liturgy and Popular Culture,” *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (2006): 164. See also Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>23</sup>Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*, 143.

observed that a person may be damned by poor fellowship, but he is seldom saved in isolation.<sup>24</sup>

The transforming power of God is often released as one opens himself to the instrument of fellowship.

Another area where the Western worldview has impacted relationships can be found in the normalization of serial monogamy. Serial monogamy is a form of monogamy characterized by several successive short-term marriages or sexual relationships over the course of a lifetime. A serial monogamist enjoys the intimacy of relationship but is always holding back. If the other partner begins to demand too much or pushes at all, the serial monogamist will end the relationship, often without emotion, simply to move on to another. Such an attitude can be observed in one's relationship to the local church as individuals have several short-term committed relationships with a local church over the course of a lifetime. Serial church attendance allows one to escape accountability and the responsibility to truly love their brother or sister. This so-called "freedom" is viewed as a benefit, but in actuality is only a perceived gain. Real growth that produces fruit comes from being well grounded, firmly planted with roots that extend deep. In a relationship between individuals, love grows deeper when the partners persevere through difficulty. Trial strengthens the bonds of relationships; people learn objectively what it means to forgive and be forgiven, to pour out one's life for the betterment of another, leading to fruitfulness and maturity.

Despite the myriad of ways to communicate and relate and despite the ever-present search for meaningful relationships, the people of God are just as desperate for community as those outside the fellowship. Ironically, loneliness is a plague of modern humanity. Feeling disconnected in a hyper connected world seems impossible, yet it is real. David Wells states,

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<sup>24</sup>Harvey H. Pothoff, "The Church as a Saving Fellowship," *Iiff Review* 17 (1960): 35-46.

This is the plague of being disconnected . . . . It is the affliction of being alone, of being unnoticed, of being carried along by an indifferent universe. Commitment—actual commitment, real bonds, a real sense of belonging, not just the idea of commitment—has become a precious stone, rare, much sought after and, when found, treasured.<sup>25</sup>

## **Theology**

When the individual is prioritized, the theology presented must be congruent lest the claim of irrelevance is declared and the consumer, the worshiper, moves to a church that will fulfill the felt needs demanded. Individualism not only shapes how church is structured and how relationships are valued, but also how the Scriptures are understood. Except for a few books in the Bible (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) the intended audience is corporate, written to communities. Whether the books are intended for Israel, a church in Thessalonica, or even the seven churches in Asia Minor referenced in Revelation, the target is a community. Contrast these messages with today's most popular sermon series which focus on living one's "best life," or enjoying more intimacy in one's marriage. The common denominator is the individual not the community. Even those sermon series that have God as the focus place the relevance of the teaching in the realm of the individual. Little weight is given to how the assembly can reflect a greater corporate unity in the community in which God has placed them. Rah is correct when stating, "The Western hermeneutic of Scripture relies upon an individual focus and an individual application."<sup>26</sup>

When one considers passages of Scripture from an individualistic viewpoint misinterpretations and misapplications are the certain fruit. Therefore it is a mark of a good expositor to note that many popular verses are directed not to "you," but to "you all."<sup>27</sup> Having said this, one should not conclude that personal application of Scripture

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<sup>25</sup>David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33.

<sup>26</sup>Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 34.

<sup>27</sup>Isa 1:18-20 and Jer 29:11-14 are examples of popular texts that are often

should be forbidden, nor should one conclude that the Bible has nothing to say to the individual. The Bible speaks of individual faith. For instance, the apostle Paul speaks of the importance of individual confession of faith in Romans 10:8-10:

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

The pronouns used in this passage are singular, indicating that one comes to Christ not through one’s family or church, but through a personal invitation by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also addressed people on an individual basis. Again Rah summarizes,

However to reduce Jesus’ teachings and his life to merely an individual expression is to do a disservice to the full canon of Scripture. The doctrine of the incarnation reveals that Jesus is a personal God; however, Jesus’ incarnation is a heavenly invasion that has a social as well as individual implication. Jesus comes announcing the kingdom of God, not merely expressed on an individual level but also on a societal level.<sup>28</sup>

The narcissism prevalent in many Western churchgoers finds expression in how one views sin. Rebellion against God is viewed as an individual act. In other words, “I offend God,” or “I have fallen short.” Such recognition of lawlessness is important for spiritual maturity, but when out of balance neglects the offense of corporate sin. Both Nehemiah and Daniel modeled the importance of confessing the sin of the community, even of those to whom these leaders never had direct association (Neh 9:1-37; Dan 9:1-14). Churches, not just individuals, have not loved God completely nor have they loved one another in a way that reflects the love of Christ. Worshiping communities have tolerated moral compromise, injustice, gossip, factions, and biblically compromised teaching. If biblical history is an indicator, such violations of God’s Word are to be confessed and repented. Many churches have a time for personal reflection prior to the receiving of the

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personalized for the individual, yet in the original context they are meant for the nations.

<sup>28</sup>Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 34-35.

Lord's Supper, and perhaps it would be wise for the leadership of a local church to present to the congregation the need for corporate repentance.

When customer satisfaction becomes central, theology that addresses the difficult and/or unpleasant can be easily discarded in favor of more appealing subject matter. However, most market-driven churches would recoil at the suggestion that they convey a weak theological foundation, stating that their only difference with a more traditional church model is the methodology, not the theology. Lee Strobel responds to such criticism by stating,

Objections [to the market-driven church] generally relate to the method that's used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself, and consequently we're free to use our God-given creativity to present Christ's message in new ways that our target audience will connect with.<sup>29</sup>

But this is not the case at all, what is at issue is the theology. Methods may vary over the course of time, but truth, even inconvenient truth must remain solid. The issue at hand is traditional theology that is at the heart of traditional church life. In addressing the theology of market-driven churches David Wells perceives that traditional theology, which speaks of truths such as justification, atonement, propitiation, holiness, and sanctification, is something of an embarrassment to these "new paradigm" churches. He compares them to family secrets that are best kept private. He then describes the dilemma created by stating,

These churches cannot live without traditional evangelical belief, if they still want to think of themselves as evangelical, but they also want the freedom to be independent of evangelical beliefs in constructing their churches. They do not deny the doctrines . . . but these are not owned publically because that would exclude their churches from the market dynamics.<sup>30</sup>

In an attempt to attract people to the gospel many well-intentioned pastors and

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<sup>29</sup>Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 168.

<sup>30</sup>Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 40.

churches are buying into the idea that it is necessary to treat the gospel as a self-help manual offering therapy for whatever ails. The gospel is not the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), but a method for meeting one's felt needs. The important question then, is; have the new church marketers simply repackaged the gospel for the purpose of easier acceptance by a modern audience or has the gospel product been gutted of its value?

## **Worship**

Perhaps the area most affected by a consumer mindset is in regard to how one perceives worship. In a broad sense worship is viewed as a manner of living, a way of life as described by Paul in Romans 12:1. In a more narrow sense, worship is restricted to the act of the assembled people of God in order to give him honor in response to his gracious acts and self-revelation. Marshall provides a simple definition that will suffice for the purpose of this paper: "Worship . . . originally referred to the action of human beings in expressing homage to God because he is worthy of it."<sup>31</sup> Scripture is clear that there is a proper method of worship as well as worship that is irreverent. Consider God's rebuke of his people through the prophet Malachi: "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you" (Mal 1:10). The people were bringing worthless sacrifices to the Lord's altar and in his chastisement he states that it would be just as well to shut the gates of the temple and offer no expression of worship rather than irreverent worship. Ellsworth comments, "Here the Lord tells them that their worship is worthless in his eyes. He even calls for them to shut the doors of the temple! No worship at all is better than irreverent worship!"<sup>32</sup>

The point of the preceding material is a reminder that God is the focus of

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<sup>31</sup>I. Howard Marshall, "Worship," in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood and I. H. Marshall, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 1250.

<sup>32</sup>Roger Ellsworth, *Opening Up Malachi* (Leominster, MA: Day One, 2007), 34.

worship! In worship, God is not the guest. Worshipers congregate in his presence by his invitation to declare his worthiness and celebrate his graciousness. In a consumer-oriented church, however, this model is turned upside-down by making the congregation the center of attention. The sacred things, even God, are assigned a value based not on intrinsic worth but what benefit is provided. The church becomes the brand and the congregants are the consumers who must be satisfied by greater and greater ingenuity and hype in order to keep them coming back. In this system, large congregations are established with services noted for their high production value but the focus is misplaced. Worship becomes a “style,” that best expresses one’s innermost desires, not a vehicle for transformation into godliness. Worship no longer forms the individual, the individual forms it. Generally worship is formed into a production that feels right, and content becomes the servant to the form, resulting in a faith that is unable to direct and command one’s life.

The prophet Isaiah encountered the God of glory in the year that King Uzziah died and was immediately consumed with the presence of the holy God to the exclusion of all else except his pitiful condition (Isa 6:1-6). In this passage Isaiah becomes keenly aware of his sinfulness in light of God’s holiness prompting him to “fall on the mercy of the court.” Having then received forgiveness, he is sent to proclaim the message of truth, even an uncomfortable truth. When one substitutes the congregation as the focal point of worship the result is that God becomes secondary. Stott engages this issue well by providing three reasons worship of God has preeminence in the gathered assembly. The first reason speaks directly to the issue at hand:

It is often said that the church’s preeminent responsibility is evangelism. But this is not so. . . . First, evangelism comes under the heading of our duty to our neighbor, whereas worship is our duty to God, and our duty to God must take precedence over our duty to our neighbor.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Grand Rapids: IntersVarsity, 2007), 34.

## **The Effects of Social Media on Community**

God by nature is corporate (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and has perfect fellowship within himself. He has also created humans as social beings who find satisfaction in togetherness. In this modern digital age individuals have found new ways to connect with others, forming friendships and relationships in ways never before considered. The question this section of the project intends to address is how this hyper-connected generation is redefining community and the impact it has upon the local church. As was discussed in chapter 2 of this project, fellowship is one of the key components of a worshipping community (Acts 2:42). The early church, as well as the church throughout history, has understood the importance of joining together to encourage and strengthen one another. Until recently however, this demanded physical presence. Now, friendships and community can be found without ever leaving the confines of one's living room and without having to physically meet the other person.

Social media can be a powerful tool to keep in touch with family and loved ones, as well as being an effective means for ministry, but are sites like Facebook or Twitter neutral when it comes to forming views regarding fellowship or community? The concern to be addressed is the appeal of these sites that enable a user to have thousands of friends and relationships without actually having to risk the investment of a real human interaction. Jethani writes, "The medium allows us to abandon real identities to become whoever we want, or whoever we think people want us to be."<sup>34</sup>

A second concern regarding the topic being considered is that much of what is posted to these websites is not intended to move toward spiritual maturity, but is useless minutia. The website pages are filled with inane information about what one is having for dinner, or that another is hopelessly stuck in traffic. The issue here is that such postings are rather self-centered and ego aggrandizing. Once again "me" is the central

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<sup>34</sup>Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*, 144.

theme, and it is this self-absorbed inclination that Christ has come to purge from one's life. One blogger notes,

The individually inflated ego is one of the true identifiers of the human condition and one that will always latch onto any available tool and outlet in order to enhance its influence. Social media quite often, ironically, leads us to become more inward looking and self-obsessed.<sup>35</sup>

Gavin Richardson, who describes himself as a youth minister, a lover of South Park, and a Renaissance man, addresses the benefits and shortcoming of virtual community on a blog entitled "Life Without Pants." In this conversation Richardson describes the church communities that he participates in on the virtual world known as "Second Life." Second Life (SL) is an avatar-based virtual world where a person can be whoever he would like, live in exotic places, and work in whatever field appeals to him. In SL there exists many faith communities including an Anglican island, as well as an island for LifeChurch.tv where worshipers can come and participate in the worship service with other virtual congregants. Richardson presents SL as a safe place for those who have been abused and notes, "For many, this is a safe place to come in, be accepted, worship, share stories, and develop relationships. They are faithful attendees 'teleporting' in for the start of service then doing meet ups at homes after services or going back to their real world life."<sup>36</sup> Ultimately however, Richardson recognizes the need for human contact stating, "I do believe that people need a physical element to their spiritual life, being able to touch and be touched with hugs and see the faces of empathy and joy."<sup>37</sup>

Social media, virtual worlds, and the blogosphere are all relatively new

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<sup>35</sup>FutureConscience, "Does Social Media Negatively Impact Spirituality?" [on-line]; accessed 14 June 2012; available from 2012<http://www.futureconscience.com/discussion-does-social-media-negatively-impact-spirituality/>; Internet.

<sup>36</sup>Gavin Richardson, "Spirituality and Social Media: Discovering Your Virtual Self" [on-line]; accessed 28 June 2012; available from <http://www.lifewithoutpants.com/category/spirituality-and-social-media/>; Internet.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

realities that are here to stay, requiring the local church to be increasingly aware of their influences. Certainly such sites as Facebook can be used for the advancement of the cause of Christ but the ultimate affect it may have on how individuals relate to one another is still unknown. Two concerns (at least) are readily apparent. The first is the concern that in a virtual world one escapes from reality, being whoever one wants to be. Genuine relationships and fellowship are difficult in an environment of fantasy, bringing greater separation, not unity in truth. The second concern is the ease at which one can enter and end a friendship. Today a person is “friended” and tomorrow “unfriended,” which may normalize such activity. It is difficult to see how such tenuous relationships in a physical local church can be beneficial. God has created people to join together in community, in truth, even though this can be messy and uncomfortable.

**The Influences of Popular Christian Leaders  
Who Propose the Church Must Reflect  
the Culture Lest it Die**

Since the advent of the modern Church Growth Movement (CGM), which can be traced back to the 1950s, there has been persistent pressure placed upon church leadership to be more effective in facilitating church growth. The CGM observed correctly the waning influence churches had in their communities and concluded that there must be a better way to increase the impact of the church in affecting the masses. The father of the CGM is Donald McGavran, whose book *The Bridges of God*<sup>38</sup> launched the CGM according to C. Peter Wagner.<sup>39</sup> Wagner is the man who systematized McGavran’s philosophies and taught church growth principles alongside McGavran at Fuller Theological Seminary.

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<sup>38</sup>Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

<sup>39</sup>Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), ix.

The CGM initially focused on applying McGavran's principles to those called to the foreign mission field. However, individuals within the movement began to ask the question: Could the same principles of Church Growth that appear to work on the foreign mission field be just as effective in mission work in North America? As church leaders began to respond enthusiastically to the Church Growth principles the focus began to shift from the foreign mission field to the domestic. The CGM, in their desire to see masses come to Christ, has focused attention not upon doctrine but upon pragmatism. Valleskey states,

From all outward indications there is a genuine, fervent desire on the part of those involved in the Church Growth Movement to bring as many into the fold as possible. . . . It is this desire that spurs them on to a pragmatic examination of mission methodologies, to use what works and discard what doesn't.<sup>40</sup>

The means of determining success in evangelism is numerical growth, which is why leaders of this movement look favorably upon such church leaders as Robert Schuler of the former Crystal Cathedral, and Paul Yonggi Cho and his 500,000-member congregation, despite their doctrinal aberrations.

The result of a well-intentioned desire for the expansion of the church has devolved into the belief that a local church must be growing if it is healthy. Tolerating doctrinal compromise under the assumption that if a church is growing the leaders must be doing something right, the CGM falls under the same delusion as those of the Latter Day Saints who use the same reasoning to argue the orthodoxy of their teachings.<sup>41</sup> When success is determined by growth and not faithfulness to God, massive pressures are

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<sup>40</sup>David Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation" (delivered to the Ohio Conference, Michigan District, at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg, PA, October 15, 1990) [on-line]; accessed 8 July 2012; available from <http://www.wlssays.net/files/ValleskeyGrowth.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>41</sup>This "fact" was used by two Mormon missionaries in a personal encounter to demonstrate the veracity of their claims. Besides this personal encounter others have also been approached with this apologetic. See also "The Fastest Growing Church in the World?" *Mormonism Research Ministry* [on-line]; accessed 19 July 2012; available from <http://www.mrm.org/fastest-growing-church>; Internet.

placed upon pastors and church leaders to adopt such practices even at the expense of solid teaching. Bob DeWaay offers, “Whatever else the Church Growth Movement has done, it has convinced the majority of church leaders that if their local organization is not growing, this is a sure sign they are “unhealthy” and failing.”<sup>42</sup> As stated earlier in this chapter, one of the components of consumerism is the creation of dissatisfaction in the audience. The principles laid down by the CGM have influenced numerous pastors to cling to the idol of growth as the measurement of success, prompting these leaders to seek ever more creative means to attract consumers to purchase what they are selling. The result is entertainment-focused, well-branded churches. According to Breakthrough Media, a business designed to assist local churches to improve their brand, church branding is important because it awakens the heart. According to their website,

Our research and other’s have found overwhelming evidence that the most effective church identity connects in some way with people’s deepest life aspirations, and (as a central theme) images the church as an empowering community for true and fulfilling purpose.<sup>43</sup>

The weakness of this position is that one’s life aspirations rarely correspond with taking up one’s cross and laying down one’s life.

Like McGavran in the 1950s, so also today are influential voices noticing the lack of numerical growth and influence the Christian church has on society and are likewise calling for a revolution and new reformation to save the church from becoming extinct. Such voices are saying that unless the church adapts to the culture and adopts her methods, the organism Christ birthed is in danger of becoming a relic of modernity.

One of two models of transformation is generally applied to give the church

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<sup>42</sup>Bob DeWaay, “Faulty Premises of the Church Growth Movement” [on-line]; accessed 6 July 2012; available from [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/faulty\\_premises.html](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/faulty_premises.html); Internet.

<sup>43</sup>Breakthrough Media, “Five Reasons Why Missional Churches Cannot Ignore Identity Branding” [on-line]; accessed 14 July 2012; available from <http://breakthroughchurch.com/branding.htm>; Internet.

the necessary makeover. The first approach focuses on the consumer while the second appeals to the individual. One states that a culturally relevant business model is the pathway to growth while the other declares that one must abandon the church to save it. One side prizes the consumer, the other, the individual.

While there is no end to the number of books being written by those who claim the church must change in order to survive, one of the leading voices is George Barna, an influential statistician, author, and speaker regarding trending mindsets toward spiritual matters. In his book *Revolution*, Barna rightly observes the shallowness of those who call themselves Christians but whose relationship with the local church has done little to foster spiritual maturity. The remedy proposed by Barna is a new breed of Christian who values authentic spirituality without the strong commitment to the local church. Barna states, “Or, put more succinctly, the Revolution is about recognizing that we are not called to *go* to church. We are called to *be* the church.”<sup>44</sup> Barna sees the Revolution as “an unprecedented reengineering of America’s faith dimension that is likely to be the most significant transition in the religious landscape that you will ever experience.”<sup>45</sup> In Barna’s view, true spirituality has nothing to do with involvement in a local church but one’s personal commitment to Jesus. This is stated at the outset of the book as the author describes two believers playing golf together as an adequate replacement for involvement in the local church. Barna, it appears, takes the view that one becomes a member of the universal church upon regeneration, which precludes the necessity of joining in unity with a local assembly.

There is much to agree with regarding Barna’s concern with the lack of spiritual maturity among those who are churchgoers. His remedy, however, does not guarantee different results and is contrary to the Scriptures he desires to uphold. One of

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<sup>44</sup>George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 39.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

the fatal flaws of this type of thinking that has become prevalent is the overemphasis on personal individuality. No Christian will argue the importance of a personal faith in Jesus (Phil 3:8-14), yet the Scriptures know nothing of a relationship with Jesus apart from a relationship with a local church. Stott, correctly notes, “I trust that none of my readers is that grotesque anomaly, an un-churched Christian. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person.”<sup>46</sup> Twice the Bible references those who disassociated with a local church and in both instances the description is of apostates (Heb 10:24-25; 1 John 2:19). Justin Erickson wisely states,

That does not mean that these “20 million Revolutionaries” are apostates. It just means that the New Testament is not friendly towards what they are doing and the nearest category of people who fit their description are those that are unredeemed, indentified as those having left the local church.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of church being whatever one decides it to be feeds into the individualistic and consumer orientation that demands freedom without accountability. In loose fellowships, lacking recognized God-ordained elders and deacons, not only flies in the face of clear biblical teaching but leaves open the door to heretical teaching without any remedy for correction. The result is that churches either become loose federations of individuals or entertainment centers.

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matt 18:19). These words of Jesus spoken to his disciples assuring them of his presence in making difficult decisions regarding church discipline have become the favorite words of those who view the church as an outdated dinosaur in need of evolution lest it become extinct. Today much is being written about the church; however, much of such writing is from those who see the church as being something to flee from rather than

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<sup>46</sup>Stott, *The Living Church*, 19.

<sup>47</sup>Justin Erickson, “‘Revolution’ by George Barna: Reformation or Rebellion?” [on-line]; accessed 7 July 2012; available from <http://www.gracechapelchurch.info/Downloads/135%20-%20Revolution%20-%20REV.pdf>; Internet.

the household of God where shelter and comfort can be attained. Kevin DeYoung writes,

The church is often understood as nothing but a plural word for *Christian*, so that wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name—regardless of where they are, what they are doing, and what sort of polity is in place (if any)—there you have a church.<sup>48</sup>

There is a crisis of ecclesiology today and too many high profile spokespersons are exasperating the issue, by calling the church to flee from its biblical moorings to a more “culturally relevant” position. These well-intentioned individuals are convinced that unless the church adapts to the culture, the culture will forget the church and the Christian faith along with it.

In an article for *Leadership Magazine* Spencer Burke bemoaned the lack of flexibility the church has in adapting to market trends and culture. He lamented that the focus on teaching in a church service is no longer relevant for modern worshipers. Note, he does not stipulate that teaching should not be a component of the worship service, just not necessarily the center. That churches are not attracting new attendees at a rate desired, Burke reasons, is due to the lack of selling what people are buying:

Right now churches are focusing on one product to the exclusion of others. Most often, it's teaching, a 60- to 90-minute event held at a particular time, at a particular physical address. It's basically the same product we've been selling since the Renaissance. People sit in a room and listen to someone talk.<sup>49</sup>

Teaching, the reader is informed, is no longer a rare commodity as it was in centuries past. With the advent of radio, television, and the internet one does not need to go far to find teaching. In other words, a person can receive biblical teaching somewhere other than the local church, presumably by someone much more skilled than the local pastor, so the focus should be on other more marketable resources at the disposal of the church.

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<sup>48</sup>Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 207.

<sup>49</sup>Marsha Shelley, “Spencer Burke on the Church That Consumerism Built—and Why I Fled” [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2012; available from [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/05/spencer\\_burke\\_o\\_1.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/05/spencer_burke_o_1.html); Internet.

Burke then promotes a form of church that is flexible in its ability to meet people's needs. Finally, there is a correct appeal to return to the God-ordained mission of the church, which is a great place to begin.

First, the mission of the church is to make disciples. The making of disciples is comprised of two functions. One, bringing the unregenerate into the kingdom of God, expressed in baptism.<sup>50</sup> Second, the church is to bring people to maturity by "teaching them to observe" all that Jesus commanded. Since the first priority is to bring people to salvation one must ask how that is accomplished. The Bible is clear on this matter. As Paul stated in his letter to Rome, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). Later the apostle declares,

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rom 10:14-15)

Both of these passages of Scripture have at their root the need to proclaim or teach. After making disciples the church is to teach all that Jesus commanded. Does anything else need to be said regarding the importance of teaching? The mission of the church is a great place to begin but what one finds is the centrality of teaching.

No doubt the church has seen its fair share of monotonous and dry teachers, but this fact should not be a call for retreat. God's Word is an exciting, vibrant, interesting revelation that is unfortunately diminished by the joyless, burned-out pastor. In agreement with Burke, the church must do this task without neglecting other areas of worship such as serving and being in community with one another.

Numerous influential voices are calling for the church to do something, to be

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<sup>50</sup>See chap. 2, "The Church Is a Missional Community."

more like the New Testament churches.<sup>51</sup> Kevin DeYoung proves insightful with the following words:

What we need are fewer revolutionaries and a few more plodding visionaries. . . . What the church and the world needs from us, we imagine, is to be another Bono-Christian, but more spiritual than religious and more into social justice than the church. As great as it is that Bono is using his fame for some noble purpose, I just don't believe that the happy future of the church . . . rests on our ability to raise up a million more Bonos. With all due respect, what's harder: to be an idolized rock star who travels around the world touting good causes and chiding governments for their lack of foreign aid, or to be a line worker at GM with four kids and a mortgage, who tithes to his church, sings in the praise team every week, serves on the school board, and supports a Christian relief agency and a few missionaries with his disposable income?<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the culture of dissatisfaction has altered the people of God to the point where unless one is considered revolutionary and on the “cutting edge,” the idea of being a Tychicus or Epaphroditus<sup>53</sup> holds little value. And yet, it is quite probable that most who belong to Jesus will not be the rock star and will not have recognition, but will have an important place among God's people to equip them to grow and mature.

### **Conclusion**

A person cannot escape being influenced by the culture in which he lives, and in the West, Christians dwell in a market-driven society. From the moment a child is born, he is viewed as a new consumer who has the potential to be a lifelong customer. This is unavoidable. However, as children of God who are joined to Christ and his Body, one needs to be cautious in bringing such attitudes into the community of believers.

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<sup>51</sup>Which New Testament churches should be modeled? Should a church be legalistic as was the Galatian church? Or perhaps Corinth provides a model to emulate?

<sup>52</sup>DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 222-23.

<sup>53</sup>Tychicus was the faithful assistant and co-laborer of the great apostle Paul. He was entrusted with faithfully delivering letters written by Paul (Eph 6:21-22; Col 4:7-9), and was involved with financial collections (Acts 20:4). This servant, though mostly unknown, was considered trustworthy and a blessing to the more well-known apostle Paul. Epaphroditus is referenced in the book of Philippians as a messenger and servant to Paul's needs.

When one decides to participate in a local church, is the decision based upon return of investment or is it based upon whether God is honored in faithful worship, soundness of doctrine, and ability to use individual giftedness for the edification of the saints? Far too often a church is chosen based upon the music performed and/or the quality of the children's program. Music and child care are important, certainly bad music and lack of safety for one's children is not conducive to authentic worship. However, when a church panders to this lowest common denominator it is no wonder believer's lack spiritual depth.

The church, like all relationships, can be messy, and perhaps this is part of its purpose. God has called disparate individuals to work together for the cause of the gospel and in this conglomerate learn to love those who are different. Jesus called his church to be identified by people's love for one another and their unity. In these two qualities the world will know that the Father has sent the Son and the manifold wisdom of God will be made manifest to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (Eph 3:10).

CHAPTER 4  
ELEMENTS OF THE MINISTRY  
RESEARCH PROJECT

Beginning in late February 2012, I began requesting the assistance of congregants of the Church On Randall Place (CORP) to participate in a fifteen-week ministry research project necessary for completion of my Doctor of Ministry degree. My desire was to recruit at least 6 and no more than 10 individuals from among the church congregation. By March 18, 7 people had consented to commit to the project. My objective with the project was to accomplish four strategic goals that would strengthen the congregation who call the Church On Randall Place their home church: (1) to demonstrate the importance of the local church in the redemptive plan of God; (2) to develop a church membership curriculum and church covenant; (3) to provide an opportunity for congregants to attend the church membership class, and unite with one another in covenant relationship; and (4) to improve personally by being more confident in the importance of local church membership, by calling people to committed love and unity.

The project consisted of four key phases that formed the basis of the project. The first phase of The Deepening Covenant Relationship (DCR) project was the recruitment of the focus group and the administration of the pre-test that served as the measuring instrument. The second phase was a ten-week sermon series illuminating the importance of community in the redemptive plan of God. In phase 3, I developed a church membership curriculum and church covenant based upon the ten-week sermon series. The final phase included the administration of a post-test to the focus group,

evaluation of the results, and the presentation of the church membership curriculum and the newly created church covenant.

### **Phase 1: Recruitment of the Focus Group**

Beginning in mid-March I began to recruit individuals who would serve as a focus group in order to assist in measuring the effectiveness of the DCR project. My goal was to enlist 6 to 10 individuals from various backgrounds, age groups, and genders to provide a broad spectrum of viewpoints.

Each potential candidate was made aware and agreed to participate in four activities necessary for the completion of the project. The first requirement was the completion of a pre-test questionnaire. This questionnaire measured the attitudes and feelings that focus group members had regarding the local church. The questionnaire was composed of three primary sections. In the first section, general biographical information was sought such as name, age, and length of time one has been a follower of Christ. The second section was provided to assist in gaining information on the personal experiences the individuals had with the local church, as well as a short essay question addressing their perceived purpose of the church. The third section was composed of thirty questions with the answers set up on a 5-point Likert scale (see appendix 1). The pre-test questionnaire was handed to each of the participants on Sunday, April 8, with the instruction to return the completed questionnaire the following Sunday.

The second activity required the individuals to attend at least 8 of the 10 Sundays during which the sermon series was being preached. If for some reason a group member could not listen to the sermon in person, then that member would agree to listen to the message on-line.<sup>1</sup> I emphasized the importance of being physically present for the sermon series; however, I also realized that life situations such as illness, work, and other

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<sup>1</sup>Sermon audio as well as sermon notes were available from Sermon.net “Church On Randall Place,” [www.sermon.net/corp](http://www.sermon.net/corp) (accessed 1 April 2012).

factors may have prohibited attendance each of the ten weeks. The third requirement was to attend the church membership class, entitled Entry Points, at the conclusion of the sermon series. Finally, the participants agreed to complete the post-test and return the completed form no later than July 15, the week following the membership class.

Ultimately, I was able to enlist 7 individuals ranging from 18 to 74 years in age. The group consisted of 3 males and 4 females. In addition to the variety of ages and gender, I desired to create a pool comprised of single, married, divorced, and widowed congregants, as well as those who have been coming to CORP for many years and at least one who has been attending for just over a year. I also sought to have a range of educational experience represented. In other words, the goal was to create a group with as diverse a demographic as possible.

### **Phase 2: Synopsis of the Sermon Series**

The ten-week sermon series focused on the community in God's plan of redemption, and consisted of a three-week study of the community of God in the Old Testament, followed by a seven-week consideration of the church in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Demonstrating both the continuity and discontinuity between the OT and the NT was an important objective. I believed that it was important for those attending the Church On Randall Place to grasp the importance of the themes developed in the Hebrew Bible and how they are continued into the New Testament. The theme of the sermon series was "I Will Be Their God, and They Shall Be My People," based upon the covenant formula found throughout the Scriptures (Jer 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; Zech 8:8; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; Rev 21:3). The sermon series focused on the communal nature of God's people and was characterized by three identifying marks: the people of God are a holy people, the people of God are a worshiping people, and the people of God are a missional

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<sup>2</sup>See app. 2 for detailed sermon outlines.

people. Attention was also provided regarding the New Testament teachings on church leadership, church ordinances, church discipline, and church membership.

### **Sermon 1**

After introducing the focus of the sermon series, the first message illustrated holiness as the defining characteristic of the people of God. The primary texts for this homily were Leviticus 19:2 and Leviticus 11:44-45. The first task was to identify the meaning of holiness as being distinct or separate, indicating that there is a noticeable divide between the sacred and the common. Holiness is one of the evident characteristics of Yahweh made clear in Genesis 1 as Moses draws a clear line of separation between Yahweh and the gods of Israel's neighbors. God is without peer or competitor, he has no rival, he is holy. Yahweh has redeemed his people and separated them from the nations and they will experience the blessing of his presence as they maintain their distinctive nature. The message concluded with a presentation of the blessing of holiness being the very presence of God among his people.

### **Sermon 2**

The second sermon, entitled "A Worshiping Community," engaged Exodus 3:12 as the primary text. In this message I asked the question, "Why did Yahweh deliver a group of people from the land of Egypt?" The answer to this question was discovered in Exodus 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:7, where the reader is informed that God's people were delivered for the purpose of worshiping their redeemer. Emphasis was given to the priority of hearing the Word of God in corporate, public worship. The priority of worship, with emphasis on the fact that God is the primary focus of worship, was presented as an antidote to some modern attempts at worship where the congregation is the main subject. A strong contrast was drawn between the desire to draw a crowd through entertainment and the calling of a community to honor the God who purchased their salvation. The theme of market-driven approaches to the worship service was

referenced frequently throughout the sermon series, and in this message the foundation for my position on this theme was established.

### **Sermon 3**

Sermon 3 was grounded in Deuteronomy 4:5-8 and focused on the Old Testament community being an influence on pagan culture. As the people prepared to enter the Promised Land there was a temptation to adapt their religion to look like the cultures that surrounded them. But Yahweh had made the nation of Israel to be a nation of priests, intermediaries between God and man. In fact the attractiveness of Yahweh would be found in their distinction from their pagan neighbors, not in their attempts to imitate their neighbors. While the Old Testament contains no explicit command to evangelize their neighbors, Israel was to declare the glory of Yahweh and prove him worthy of adoration. While this subject provides numerous pertinent applications, two in particular were given priority. The first was that obedience to the Word of the Lord is a witness to our neighbors, just as it was for the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land. Second, was to help demonstrate the continuity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Influencing the ungodly has always been a call of God, not merely a New Testament mandate.

### **Sermon 4**

Sermon 4 gave emphasis to the importance of the church in the redemptive plan of God. Two overarching truths were introduced in this message that guided the remainder of the sermon series. Love and unity as described in John 13:35 and John 17:21 are integral to the church's testimony in the world. The importance of the church is not only in its testimony to the world but also to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Thus, the church reflects the glory of God in both heaven and earth. At this point I introduced that the mystery of the church is the calling of Jew and Gentile into a unified community. To call such disparate people to join in common worship and

purpose was radical and often difficult, yet it is in this sometimes chaotic unity that God is glorified. My hope was to drive home the fact that the church is a new community based upon the crucified, risen, and resurrected Christ and not based on external factors such as race, gender, economics, or culture. As a result, the church will glorify God as the former enemies join in fellowship.

### **Sermon 5**

The fifth sermon in the series concentrated on the church as a worshipping community using Acts 2:42 as the primary text. After Pentecost, the early believers gave ongoing attention to the apostles' teaching or doctrine, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. This message was a call back to remember these fundamentals of worship. As I see worship becoming more entertainment based, it was my desire to refocus the church on the four essentials referenced in Acts 2:42. The second point that I highlighted was that as an organism grows, so does its complexity. This complexity is not necessarily an evil to avoid but a reality that must be recognized, and in this recognition a reminder to guard against the danger of allowing the organization to become central. Therefore as the church grows, and by necessity adds layers of organization, care must be taken to remember the four essentials listed in the biblical text.

### **Sermon 6**

The sixth sermon guided the listener through Matthew 28:18-20 highlighting the mission of the church. The message gave emphasis to the fact that the primary command of Jesus in this text is to make disciples. By highlighting this imperative I explained how the church is to fulfill this command. Jesus' words contain three subordinate clauses that describe how to make a disciple. The first participle is that we are to be "going." In other words, missions is intentional. We are to bring people into the kingdom represented by the second participle of "baptizing." Teaching all the commands of Jesus is the third participle that describes the work of making a disciple.

As a missional church we need to be going, baptizing, and teaching. We must engage our community, state and world, we must be faithful in sharing the gospel leading to regeneration. Finally, we must assist the infant believer to grow to maturity.

### **Sermon 7**

Sermons 7 through 10 looked into the inner workings of the local church; her polity, ordinances, discipline and finally, membership. In this seventh message, attention was given to how the church is governed. I explained the role of elders and deacons in the structure of the local assembly and the responsibility these individuals bear. This sermon demonstrated that the early church was overseen by a plurality of elders, whose primary function was found in teaching doctrine, judging, and providing general oversight. The role of deacons and the responsibility of the congregation were also highlighted. This was a topic that was unfamiliar with many in the church. Some of the congregants consider the matter of church government to be too political for heavy consideration. To counter such a view, I emphasized that the issue of church polity appears insignificant until a crisis arises and then the importance of our government will become a priority.

### **Sermon 8**

Sermon 8 was entitled “The Ordinances of the Church,” leading one to conclude the main topic would have been on the subjects of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These two issues were addressed, but it was my desire to move the church beyond the “nuts and bolts” of the two ordinances and bring them to a deeper underlying truth of baptism and communion. Because of this desire, I gave emphasis to the topic of “union with Christ.” Baptism and the Lord’s Supper serve to remind the believer of this important truth. The two ordinances of the church also serve as a visual presentation of the gospel. In the ordinances, the death and resurrection of Jesus is observed. Therefore, when we celebrate either of the ordinances we are actually proclaiming the gospel. By

participating in baptism and the Lord's Supper the believer affirms his or her crucifixion with Christ and firm hopes in a coming resurrection.

### **Sermon 9**

The penultimate message in the series was designed to instill in the hearts and minds of the congregation the biblical purpose and need for corrective discipline. I began by describing the various types of discipline found in the New Testament and attempted to drive home the importance of a correct attitude when engaged in this very difficult aspect of community life. It was an important goal of this message to bring clarity to the seriousness of sin and how rebellion in the camp damages the whole assembly, not just the guilty party. Highlighting the imperative of mercy and the desire to see others reconciled to the Lord as the driving force behind this uncomfortable topic was an additional necessity. One of the challenges of church discipline is identifying which deeds merit such action. Differentiating between simple differences of opinion, disputable matters, and sin that rises to the level of requiring discipline was given serious attention.

### **Sermon 10**

Church membership was the topic of the final sermon in this series. The topic of church membership is most misunderstood at the Church On Randall Place, as many consider membership as pragmatic but not necessarily biblical. Because there is no explicit command to join a church in the New Testament many hold that such an idea is unfounded. Added to such an understanding is the reality that many at the CORP feel as though they are utterly committed to the church and hence have no need to make a formal declaration of membership. Therefore, the approach I took was to demonstrate that many biblical passages do not make sense unless there is some form of recognizing who is "in" the local church. Important matters that are clear in Scripture, such as leadership and discipline demand some form of membership. Important to clarify in this message was

the truth that church membership does not make a person a child of God, nor does non-membership disqualify a person from eternal life. The final issue addressed was what it means to be a member of the CORP, and that local church membership was the norm in the early church.

### **Phase 3: Development of the Church Covenant and Church Membership Curriculum**

The third segment of my project was completed over the course of two weeks between June 24, the date the sermon series concluded, and July 8, the day when the fourth phase of my project began. During this two-week span I developed a church covenant (see appendix 3) and created a church membership class (see appendix 4) using the ten-week sermon series as a guideline. Both of these elements were important to me personally as well as to the CORP, as they would establish a clear understanding of the goals and vision of the CORP and provide a concrete result of my project. Another benefit provided by the creation of these two documents was in regard to protecting our religious freedom in an increasingly and litigious culture. The covenant and church membership class serve as a guardian against legal action in the case of excommunication or other disciplinary measures that may be taken to protect the integrity of the CORP.<sup>3</sup> The membership curriculum and covenant would also serve the church if I were no longer to serve as the pastor, and would be portable if I were to go to another ministry setting should the Lord so lead.

#### **Church Covenant**

The CORP has not had a church covenant during my tenure as pastor and I

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<sup>3</sup>Alliance Defending Freedom has numerous resources to assist churches in creating documents and position statements for the purpose of protecting against legal action. One very helpful resource is Alliance Defending Freehom, “Seven Things a Church Should Have in Their Bylaws” [on-line]; accessed 26 August 2012; available from [http://www.speakupmovement.org/Church/Content/userfiles/Resources/church\\_seven\\_bylaws.pdf](http://www.speakupmovement.org/Church/Content/userfiles/Resources/church_seven_bylaws.pdf); Internet.

believed that a short document succinctly stating the expectations of those who would call the CORP their church home would be healthy. It would serve as a reminder of mutual accountability as well as provide a general outline of our commitment as brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the guiding scriptures for this project was John 17:23, as Jesus prays that the disciples would be united with one another as a testimony to the world that the Father had sent the Son. Therefore, I modeled the church covenant from the “one another” passages of the New Testament. Scripture repeatedly informs how believers ought to behave toward “one another.” For instance, Jesus commands that believers are to love one another even as he has loved those he has redeemed (John 13:34). We are to encourage one another (Heb 3:13), serve one another (1 Pet 4:10), bear with one another (Gal 6:2), forgive one another (Col 3:13), and pray for one another (Eph 6:18). By using scriptures that are “other” centered, there is a continual reminder that the members of the CORP are to consider others over self. These exhortations provide a foundation for how we as a community should conduct ourselves.

### **Church Membership Class**

During the two-week time span between the end of the sermon series and the church membership class, I developed a curriculum for the purpose of introducing individuals to the Church On Randall Place, which would also serve as a necessary requirement for those desiring to become members. The class would be open to all who desired information about the church, even if the person was only interested in knowing more about what we teach, our affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), our polity, etc. Imperative to the unity of the church is that we all are in agreement regarding our vision, purpose, and doctrine. This class provides the necessary information which allows a person to decide if the Church On Randall Place will be a place they can call home. Too much disharmony within a local congregation may be due to the fact that a congregant was never in total agreement with established church direction when they were accepted into membership. Perhaps the person enjoyed the

music or was attracted by the warmth of a particular congregation. However, after a time of faithful attendance he comes to learn that his beloved church holds a doctrinal position not in alignment with his personal convictions. Perhaps the individual discovers that his church holds a millennial view contrary to his own. Or, it may be that the doctrinal position of the pastor is more in line with the Remonstrant's and less with the Reformed position. These views need to be addressed prior to church membership. During this class I am able to address what the church teaches regarding challenging issues such as eschatology, spiritual gifts, and the doctrines of grace. The curriculum developed is not entirely new as we have had church membership classes prior to the one following the ten-week sermon series. However, the previous curriculum was somewhat disorganized and incomplete. For this project, I reorganized the more relevant material and added new material gleaned from the sermon series. The new curriculum better reflects our church culture, defines more precisely who we are as a church, and is more biblically grounded.

#### **Phase 4: Teaching the Entry Points Class and Administering the Post-Test**

On July 8 I gathered those who were participating in the fifteen-week project phase of my D.Min. program: those who sought church membership and those who were desirous of knowing more about the CORP. About 26 persons were in attendance, by far the largest gathering for a membership class since I have been pastor of the Church On Randall Place. In the two weeks following the class, I administered and received the post-test from the focus group, and followed up with those who expressed interest in joining the Church On Randall Place as members. The follow-up consisted of a face-to-face meeting for the purpose of hearing the membership candidate's testimony of regeneration. Because the CORP is congregational in its polity, it is imperative to have a regenerate membership as a barrier to false teaching, and to promote in a biblically focused direction. To complete the fifteen-week project, data was analyzed (see appendix

5, 6, and 7) and new members were received by the church at the church's quarterly business meeting. The following is a synopsis of these elements.

### **Synopsis of the Church Membership Class**

Twenty-six persons gathered in the fellowship hall of the Church On Randall Place to participate in the Entry Points class. The purpose of the class was two-fold: The first purpose was informational. For those who were interested in learning more about the vision, purpose, and polity of the CORP, this seminar was the forum to disseminate information on the teachings of the church. This proved to be an important function of the Entry Points class. Many who attended the CORP were unfamiliar with what we teach, how we are structured, and our reasons for cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention. The second purpose was for those who desire to make the CORP their church home by covenanting together in membership. The Entry Points class aided in closing the "back door" of the church, for those who would easily disengage from fellowship, by calling individuals to a high standard of commitment. The Entry Points class also guarded the "front door" of the church by demonstrating who we were and what we expected of a church member before the person made the commitment to church membership.

The Entry Points class was an opportunity for the CORP to assist congregants to develop a solid idea of what it meant to be part of our local assembly. This is especially important in a culture that appears to be growing more adverse to commitment. The class began with a presentation of the biblical view of the church, distinguishing between the invisible and visible church. Following this discussion was a presentation of the gospel. I have come to the realization that many in the church speak of sharing the gospel but very few are able to articulate exactly what this gospel is. Therefore it was essential to provide a clear way of explaining the gospel that saves. For this class I

followed the outline provided by Matthias Media entitled “Two Ways to Live.”<sup>4</sup> The basic outline presented was God, rebellion, consequences, Jesus, and decision. This was a comprehensive, yet concise outline of the essentials for a gospel presentation, in a format that was easy to remember. I was unwilling to assume that all who attended this class were believers; therefore I provided an opportunity at this point for any experiencing conviction of the Holy Spirit to express their desire to repent and believe the gospel.

The remainder of the class investigated subjects such as our purpose in missions and evangelism, and how the church participates in those two areas. We also gave considerable attention to the topics of church membership and our cooperation in the SBC. I discovered that many in our church have a background in which church membership was ignored or considered unbiblical and therefore attempted to address questions regarding this biblical truth. Because very few people at the CORP have an SBC background, I clarified what this cooperation entails and why we are involved in this network of independent churches. Most find this revealing, as many have an incorrect impressions of the SBC, believing it to be a “top down” organization where a committee of officials dictates what is taught in the local churches. Therefore, many were relieved to discover that churches within the SBC are autonomous and joined together by willing cooperation for the purpose of missions and evangelism. At the conclusion of the seminar I explained that those who desire to become church members should schedule an appointment with me or one of the elders, in order to hear their testimony of conversion. Upon satisfaction that the person has been regenerated we informed the potential member that he or she would be received into membership at the next business meeting.

At the conclusion of the Entry Points class I administered the post-test to those

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<sup>4</sup>Materials and information available from “Two Ways to Live” [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2012; available from <http://matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl/>; Internet.

participating in the focus group. Due to various schedules and priorities I made the decision to have the post-test returned no later than the following Sunday, July 15.

The fifteen-week ministry project concluded by spending time analyzing the data gathered from the pre and post-tests. I also followed up with those who sought church membership. Because of the biblical imperative of a regenerated membership, I gave diligence to discovering how those who desired membership had come to belief in Jesus. These personal visits also enabled me to better know some of people who would become integral to the CORP. These meetings also provided an opportunity to learn of the various spiritual gifts possessed by the congregants, thereby enabling me to better find areas of ministry where they may utilize those gifts. Another matter of concern these visits satisfied had to do with the fact that some people were transferring from other local churches. It is important that those who transfer membership are not simply running from an uncomfortable situation in hopes of finding satisfaction at the CORP. It is also important that they are not leaving behind unfinished business or leaving with unresolved issues. In such instances I believe it is usually important to meet with the previous church and seek reconciliation, if possible.

Having been satisfied that the people interviewed were indeed followers of Christ, I informed them that they would be recognized as members of the Church On Randall Place at the quarterly business meeting, held on July 22. Four of the 26 attendees sought to become church members. Eight people expressed interest in church membership, but being out of town the week of the business meeting, opted to delay entry until the next meeting. One individual who demonstrated signs of great satisfaction with the church and who initially expressed interest in becoming a church member later declined. This individual expressed to me that she had some difficulties with the Southern Baptist Convention as well as some other unspecified views expressed during the meeting. While I was disappointed in her decision, I am pleased that the process worked well. Many people come to a new church and are initially excited in the new

environment. This excitement can encourage the temptation to quickly receive that person as a covenant member, only to discover that their beliefs and direction are not in sync with the church's vision. In such times it is beneficial to discover this discontinuity sooner rather than later, and this is one of the benefits of the Entry Points class. Fortunately, the woman in question remains a friend to both me and my wife, and is regarded as a sister in the Lord, and we continue to pray that she finds a compatible church home.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this project was to heighten the appreciation of the local church in the hearts and minds of those who call the Church On Randall Place their church home. I found the process of the project to be entirely rewarding as an opportunity to show the value of the church in God's plan of redemption. As a pastor, the preparation for each of the ten sermons was naturally the signature event. Beyond the sermon, however, the one-on-one conversations with other congregants about their newfound discoveries and of all that Scripture says about the church was completely satisfying. I found that this exercise also served as a means to unite the Church On Randall Place in corporate fellowship in a manner not before experienced. For those who attended the sermon series and the Entry Points class, there is a greater appreciation for being part of this small community in the central mountains of Arizona.

CHAPTER 5  
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

**Introduction**

This project contends that spiritual maturity of believers is requisite if the church is to penetrate the encroaching darkness prevalent in Western culture. The stunted growth of many believers today has multiple causes, the majority of which are impossible for this project to address comprehensively. Nevertheless, this project is an honest attempt to address a small but significant cause of spiritual immaturity. Despite the lingering adolescence of many in Western churches, one can have assurance that God has graciously redeemed sinners, filled them with the Holy Spirit, and placed them into a local community for the purpose of stimulating one another to love and good works. It is in light of the words of Jesus recorded in John 13:35 and 17:21 that this project was constructed. The statements declared by the Lord are that disciples of Jesus are recognized by their love for one another and that unity among the disciples is a testimony to an unbelieving world that the Father has sent the Son. In order to reach a lost world the church must have these two foundational aspects operating, lest new believers come into the church only to discover that it is no different from the culture they have just abandoned. Consumerism and individualism are the two threats to love and unity among believers addressed in this project.

This chapter concludes the project presentation by offering a seven-step analysis and reflection. First, I present an evaluation of the purpose. Second, I offer an evaluation of the goals; and third, an evaluation of the methodology. The fourth and fifth sections respectively evaluate the strengths and weakness of the project. The sixth

section provides a theological reflection about the project, concluding with a personal reflection, focusing on how the project impacted me as a leader and pastor.

### **Evaluation of Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to deepen covenant relationships at the Church On Randall Place in Pine, Arizona. When speaking of deepening covenant relationships I do not merely desire to create an atmosphere of friendliness or increase the quantity of small group meetings endorsed by the church. My purpose is much larger, perhaps larger than a project such as this one can accommodate. I have a longing that God's people would have relational ties with one another that would enable the church community to stand together despite imperfections (real or perceived) in one another and in the leadership. I desire that relationships among the congregants at the Church On Randall Place would transcend the superficial. The importance of this purpose is discovered in what I observed to be an erosion of the significance of the local church in the hearts and minds of contemporary Western Christianity. My concerns for the local church are twofold. First is the apparent de-emphasizing of the church, in favor of a more de-centralized community with blurry leadership structures and nebulous doctrinal standards. My second concern is the movement toward a corporate model that seeks conformity with culture rather than standing as an antidote to the corruption prevalent in culture. While both of these models demonstrate some beneficial characteristics, the result is degradation of the covenant community and descent into self-centeredness.

The erosion of the importance of the local church may be national, but the importance of this project is found on a local level. The Church On Randall Place is experiencing both numerical and spiritual growth, requiring strong foundational principles. If we are to be strong in the future we must construct a solid foundation. One basic principle upon which we will build is that the church is an important component in the plan of God's redemptive purpose. The church is not simply a good idea or pragmatic means to organize laborers for the fields into which the Lord commissions. God works

through a community of elect individuals for the glory of his name and the salvation of his people. As such, it is essential that if we, as a church body, are to work towards the purposes of God's glory and mankind's salvation, we are required to demonstrate the love and unity Jesus said would be the identifying characteristics of his disciples. These two elements, love and unity, are the two elements by which the world will know that we are his disciples, and that the Father had sent the Son (John 13:35; 17:26). A loving, united group of believers precedes a powerful evangelistic strategy or discipleship program. In fact, programs centered on evangelism or discipleship can mask the erosion of a crumbling foundation, permitting individuals to assume all is well when, in fact, serious trouble lurks just below the surface.

As I attempt to evaluate the purpose of this project, I concede that quantifying such an objective is difficult. After all, how does one measure the depths of personal relationships? How can love and unity be quantified? The means by which these subjective elements were measured was a pre-test questionnaire given at the beginning of the fifteen-week project and a post-test questionnaire administered at the conclusion of the fifteen week project.<sup>1</sup> I did not enter into this project wearing rose-colored glasses of transforming the world. However, I did desire to begin the process of altering the "DNA" of our church; to hold the local assembly in high regard. Therefore, when people arrive at the Church On Randall Place in the future, the established belief will be one consisting of a high view of the bride that Jesus died to purchase. As individuals are influenced by contemporary voices that diminish the local church, or who come from assemblies who did not view the church as anything more than a place where "two or more" are gathered in the name of Jesus, we will have a different standard. Our standard will be one of mutual submission and commitment. The paradigm will be one of

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<sup>1</sup>Analysis of the data from both the pre-test and the post-test is found in the section titled "Evaluation of Methodology" in this chap.

standing together even when we may be at odds with one another, recognizing the glory of God is a much higher objective requiring the pursuit of love. This ideal is revealed in Ephesians 3 where the integrating of former enemies into a unified body is a demonstration of the wisdom of God to heavenly authorities (Eph 3:10).

The purpose of the project was a lofty one. It was an attempt to secure a small foothold against the increasing influence of a self-centered culture that I believe is becoming increasingly anti-institutional and pushes back against any semblance of authority. Based upon personal interaction with congregants, as well as the manner in which others are seeking to build relationships and overcome minor disagreements, I believe this project provided a good start to accomplishing the stated purpose.

### **Evaluation of Goals**

Personal observation has some merit, but does not provide objective data regarding success or failure for the project. Therefore, in this section I will address the four goals presented in the first chapter and consider the data that was collected in order to determine whether or not the objective was achieved.

The first goal was to establish a strong ecclesiology in the Church On Randall Place. Overall, the goal was worthwhile, and at least temporarily successful. This success is evidenced by the responses to the survey questions charted in appendices 6 and 7. Consider the following examples. Question 2 demonstrated a strong move away from the errant idea that a church exists wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, demonstrating a significant reduction of those who “strongly agree,” as well as significant increase towards the category of “strongly disagree.” In other words, more of those in the sample group are now less likely to believe those who would tout that the church is any loosely associated group of believers.

Table 1. Responses to question 2: A church exists wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus

Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	0	0%
Agree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Undecided	0	0%	1	14.28%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	3	42.85%

Question 5, regarding the importance of church discipline, also showed significant movement toward a more biblical understanding of this issue. There was a 25 percent decrease in those who “disagree” with the statement that church discipline is no longer relevant and a 10 percent increase in those who “strongly disagree.” There was also a 100 percent decrease in those who were “undecided.” I was encouraged by this result as I realized that the difficult work of church discipline may be more likely to be undertaken if and when circumstances require it.

Table 2. Responses to question 5: Church discipline (including excommunication) is no longer relevant

Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	2	28.57%	4	57.14%

Question7 addressed the issue of felt needs, and I was pleased to see the movement away from being “undecided” on the matter towards “disagreement.” This is an important category in the fact that truth must be valued above emotion. I do not desire that the Church On Randall place be unfeeling or uncaring, but that truth would drive our actions. Another encouraging factor drawn from this data demonstrates that those in the survey group have a grasp of the fact that the local church does not exist solely for their personal benefit. This attitude is also found in table A29, which shows a movement away from the idea that the function of church attendance is self-improvement.

Table 3. Responses to question 7: In order to grow a church must appeal to felt needs

Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%
Undecided	2	28.57%	0	0%
Disagree	2	28.57%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	1	14.28%

Other data demonstrating success in the project can be observed by viewing the complete results in appendices 6 and 7. Specific consideration should be given to table A10, which indicates that doctrinal studies are important for the health of the CORP. Also tables A25 and A26 identify that the main component of the worship service is the proclamation of God’s Word over and above worshipping through music. It is my observation in our community that many who seek a church to attend consider the music as the primary determiner of where they will commit. At the CORP, worship in music is an important component and is presented in a professional and reverent manner, but the congregational singing is a response to the abundant provision of the

Lord, and not a means of entertainment to attract the unchurched.

While most of the answers moved in a direction that I had desired at the beginning of the project, there were a few statements that resulted in responses contrary to my intent. For instance, for the statement “Weekly church attendance is important,” there was a slight movement towards “disagreement” in the post-test questionnaire (see table A11 in appendix 6, and table A41 in appendix 7). Likewise, statement 15 which declared, “Some form of church membership was the norm in the New Testament” also demonstrated a similar result, as there was significant movement away from “strongly agree” to “agree” (see table A15 in appendix 6, and A45 in appendix 7) This response was perplexing after a ten-week sermon series focusing on the importance of the local church and the biblical position regarding church membership. Perhaps these examples are mere statistical anomalies but they were interesting to note.

In light of the positive outcomes of the fifteen-week project, I also realize that such results are temporary and will need to be reinforced over the weeks, months, and years to come. Such reinforcement will be provided during quarterly business meetings as well as from the pulpit when the text of Scripture permits such an interpretation. Most importantly reinforcement will be modeled by leadership and those who have visible responsibilities in the church.

The second goal was to develop a church membership curriculum and church covenant based upon the ten-week sermon series. My desire for this goal was to create objective, lasting documents, that would serve the Church On Randall Place for the long term as well as provide a point of agreement that would assist in unifying the church. The first portion of this goal was successfully accomplished. The membership curriculum, as well as a student guide for the class can be found in appendix 4. The second portion of this goal was to formalize a church covenant based upon the ten-week sermon series and was also created successfully (see appendix3). This church covenant was introduced to the Church On Randall Place at the membership class that was conducted on July 8 as a

component of the project. The success of this goal is found in the fact that the two documents have been created.

The third goal was to move newcomers purposely from visitor to committed member. This goal is much more than giving a person a job to do or keeping a congregant busy. Joining in covenant community requires a commitment beyond simply filling a volunteer post in the church. This goal demands that an individual commits to the join themselves in covenant with others in the church. This goal requires that each person seeks the best for the progress of the church, forgiving as they have been forgiven, admonishing the unruly, and joining in biblical fellowship. The first stage of accomplishing this goal was to encourage participation in the church membership class. At this class, individuals learned the expectations the CORP had for those who would make it their church home. Assessment of this goal hinges upon the adjective “committed.” This term is somewhat difficult to define. Is a committed person one who attends and participates in every church event? Or is the committed person the peacemaker who steps in to bring a resolution to a disagreement? Perhaps commitment is the admonishing of a brother who is balancing on the precipice of sinful behavior. The scale by which one measures the aspect of being committed can result in varying outcomes. As a result, I have to consider the person’s spiritual maturity, their current life situation, as well as other factors. For some, I held out high hopes of impactful involvement in the ministry of the church, only to become aware that perhaps greater patience is necessary, as well as a reassessment of my perception of their spiritual maturity. Others, who have hectic family lives, but who are able to serve in one or two areas of ministry, should be considered committed, despite the fact that their place in the church may appear minimal. In evaluating this goal I realize that I should have defined more clearly what is meant by the term “committed.” On the positive side, leaders of various ministries have found a new commitment to establish strengthened relationships in their area of responsibility.

Overall, I would conclude mixed results in achieving this goal. The church is beginning to experience some improvement but not to the degree that I had desired. Perhaps my expectations were unrealistic, but I am thankful for those who have determined to join the Church On Randall Place, and the opportunity to disciple these new members.

The fourth goal was personal. I sought to be more intentional in assisting others to progress from a church spectator to a church participant. This goal is a challenge to an ongoing weakness that I perceive in my work as a pastor. I can easily become complacent in determining to motivate congregants to involve themselves in the work of ministry. Too often my default position is to believe that sufficient motivation is achieved when I make a declaration from the pulpit on a Sunday morning. After all, if individuals do not respond to those promptings, then what more can I do? I also have an inherent concern that due to my position as pastor, my promptings to greater participation might be viewed as manipulation. This goal has had immediate success, but diligence is required if lasting fruit is expected. Initial success can be observed in the confidence I have in calling church members to remember their commitment to exalt Christ and use the gifts he has given them for the edification of his community. Having formally and publically declared high expectations of those who call the CORP their home, I am able to stand upon that foundation when calling others to forgiveness, forbearance, and humility with others.

### **Evaluation of Methodology**

Evaluation of the project methodology focuses on the four key phases of the “Deepening Covenant Relationship” project. The four phases involved the recruitment of a focus group and the administration of the pre-test that would serve as the measuring instrument. The second phase was the ten-week sermon series on the importance of the community in the redemptive plan of God. The third phase was the development of a church membership curriculum and church covenant, including the teaching of a

membership class, as well as the administration of a post-test to the focus group. The fourth phase involved the evaluation of the test results and the presentation of new members to the church family.

I am generally satisfied with the recruitment of a diverse focus group and the administration of the pre-test, but there are some areas that I would view as needing improvement. The first area of improvement can be found in the test itself. On question 2 in section 1, “Circle the number of years since you came to faith in Christ,” I provided options of 11-15 years and 20+ years, omitting years 16 through 19. Another error is found in section 2, question 5. I requested that the individual place an “X” by the primary reason for choosing a church. My intent was to discover what factors the individual considered important in choosing a church, not simply their number one reason. I should have allowed for multiple boxes to be checked or considered having the respondent rank the importance factors that determine their choosing of a church. As a result, the results were skewed as most responded that “solid Bible teaching” was the primary determiner.

I believe that the demographic of the focus group represented the Church On Randall Place effectively; however, as the project proceeded I began to observe a characteristic that I believed would prejudice the results. The characteristic that became evident was that the majority of the focus group was already in agreement with the views regarding the church that I affirm. Simply put, the people who attend the CORP know my position and teaching emphasis, and they attend for that reason. Those who disagree with the positions I teach have left the church for one that is more in line with their beliefs. The result of this reality is that on many questions there is little change. In hindsight, I would like to have anticipated this phenomenon and alerted the reader by locating it in the section on limitations and de-limitations.

The second phase of the project was a ten-week sermon series. This portion of the project was uneventful in the sense that I believe I accomplished what I purposed to

do. As a teacher and preacher, I can always critique a message, wishing that I had given greater emphasis to some area of the sermon, or refrained from an impromptu illustration. Overall the sermon series proved beneficial in helping the CORP understand the importance of the local church. Perhaps the biggest challenge was in reducing this large topic to a ten-week series. In an attempt to overcome this limitation I devoted Wednesday night Bible studies to develop the ideas presented in the previous Sunday service in greater detail. This feature allowed those in attendance to drill deeper into the subject matter and address specific concerns in a small group format. I was extremely pleased by the discussion, questions, and challenges that permeated these conversations. Because of the restricted time frame I resolved to focus on three primary areas of the church community. Those three areas were holiness, worship, and missions. I attempted to demonstrate continuity of these three aspects from the Old Testament to the New. I believe I was moderately successful in this task, based on conversations I had with congregants, but in retrospect I would like to have made that connection more firm.

The success of phase 3 called for the creation of a church membership curriculum and church covenant based upon the ten-week sermon series. The church membership curriculum was designed to be presented in a two to three-hour format. The purpose for this decision was to be respectful of the time constraints of those who wished to attend. This format also took into consideration those who may not be interested in becoming church members, but who are desirous of more information regarding the CORP. Wanting to respect another's time is a worthy one; however, I have a sense that this class was rushed and would have benefited by splitting into multiple sessions. I got the impression that I was being a little schizophrenic when I announced that we had a high standard for church membership and then strove to lower the commitment bar at the initial point of entry. I will continue to wrestle with this issue and may decide to make the class a multi-session event; however, the best time to have done this was at the completion of this project.

The fourth phase of the project was composed of two major components, one that was planned and the second that was implemented but not included in my original proposal. The planned element included collecting the post-test surveys and analyzing the data against the pre-test. In my proposal, this concluded the fifteen-week project. However, this did not conclude the integration of new members into the church. This was a serious oversight. Upon completion of the membership class, my proposal should have included the reception of new members into the church, which would bring all of the events of the project to a natural conclusion. Without this final step, the project left people with information about church membership, without actually making them members. Therefore during the final weeks of the project I not only reviewed the data from the tests given to the focus group, but I followed up with those who desired church membership by hearing their testimonies (a clear testimony of conversion is requisite for church membership), and presenting them to the church for formal acceptance at a business meeting. The CORP had a regularly scheduled business meeting (we call these “progress reports”), on July 15. At that time, four individuals made a commitment to join in covenant relationship with the Church On Randall Place, making it their church home and affirming their desire to glorify the Lord by working for the good of this local expression of God’s church.

### **Strengths**

The primary strength of the project was in the subject itself. As people begin to drift away from the community that God has established for his glory and as a means to accomplish his eternal plan, they also slip into the haze of individualism. As focus shifts towards self, the gospel is easily transformed into a story whose primary purpose is for personal edification, becoming just another means of self-actualization. The gospel deteriorates from the glorious message of the Creator God reconciling all things to himself, to a tool to improve one’s poor self-image and make one a “better person.”

Along these same lines is the opportunity for Christian maturity, as individuals

learn to love others who may be quite different socially, economically, intellectually, racially, or by other carnal means of distinction. More important than this, however, is that the joining together of disparate people into a unified group is the means by which God is glorified both on the earth as well as to the principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph 3:10). The joining together of disparate people is in my opinion one of the most important elements of being a church that is distinct from the world, where people generally gather around similarities. Joining together with dissimilar people is one of the great benefits of a small church. In a small congregation, people must interact with those who are different, while at a large church, congregants can segregate based on similarities, never having to learn to intermingle with disparate people.

A final strength of the project was the firm establishment in the hearts and minds of those who attend the CORP of the importance of commitment to one another in ways that transcend mere words, but are realized in our love towards one another. If we as a body of believers are to reach a lost and dying world, we must have in place a noticeable love for one another that the new believer or non-believer would immediately discern. Our distinction as a people of God is to be found not in our emulation of the culture, but our transcending of society. Related to this strength is the fact that as the pastor of the church I have grown in my conviction of being diligent to lead a people who seek the unity expressed in the Bible.

### **Weaknesses**

One of the primary weaknesses of the project was the pre/post-test survey. Having reviewed the questions presented I realized that there were some important topics covered in the sermon series and the membership class that were absent from the survey. For instance, there are no questions regarding church leadership and structure. There was also the omission of any questions pertaining to the Lord's Supper and baptism. Considering that these areas were dealt with extensively in the sermon series as well as in the Entry Points class, they should have had a prominent place in the questionnaire as

well. A less noticeable, but critical portion of the teaching series was in regard to holiness, so there should have been some place given to this topic in the questionnaire as well.

I might find some comfort in the idea that it is difficult to anticipate questions that concern topics that will be written months in the future. The answer to this argument, however, is that in retrospect I would have done well to develop my sermon series more completely before constructing the pre/post-test.

A second weakness was found in the title and thrust of sermon 5 as it is misleading and disrupts the link to the Old Testament community (see appendix 2). I titled the sermon “The Marks of the Church,” but this title may be misleading since I was not specifically addressing the identifying marks of the church. John Calvin identified the marks of the church as right exposition of the Scripture and the right administration of the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> The Belgic confession adds church discipline to Calvin’s marks.<sup>3</sup> I realize that I was addressing more closely the characteristics of worship. By focusing on the worship of the church, I would have brought greater clarity and cohesiveness to the overall theme as it would have dovetailed perfectly with what was written regarding the Old Testament community.

### **Theological Reflection**

Independent, unaccountable believers living as an island, responsible to no leadership structure is unhealthy and unbiblical. As I consider my doctoral journey I have come to recognize the creeping malaise of individualism and the influence such

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<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.9 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, “Belgic Confession, article 29” [on-line]; accessed 13 May 2012; available from <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html>; Internet.

thinking has on God's people. Western Christianity exists in a society where commitment to others, including leadership, has a superficial appeal. Yet when the time arises to live out that commitment, the people of God too often find it more convenient to abandon the relationship and re-establish new connections elsewhere. This continual movement away from commitment perpetuates spiritual adolescence and does not develop the depth necessary to withstand the onslaught of a culture antagonistic to the gospel. While God saves individuals, he immediately places those individuals in a body (1 Cor 12) and equips them with the necessary gifts to edify and mature the body of which that individual is a part. Accountability in the body of Christ is too often sacrificed on the altar of personal fulfillment.

Throughout this project, I increasingly became aware of the mutual accountability between leaders and congregants. As believers are seduced by the voices encouraging departure from the local assembly, I must, as a pastor of a small flock, raise the call to return to the sheepfold, for it is here that the Great Shepherd will meet them. I recognize that hypocrites, false shepherds, and errant teaching have wounded many, but the wounds should not drive one into isolation, but rather to a pursuit of the truth.

Reflecting further on the theological concepts gained from the project, I have found a greater sensitivity and movement towards a more cruciform worship service. This conviction actually began in the doctoral seminar entitled "Ecclesiology and the Local Church," but was nurtured further in this project. Of great importance was my reading of *Christ Centered Worship* by Bryan Chapell.<sup>4</sup> Our time of corporate worship at the CORP has become more structured around the cross with less attention given to peripheral matters. I am more intentional regarding the use of media and technology, illustrations, etc. when the church is gathered. Such tools can be beneficial, but can also

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<sup>4</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

distract from being God-centered. I have become much more cautious regarding the songs that are sung in the gathered assembly, and instructing our musicians on what kinds of songs are appropriate. Included in this cross-centered worship is a new commitment to the reading of God's Word. We are now reading more Scripture in times of worship and not relegating this important matter to the sermon or a reading of a few passages when convenient.

Finally, I am in awe of the fact that God has determined to use human vessels as a means of displaying his glory. Too often believers have been convinced that God is seen as glorious through his mighty works. Certainly, instances such as the parting of the Red Sea, the raising of Lazarus, or the victory over the prophets of Baal demonstrate the power, sovereignty, and glory of the Lord. But what can be overlooked is that God calls disparate people together in a united, loving community for the purpose of manifesting his manifold wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Who would have ever thought that a "rag-tag" group of imperfect people would be the means of manifesting the wisdom of God? Given such a marvelous truth, how can one live in unforgiveness and unrepentance? How can one separate from fellowship at the slightest provocation? As a result, I have become more diligent to seek reconciliation, not simply to keep the peace, but to demonstrate to the world an accurate view of our great God and Savior.

### **Personal Reflection**

Turning attention now to the manner in which the project impacted me personally I will address two topics. First, the topic chosen has given me confidence when calling the CORP or a member to consider her ways. When I observe an individual or a group within the corporate fellowship excluding another, or drifting from engaging with the body I am able to more confidently direct, by way of reminder that we have all agreed to live together in unity. Confidence in administration and ecclesiastical matters is an area I wrestle with, as I am often concerned about peacemaking. However,

peacemaking, in my case can simply be an excuse for avoidance or procrastination. With the emphasis provided by this project and the constant reminder of who we are as a church body during our membership classes, as well as our quarterly progress reports, I am able to stand firm on this foundation. In other words, I do not feel as though I am simply making up some new “rule” in the church, but I am calling people back to a foundational principle that has been openly declared and explained.

The second area to be addressed is the reminder that the CORP does not belong to me and those who call it their church home are not mine. Perhaps this statement sounds cliché, but the work of administration, preparing sermons, and all the various tasks that I am called to perform in the role as pastor can easily degenerate from a work of the Spirit to simply another task that I will accomplish by my own skill and desire. Viewing the care that God has for his called out community through the Scriptures is simultaneously humbling and awe-inspiring. God fills flawed, weak, and limited vessels with his grace and Spirit that they might pour themselves into the lives of others for the glory of God.

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude this worthwhile project I have come to realize that my understanding of the greatness of God has increased significantly. Considering his superintendence of his Word and his people has caused me to be increasingly aware of my dependence upon him for leading the Church On Randall Place. This God exalting realization however has not come solely from the work done on this project. As I consider the intellectually challenging classes, the stimulating discussion with my cohorts, and the humility of the professors, I realize the diversity and beauty of the Body of Christ, resulting in praise. However, the most impactful and lasting lesson I have gained from this program is not found in a deep theological insight nor is it discovered in learning from the lectures of well-respected theologians. The most lasting lesson learned came in my second seminar where the professor remarked on the importance of reading

the Bible. What was most impressive was not so much the admonition, but the obvious fact that he had spent many hours reading God's Word, as he was able to answer students questions by referring to obscure portions of the Bible as though they were as familiar to him as John 3:16 is to me. This simple encouragement propelled me to commit to reading God's Word more diligently. I should not be surprised that God in his wisdom used an academic program that challenged my exegetical abilities, enlarged my understanding of historic theology, and expanded my horizon of the biblical story to impress on me the simplest of lessons. As this portion of the journey God has given to me comes to a conclusion I find myself echoing the words of the apostle Paul: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Rom 11:33).

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DOCTOR OF  
MINISTRY PROJECT

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your understanding of the local church and how this subject is presented in the Bible. The research is being conducted by John Lake for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply answer the questions before we begin a sermon series on the topic of purposes of God in the church and you will answer the same questions after we complete the sermon series. Any information you provide will be held strictly *confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information about the individuals participating in this research project.

1. Please print your name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Circle the number of years since you have come to faith in Christ:  
1-5 years      6-10 years      11-15 years      20+ years
3. Age: Less than 20\_\_\_ 20-30\_\_\_ 31-40\_\_\_ 41-50\_\_\_ 51-60\_\_\_ 61+\_\_\_

The second section of this questionnaire addresses your personal experiences in local churches.

1. Have you ever heard a sermon series on the importance of the local church?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
2. How long have you been attending the Church on Randall Place?  
\_\_\_0-1year \_\_\_2-4 years \_\_\_5-6 years \_\_\_6+ years

3. How often do you attend church or church functions (please circle).

Once a week          Twice a week          Three or more times a week

4. Place an X by any reason(s) you believe would be appropriate for seeking a new church.

False teaching     Inconvenient location     Move out of area

Feud with another congregant     Difference in doctrine

Quality of music           Quality of youth programs     Other (Explain)

5. Place an X by your primary reason for choosing a church

Strong children's program           Relevant music

Solid Bible teaching     Caring people           Convenient location

Other (Explain)

6. Have you ever left one church for another? Why?

7. Why did God establish the local church?

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the following statements:

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

- \_\_\_ 1. Upon confession of faith in Christ I became part of the church.
- \_\_\_ 2. A church exists wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus.
- \_\_\_ 3. Unity of disciples is foundational in God's redemptive purposes.
- \_\_\_ 4. The church is the means by which God accomplishes His redemptive plan.
- \_\_\_ 5. Church discipline (including excommunication) is no longer relevant.
- \_\_\_ 6. Modern culture has little impact on one's attitude regarding spiritual matters.
- \_\_\_ 7. In order to grow a church must appeal to felt needs.<sup>1</sup>
- \_\_\_ 8. Church attendees are not interested in theology.
- \_\_\_ 9. Theology must be emphasized if a church is to grow.
- \_\_\_ 10. Doctrinal studies are inappropriate in a church setting.
- \_\_\_ 11. Weekly church attendance is important.
- \_\_\_ 12. Attending numerous churches is an appropriate option for spiritual health.
- \_\_\_ 13. Commitment to a single local church stifles spiritual growth.
- \_\_\_ 14. In order to be relevant a church must adopt current cultural trends.
- \_\_\_ 15. Some form of church membership was the norm in the New Testament.
- \_\_\_ 16. A person can be committed to a local church without becoming a member.
- \_\_\_ 17. Church discipline can only be enacted on a church member.
- \_\_\_ 18. I would leave a church that required church membership in order to serve in a ministry position.

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<sup>1</sup>Felt needs are those things individuals say they want or the problems they think need addressing.

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

- \_\_\_ 19. I would not seek membership in a local church requiring a membership class.
- \_\_\_ 20. Church membership is explicitly taught in the New Testament.
- \_\_\_ 21. God works primarily through a corporate community.
- \_\_\_ 22. God works primarily through an individual.
- \_\_\_ 23. I would attend a membership class if one were offered.
- \_\_\_ 24. The primary purpose of the church is to evangelize.
- \_\_\_ 25. Teaching the Scriptures is the most important element of a worship service.
- \_\_\_ 26. Music is the most important element of a worship service.
- \_\_\_ 27. The nation of Israel was not to “evangelize” other nations.
- \_\_\_ 28. The uniting of Jew and Gentile into one group is a mystery revealed in the New Testament.
- \_\_\_ 29. The main purpose of going to church is to help me become a better person.
- \_\_\_ 30. Most local churches are comprised of both believers and unbelievers.

## APPENDIX 2

### SERMON OUTLINES

#### Sermon 1

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES 4/22/12

“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

TODAY'S MESSAGE: “YOU SHALL BE HOLY” LEVITICUS 19:2

- I. Thesis
  - a. Guiding Scriptures.
    - i. John 13:35; 17:21.
  - b. Series Direction
    - i. Ten week series on God's covenant community.
    - ii. To demonstrate the importance of community in God's plan of redemption.
      - 1. Specifically the importance of the local church.
    - iii. The church is the means by which God is glorified in heaven and earth.
  - c. Undermining Issues
    - i. Consumerism: Value is derived by a things' usefulness to us.
    - ii. Individualism: The mindset that reduces Christianity to a personal, private faith.
  - d. Transition
    - i. 3 weeks considering God's community in the OT.
      - 1. 3 foci: Holiness, Worship, Mission.
- II. Be Holy For I Am Holy (Lev 19:2; 11:44-45).
  - a. Holy: what is it?
    - i. Separate, distinct, set apart.
      - 1. Moral purity is a reflection being distinct.
      - 2. Distinguishing the sacred from the common (profane).
        - a. These two spheres are not to co-mingle.
  - b. God is Holy (Gen 1:1-26)
    - i. A theological attack against popular culture and religion in Ancient Near East (ANE).
      - 1. Sun/moon vs. Greater/lesser lights
      - 2. Great sea creatures: Does not first subdue them.
      - 3. Separating upper and lower waters. No struggle or magic. It is done.

- ii. Summary: God is without peer or competitor; He has no rival, He is supreme, He is other, He is holy.
  - 1. He is not like the pagan gods, or the gods of the culture.
- c. God's people are to be holy
  - i. What does this mean?
    - 1. They are to bear His image.
      - a. As image bearers this community will reflect His nature.
      - b. The moral nature of God is to be exhibited in the daily life of the believer.
  - ii. What does this look like?
    - 1. A distinction between the sacred and the profane.
      - a. These two spheres are not merged.
    - 2. Leviticus 19:2
      - a. Moses addresses the entire assembly.
        - i. The call is less about moral perfection but the establishing of communion with God.
      - b. The call is to put aside all obstacles to that relationship.
        - i. Pagan cultural/religious practices are incompatible w/ the worship of Yahweh.
        - ii. Isolation and neglect of brethren incompatible.
    - 3. 2 areas of concern: Religious piety and responsibility to brothers/sisters.
      - a. We cannot divorce ethics and theology. We have a responsibility towards one another.
    - 4. Leviticus 11:44-45.
      - a. Note the reason for the call to holiness. To be your God. (cf. Ex 6:7; 20:2; Lev 22:33; 25:38 26:45).
      - b. Note the result. Be holy like me.
- d. Blessings of Holiness.
  - i. Presence.
    - 1. In holiness the community takes on the character of God and is united to Him and He with them. Result: His presence.
    - 2. Leviticus 26:11-13
      - a. I will make My dwelling with you. "I will pitch My tent among you."
        - i. John 1:14.
      - b. I will walk among you. Not confined to the tabernacle.
        - i. Continual fellowship.
      - c. I will be your God and you My people.
  - ii. Full adoption.
    - 1. Exodus 19:5-6.

- a. The whole earth is Mine.
  - i. However there are a separate people among all the peoples.
  - ii. His redemptive plan will begin to be worked out in them.
- b. Not a people unto themselves. Representatives, a kingdom of priests
  - i. They will stand between God and men to bring men to God.
  - ii. 1 Peter 2:9

### III. Conclusion

- a. God has called a community to bear His holy image on the earth, that His glory would cover the land as waters cover the sea.
- b. We are called to keep separate the profane from the holy. (Cultural norms vs. biblical patters).
  - i. Maintain a biblical worldview.
- c. What worldly values have crept into this community? To your life?

## Sermon 2

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES 4/29/12

“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

TODAY'S MESSAGE: “A WORSHIPING COMMUNITY” EXODUS 3:12

- I. Introduction
  - a. Direction/Purpose of this sermon series.
    - i. The place of the church in God's redemptive plans.
  - b. Review
    - i. God calls an assembly.
      - 1. This assembly is holy. A distinct influencer.
      - 2. The blessings of holiness are presence and communion.
  - c. Preview
    - i. The community of God is a worshiping community.
      - 1. Need
        - a. With a desire to reach the lost, the church has sacrificed worship with relevance.
- II. Called to Worship: Exodus 3:12
  - a. Context
    - i. The call of Moses to be Yahweh's agent in His redemption.
  - b. God is purposeful.
    - i. Why did God deliver this group of people?
      - 1. Exodus 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:7.
      - 2. Transfer of ownership.
        - a. Subjects of Egypt, now subjects of God
          - i. From bondage to freedom, Egypt to Sinai, idols to the Living True God.
    - ii. The redemption of Israel was that they may become worshipers of God.
      - 1. We are saved to worship.
    - iii. God would deliver His people and bring them to Mt. Sinai to worship.
  - c. Hearing God's Word
    - i. Deuteronomy 4:10.
      - 1. Yahweh calls His people out of Egypt, who would stand in His presence and hear His voice.
    - ii. Hearing the word of God is a key element for the gathered assembly.
      - 1. Joshua 8:34-35.
      - 2. Preaching is central to worship.
  - d. Summary
    - i. God has created a separate people who are delivered for the purpose of worship. This was not a time for to focus on entertainment or attracting pagan nations with attempts at relevance. It was a time of worship as Yahweh commanded, with a focus on hearing His word.

- III. Assembled for Worship
  - a. What does God desire we do when we worship?
    - i. Preliminary necessity.
      - 1. Right/Wrong. Abel, Aaron's sons, Isaiah 1, John 4.
        - a. "Entertainment Evangelism."
    - b. A True Vision of God (Isaiah 6)<sup>1</sup>
      - i. The Lord sitting on His throne. Power, authority, majesty.
        - 1. We have shifted our focus to the audience.
          - a. Tozer quote
        - 2. Holy, Holy, Holy
          - a. No superlatives in Hebrew
            - i. "Pit, pit" (Gen 14:10); Gold, gold (2 Kings 25:15)
        - 3. The Whole earth is full of His glory.
        - 4. Roger Scranton: "God is defined in the act of worship far more precisely than he is defined by any theology."
          - a. Watch what they sing, listen to their prayers, and then you will know what they believe.
      - ii. Call to Worship
        - 1. He is not the guest. He calls us to come into His presence.
          - a. Entering into His presence bears the fruit of broken hearts filled with exuberant joy.
    - c. Worship Leads to Confession
      - i. I am a man of unclean lips. I am undone.
        - 1. Have we removed the uncomfortable elements of our faith to make it more palatable to those we invite?
          - a. Seeing the lost converted is a great desire.
            - i. Is it a disservice to them to make them comfortable and feeling OK about themselves?
            - ii. God becomes secondary, when worship is an outreach enterprise. He is not center.
    - d. Worship Reveals Redemption
      - i. Purified.
        - 1. Seeing ourselves as we truly are and throwing ourselves on the mercy of the court through confession which leads to redemption.
      - ii. No altars
        - 1. The OT assembly gathered around the altar of God.
          - a. Now we gather around the cross of the crucified, risen and ascended Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from R. Albert Mohler, "The Whole Earth is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (Winter 1998): 4-15.

- e. Worship Demands a Response
  - i. Go and tell of the great things God has done.

IV. Conclusion

- a. God redeems us to worship Him.
- b. We are called as a gathered people at a time and place to commune with Him. It is a gathering that is distinguished from all other gatherings.
- c. Our worship reveals our theology.
- d. Worship is contagious. Go and tell someone the great things God has done.

### Sermon 3

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES: 5/6/12

“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

“A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY” DEUTERONOMY 4:5-8

- I. Introduction
  - a. “Missions exist because worship doesn't” (John Piper).
  - b. Why missions?
    - i. A call to holiness and worship are not a call to isolationism.
      - 1. Called out to go in.
    - ii. Cannot be divorced from holiness.
      - 1. We are image bearers.
        - a. God is the Great Missionary.
          - i. Genesis 3; 12; OT confessions (Deut 6:20-24; 26:5-9; Josh 24:2-15)
    - iii. Cannot be divorced from worship
      - 1. Right worship would reveal God's glorious nature.
  - c. Preview
    - i. Consider Israel's role as missionaries.
    - ii. Need
      - 1. There is something more fundamental than writing checks, crossing cultural boundaries, etc.
- II. For What Great Nation (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)
  - a. “See I have taught you.”
    - i. Israel's context is about to change, but God's word does not.
      - 1. In this new setting God's ways remain sufficient.
    - ii. Application
      - 1. In an ever changing culture God's Word is sufficient. We do not alter it to be more palatable.
  - b. “Keep them and do them.”
    - i. For that is your wisdom and understanding
      - 1. What is “that?”
        - a. Not merely the possession of God's truths-but the doing of them.
      - 2. Sending missionaries is imperative.
        - a. More fundamental to influencing our neighbors is keeping Gods' laws.
          - i. Link between wisdom and obedience.
            - 1. Proverbs 11:30; Psalms 19:8; 119:98, 99.
            - 2. Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1) having sought truth among the heathen was drawn to Israel, seeing the true knowledge of God among them.

- 3. Application
    - a. Some will consider a biblical worldview as antiquated, superstitious, and even dangerous.
      - i. Naturalism leads to nihilism, religion leads to frustration.
        - 1. The grace of God will stand out in such darkness.
    - c. “What Great Nation”
      - i. God is near.
        - 1. The divine response to obedience is presence.
          - a. Nearness in this context speaks of readiness, availability to help.
        - 2. The attractive force of the wisdom of God's people was that Yahweh was at hand when they called upon Him.
          - a. Unlike the pagan gods.
      - ii. A foreign passage?
        - 1. Do we see Gods' laws as cumbersome?
          - a. Sumerian prayer provides context.
      - iii. Application
        - 1. God has revealed Himself. We can know Him and His ways. We do not need to guess about salvation, eternity etc.
- III. A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:6)
  - a. Israel's mission involved intermediation. They were not to be isolated unconcerned about other nations. They were to represent Him to the rest of the world, to present Him as glorious.
  - b. Priests
    - i. The “go-betweens”
    - ii. Intercessors.
    - iii. We are still a royal priesthood.
- IV. Conclusion
  - a. When God calls a people into existence, He gives them a mission. Call presupposes mission.
    - i. You are called, you are on mission.
  - b. Mission is demonstrated by going, baptizing, and teaching.
    - i. This is founded upon a possession and adherence to God's word.
    - ii. His word does not change with the culture.

## Sermon 4

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES: 5/13/12  
“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”  
“THE CHURCH” EPHESIANS 3:1-13

- I. Introduction
  - a. “The gates of death.”
    - i. What is it about the church that would be a threat to the powers of hell?
  - b. Purpose of this series
    - i. The importance of the church in God's plan of redemption.
      - 1. The means by which God displays His glory across the Universe.
        - a. 2 undermining issues.
          - i. Consumerism: Value is derived by a things' usefulness to us.
          - ii. Individualism: The mindset that reduces Christianity to a personal, private faith.
        - 2. God works through a community.
      - ii. Preview: Today we will explore the nature of that community.
    - ii. Preview: Today we will explore the nature of that community.
  - c. Review
    - i. Examined the O.T. community.
      - 1. Holy, Worship, Missional.
- II. The Church
  - a. 2 overarching truths
    - i. John 13:35
      - 1. Love among believers is the evidence that we are disciples of Christ.
        - a. Seeking the best of others.
      - 2. As He loved us.
    - ii. John 17:21
      - 1. Unity of disciples is the evidence that the Father has sent the Son.
  - b. Rivals Reconciled (Ephesians 2:11-22)
    - i. A segregated society.
      - 1. Not unlike the 1st century
        - a. Strong racial division.
          - i. Jew/Gentile, Male/Female etc
          - ii. (Gentiles were able to come under the blessings of Yahweh. But not as “co-equals.” Consider the temple).
        - 2. And then we have the church.
      - ii. Ephesians 2:11-22
        - 1. Into this racial, social, gender, cultural society God creates a radical new community.
          - a. A community bound together by the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ.

2. He did not bring harmony by removing differences but by destroying barriers.
  - iii. Application
    1. CORP cannot become a HUP church (Homogenous Unity Principle).
    2. We are a group with diverse backgrounds, who are called to be a light in this community. This must begin with love and unity.
      - a. There are some who will “get on your nerves.”
  - c. To the Ends of the Earth and Beyond (Ephesians 3:1-13)
    - i. Paul the prisoner
      1. Why is Paul in prison?
    - ii. A mystery revealed.
      1. What is a mystery in the Bible?
      2. A new spiritual entity called the church. This was unheard of.
        - a. Fellow heirs, Fellow members, Fellow partakers,
    - iii. The mystery's purpose
      1. Paul has been made a minister of this mystery.
      2. So that...
        - a. Manifold = many, varied. An intricate tapestry (beauty, variety).
      3. Who are the rulers and authorities?
        - a. The whole host of heavenly beings.
          - i. The church is the expression of God's wisdom.
            1. Unsaved men look at God's plan of salvation and consider it foolish (1 Cor 1:18-31). Angels see God's salvation and praise.
            2. Wicked angels see God's wisdom and the far reaching effects of the cross.
    - iv. Summary
      1. The glory of God is displayed on the earth through an entity where barriers are destroyed and love and unity impact an increasingly divisive world.
      2. The glory of God is displayed in the heavenlies as the church is the expression of God's wisdom.
      3. Heaven and earth are filled with the glory of God.
- ### III. Conclusion
- a. Consumerism and Individualism have self at the center.
    - i. The church (universal and local) have Christ and others at the center.
  - b. Why do the powers of death fight so relentlessly against the church? It is the means by which God is seen as beautiful, glorious, and powerful. It is to provide an accurate picture of the nature of God throughout the universe.

## Sermon 5

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES- 5/20/12

“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”

TODAY'S MESSAGE: “THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH” ACTS 2:42

- I. Introduction
  - a. The importance of God's community.
    - i. The church is the means by which God is glorified throughout His creation.
    - ii. Barriers that segregate are destroyed.
      - 1. Jesus reconciles rivals through the cross.
      - 2. Despite our differences we are members of the same family.
  - b. Preview
    - i. What are the marks of the church? What makes a church a church?
      - 1. Traditional answer
        - a. 4 marks (Nicene Creed)
      - 2. John Calvin.
      - 3. Belgic confession.
- II. The Infant Church
  - a. Complexity Increases with age and size.
    - i. Not worldly or evil, it is necessary.
      - 1. Even the early church became more organized and structured.
    - ii. In growth we cannot abandon our core principles.
    - iii. Does the NT inform of the core principles the church considered essential?
  - b. Acts 2:42
    - i. Context.
    - ii. Devoted themselves to 4 practices.
      - 1. These 4 elements were considered essential.
      - 2. Note the word “continually.”
- III. Marks of the Infant Church
  - a. The apostle's teaching.
    - i. Early believers were faced with the question; “What do we believe?”
      - 1. They became dependent upon the apostle's teaching.
    - ii. What was the apostle's teaching?
      - 1. Things concerning the kingdom (Acts 1:3)
        - a. The kingdom of God. God's divine rule in the person of Jesus Christ.
          - i. Revealed in the parables
            - 1. How the kingdom grows, who responds, its value, nature (wheat/tares).

2. O.T. fulfillment
    - a. How the Hebrew Scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 24:26-27; John 5:39).
    3. How to live as a follower of Jesus.
    4. Compiled into the NT.
  - iii. The church is marked by teaching (doctrine).
    1. Like the OT community who gathered to hear the voice of God.
    2. Necessity due to the real threat of false teaching, savage wolves (Acts 20:29; Jude 3, 4).
  - b. Fellowship
    - i. Misunderstood today.
    - ii. Sharing in common, communal spirit, common life
      1. Defined in verses 44-45
        - a. Sharing in common
          - i. No right to live in God's blessings while another is in need (1 John 3:17).
        - b. Warning: Not a system of government.
          - i. Many retained property (Acts 5:10).
        - c. Warning: Does not justify laziness
      2. Holding all we have with an open hand so that those who have much will be a benefit to those who have little.
    - iii. Summary: Fellowship is more than a pot-luck or conversation.
  - c. The Breaking of Bread
    - i. Q: Communal meal or Lord's Supper?
      1. Acts 20:7, 13 hints at communal meal.
      2. 1 Cor 11:18-26, both.
    - ii. Summary
      1. Most likely the Lord's Supper was observed as part of the communal meal.
      2. Continually devoted to this.
  - d. The Prayers
    - i. Note the definite article and plural noun
      1. Indicates a time of formal prayer.
        - a. Common among the Hebrews (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10; Acts 3:1; 10:3ff).
        - b. Kept formal times of prayer but filled them with new content.
      2. After exclusion from the temple new opportunities for prayer arose.
    - ii. This is speaking of corporate prayer.
  - e. What were the marks that identified the early church?
- IV. Conclusion
- a. As a structure grows so does its need for organization. Organization and programs cannot supplant the core principles (they should enhance).
  - b. Doctrine, Fellowship, Sacraments and Prayer are what separates the church from other assemblies.

## Sermon 6

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES 5/27/12  
“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”  
“THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH” MATTHEW 28:16-20

- I. Introduction
  - a. Review
    - i. O.T. assembly: Holy, Worshipping, and Missional.
    - ii. When the church gathers for worship certain elements distinguish it.
  - b. Preview
    - i. Like the O.T. assembly the church is to influence culture.
- II. The Imperative
  - a. What is the command?
    - i. Not “go.”
    - ii. Make disciples.
      - 1. Not to increase our church roll, get people to sign a card, or say a prayer.
  - b. What is a disciple?
    - i. Technically it is a pupil of a teacher, a learner or an adherent of a particular outlook or philosophy
      - 1. Jews considered themselves disciples of Moses (John 9:28).
      - 2. Disciples of John (Matt 2:18; John 1:35).
    - ii. Broadly. All who respond to the message of Jesus (Matt 5:1; Luke 6:17).
    - iii. Narrowly. Those who accompany Jesus in His travels (Mark 6:45; Luke 10:1).
    - iv. Practically. A disciple was one who responded to the invitation of Jesus, involving personal allegiance to following Him. Exclusive loyalty (Mark 8:34-38).
      - 1. It meant putting the claims of Jesus first, whatever the cost. Faith in Jesus and allegiance to Him. Followers.
  - c. Who can be a disciple?
    - i. Of all nations.
- III. How Is a Disciple Made?
  - a. Disciple making is purposeful.
    - i. Go.
      - 1. Two mistakes.
        - a. Over realized: Treat as an imperative.
        - b. Under realized: Sit and wait.
      - 2. Our “going” has purpose.
  - b. A Disciple is Converted
    - i. Baptism was/is the outward expression of being born again (regeneration).

1. In Acts people who were converted were baptized.
    - a. Baptism and conversion were inseparable. There were no unbaptized believers.
    - b. Baptism symbolizes union with Christ (Rom 6:3-7).
  2. Summary. Equating baptism and conversion.
  - ii. Modern method
    1. Sinner's prayer.
  - iii. Superiority of baptism
  - iv. Summary
    1. A disciple is a convert. The gospel must be presented. A disciple is born again, regenerated, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
    2. A disciple is a new creation. She must first be born.
  - c. A Disciple Matures
    - i. Teaching them all that I have commanded.
      1. Newborns need to grow.
        - a. It is abuse to abandon a child.
      2. We have the responsibility to teach the teachings of Jesus.
        - a. These include not only the words in red, but the apostle's teaching and the O.T.
    - ii. Maturity is a process and takes effort.
      1. Unlike regeneration, maturity is a cooperative effort.
        - a. Includes the work of the Spirit.
        - b. Includes personal effort.
          - i. Hebrews 5:14; 6:1; Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 9:24.
- IV. Final Observation
- a. The mission of the church begins and ends with Jesus.
    - i. It begins with recognition of His authority.
      1. Daniel 9:13ff; Matthew 11:27; Romans 14:9; Ephesians 1:20-22.
    - ii. It rests in the assurance of the presence of Jesus.
      1. Even to the end of the age.
        - a. Have you read about the end of the age? Even then Jesus walks with us.
  - b. We do not operate in our own authority. We are ambassadors of the One who has all authority. We never operate alone.
- V. Conclusion
- a. The church is the Body of Christ. Jesus is the head.
    - i. Our task is clear and uncomplicated.
    - ii. Make disciples!

## Sermon 7

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES: 6/3/12  
“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”  
“THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH”

- I. Introduction
  - a. How does Christ direct and govern His church?
  - b. Need
    - i. Important to the early church.
      - 1. Acts, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 2 John, Revelation.
    - ii. Important to modern church.
      - 1. Most who leave a church do so because of a leadership issue.
    - iii. Jesus has provided a model of governance.
  - c. Preview
    - i. Focus upon 3 groups designated to shape the local church
  - d. Preliminary Issues
    - i. Christ is Head of the Church!
    - ii. Equality in essence, distinction in function.
- II. Pastors, Elders and Bishops.
  - a. Who's in charge?
    - i. Overseers have oversight. Overseers have multiple names.
      - 1. Acts 20:17-38
        - a. Elders, overseers (bishops) and pastor are used interchangeably.
    - ii. Even very young churches had elders (see Acts 14:23; compare Titus 1:5-9 w/ 1 Timothy 3:1-7)
  - b. One or many?
    - i. Acts 20:17. Elders (pl), church (sing).
      - 1. Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1.
    - ii. The pastor/teacher is an elder (overseer, bishop etc).
    - iii. Benefits of plurality
      - 1. Adds wisdom (Proverbs 11:14).
      - 2. Balances weaknesses.
      - 3. Diffuses criticism.
  - c. Elders have oversight of the church
    - i. Tasked with...
      - 1. Teaching (1 Tim 5:17) included is the idea of holding to correct doctrine (Titus 1:9).
      - 2. Judging (Acts 15:2, 6, 22-29; 16:4).
      - 3. General oversight (1 Pet 5:1-4).
    - ii. Summary: The elders primarily have the task of teaching and discerning questions of right and wrong and pastoral oversight.
  - d. Qualities
    - i. 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

- e. Relationship to the congregation
  - i. Congregation should recognize elders as a gift of God for the good of His church. Elders must recognize the God given authority of the congregation (Matt 18; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 6).
  - ii. Trust, protect and honor the elders (1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17)
- III. Deacons
  - a. The second Biblically identified group
  - b. Prototype (Acts 6: 1-6)
    - i. Support the leadership of the elders.
    - ii. Serve in ways that heal divisions.
    - iii. Serve to uphold the physical and financial needs of the church.
  - c. Differences between elders
    - i. Teaching is not a requirement.
    - ii. Women permitted?
      - 1. Phoebe, 1 Tim 3:11; early church (111 A.D.).
- IV. The Congregation
  - a. What it is not.
    - i. Separatism or a simple democracy.
  - b. What it means
    - i. There is no body from outside who can mandate something for a particular congregation. Polity, discipline or doctrine.
    - ii. The last and final court of appeal in the life of the local church is the congregation.
  - c. Biblical examples
    - i. Matters of dispute between Christians (Matt 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-5).
    - ii. Matters of doctrine.
      - 1. NT letters written to churches.
      - 2. Gal 1:8. The congregation discerned the true gospel from false.
      - 3. 2 Tim 4:3. The church is guilty for the allowing of false teachers.
    - iii. Matters of discipline (1 Cor 5) The congregation was implicated in his sin and the congregation must be the remedy
    - iv. Matters of membership (2 Cor 2:6-8). By the majority.
    - v. CORP. These matters including selection of staff, property, affiliation etc.
  - d. Relationship to elders
    - i. Hebrews 13:17.
- V. Conclusion
  - a. Very brief. Did not consider Eph 4:11-13.
  - b. Jesus is the Head of His church.
    - i. Jesus uses human means for the health and blessings of His church.
  - c. 3 groups are given by Jesus to function together for the health of His body
    - i. Elders, Deacons and the congregation.

## Sermon 8

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES-6/10/12  
“I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”  
“THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH”

- I. Introduction
  - a. Review
    - i. The community established by God to bring about His redemptive plan.
  - b. Preview
    - i. Two topics that have been mentioned and deserve further exploration.
      - 1. Baptism.
      - 2. Lord's Super.
    - ii. Two rites Jesus commanded His followers to observe.
      - 1. They are pictures of the gospel. The gospel visible.
- II. Baptism
  - a. What does it signify?
    - i. Closely related to forgiveness of sin and reception of the Holy Spirit.
      - 1. Acts 2:38; 8:16f; 19:17-19 (Mark 1:4 John's baptism).
    - ii. Baptism points to something beyond the act.
  - b. Union with Christ.
    - i. Galatians 3:27
      - 1. Baptized into Christ, incorporated into Jesus.
        - a. A change of state has occurred, signaled by baptism.
      - 2. Clothed yourselves with Christ.
        - a. Taken upon yourself the qualities of Christ, determined to be just like Jesus.
    - ii. Romans 6:1-11
      - 1. Pictures the gospel.
        - a. We join Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.
      - 2. United by faith as we enter into His death and resurrection.
    - iii. Summary
      - 1. Baptism is a sign of faith. That Christ is the very element of our salvation (1 John 5:11-12). Joining w/ Christ we die to our old manner of living and walk in the ways of Jesus.
      - 2. 1 Peter 3:18-22
        - a. The waters of God's wrath were approaching.
          - i. God saved everyone who by faith entered into His means of salvation.
        - b. All who by faith enter into Christ will pass through the waters of God's wrath and be saved.

3. Baptism is a way of saying with your whole body, “I trust you to take me into Christ like Noah was taken into the ark, and to make Jesus the substitute for my sins and bring me through these waters of death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus my Lord.” (John Piper).
  - a. You cannot save yourself.
4. It is an act of public faith. It is not a private matter, it is a public expression.

### III. The Lord's Supper

- a. Has its origin in the Passover (Death of the lamb to rescue from death/judgment).
  - i. The Lord's Supper came during the Passover celebration.
- b. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
  - i. During the Passover meal Jesus retells the story.
    1. No longer related to a hasty departure from Egypt but about My death which will inaugurate a New Covenant.
      - a. To partake of this meal is to participate in the New Covenant.
  - ii. This is an event that occurred when the church gathered (17-18,20,33-34)
    1. The problem-divisions among you. You come together for the worse.
      - a. Chapters 1-4.
        - i. When you come together some are acting like Christians and some are not.
          1. Therefore what you are doing is not really the Lord's Supper.
    2. Verse 21. Some have higher social standing and indulge. There is an “in” crowd and an “out” crowd.
      - a. If that's the way you want to do it, stay home. Resign your membership and do your own thing but don't despise the church of God by your selfishness.
  - iii. My Body given for you.
    1. Contrasts the selfishness of the Corinthians.
      - a. Proper relationship both for discipleship and evangelism.
        - i. Demonstrates how we treat each other.
  - iv. The Cup
    1. No longer associated with the exodus but with Jesus.
  - v. Unworthy manner
    1. Doing what Paul described in vs. 21 as well as the various sins Paul has addressed in the letter.
      - a. Sexual immorality, idolatry, factions etc.
      - b. This profanes the sacrifice of Jesus. So examine yourself.



## Sermon 9

### THE CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES- 6/17/12 “I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.” “THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH”

- I. Introduction
  - a. “Thou shall not judge.” The greatest commandment?
  - b. Preview
    - i. A tough subject generally viewed negatively, unloving and judgmental.
- II. Purpose
  - a. Love for a brother or sister who has fallen (1 Cor 5:5; Gal 6:1).
  - b. Protect the church
    - i. Against false teachers/teaching.
    - ii. Sin is rarely an individual matter; it affects the whole community (2 Cor 2:5).
    - iii. Maintain unity (Rom 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11).
  - c. Marks off the church from the culture.
    - i. Holy as her Lord is holy (1 Pet 2:9-10; 11-12).
    - ii. Maintain a proper witness to the world.
  - d. To deter others (1 Tim 5:20).
- III. Types of Discipline
  - a. Formative.
  - b. Corrective.
    - i. By God (Heb 12:4-11).
    - ii. By the church.
      - 1. Paul was outraged that an incestuous relationship was approved. The church was to take action (1 Cor 5).
- IV. Attitude/Motive
  - a. Galatians 6:1.
  - b. Restoration not condemnation.
    - i. A humble approach is best.
- V. The Process
  - a. Matthew 18:15-20.
    - i. Notice how each step becomes more public.
    - ii. Tell it to the church.
      - 1. Now the congregation bears the responsibility and must render judgment based upon God's word and facts of the case.
    - iii. Separation
      - 1. The unrepentant person is not considered a brother or sister in the Lord.
  - b. Binding and loosing
    - i. Directed to the church.
      - 1. Has to do with forbidding and permitting.

- 2. Common among the Rabbis. Referred to the power to judge matters on the basis of God's Word.
        - a. To bind would mean to condemn the life and morals. The person will be condemned unless repentance occurs.
        - b. To loose is to liberate or declare free.
      - 3. A fearful responsibility.
    - c. Assurance
      - i. The Lord empowers what He commands.
        - 1. Jesus is with us in such difficult matters.
- VI. Actions Requiring Discipline
  - a. Unrepentant moral evil (1 Cor 5).
    - i. Sin is to be taken seriously.
    - ii. Sin affects the whole congregation (like leaven).
    - iii. Delivered over to Satan (see also 1 Tim 1:20).
      - 1. Cut off from the spiritual blessings and benefits of the church and relationship with God.
        - a. The church is a haven of protection from the full force of Satan's fury.
      - 2. This may mean the destruction of their flesh (illness, death, etc.).
  - b. False teaching
    - i. Galatians 5:10- Paul addressing the Judaizers.
    - ii. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Titus 1:13-14; 2 John 9-11.
  - c. Disturbing the unity of the church
    - i. Unity is one of the most visible distinctive and a means by which the world will know the Father sent the Son (John 17:23).
    - ii. Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11.
  - d. The unruly
    - i. Those who are undisciplined, insubordinate, go their own way, gossip, (perhaps one who will not work).
    - ii. 1 Thessalonians 5:14.
    - iii. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11.
      - 1. These did not work and meddled in the affairs of others (busybodies).
- VII. Debatable Matters
  - a. Romans 14:1ff.
    - i. Has the idea of holding person in contempt for his opinions. The issue here is not one of sin.
    - ii. Some people are in various states of growth. God is working in them.
- VIII. Conclusion
  - a. The goal is to restore the person.
    - i. God is passionate about restoring fallen saints.
  - b. As a church we are to maintain right doctrine and order.
    - i. "It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it." (John Leadley Dagg)

## Sermon 10

CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE SERMON NOTES: 6/24/12

“I WILL BE THERE GOD AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”

“THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH”

- I. Introduction
  - a. Church membership
    - i. “Membership” carries some heavy baggage.
    - ii. Spectrum of views.
      1. Man-made for the purpose of control at worst, pragmatism at best.
      2. A sign of spiritual maturity, even of salvation.
  - b. Preview- 3 Questions
    - i. Is it biblical?
    - ii. Didn't I become a member of the church when I was saved?
    - iii. What church should I join?
- II. Is Church Membership Biblical?
  - a. There is no explicit reference to church membership.
    - i. Unstated but assumed.
  - b. 2 church functions that require some form of membership.
    - i. Leadership of the church.
      1. Jesus established His church. He authorized leaders to lead
        - a. He is the great Shepherd (John 10:11) and has authorized “under shepherds” to lead His flocks.
        - b. Church leadership is local.
          - i. Responsibility to a specific group of people.
        - c. 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7.
      2. Two Questions
        - a. Which leaders should a believer submit to?
          - i. Are believers to obey any elder? From any church?
        - b. As a pastor, who am I accountable for?
          - i. Will I give account for all believers in Rim Country (what they teach in small groups, financial, missions programs etc)?
      3. Conclusion: Apart from the concept of local church covenant where professing believers place themselves under the authority of elders in a local church these passages are unworkable.
    - ii. Church Discipline
      1. This is a function of the local church.
        - a. Matthew 18 “Tell it to the church.”
          - i. A local assembly. A defined group, a recognized whole.

- ii. Presupposes the church knows who is part of the church and who isn't.
    - b. 1 Corinthians 5:11-13
      - i. To judge those who are inside, not outside.
      - ii. Only makes sense if there was some way a person identified w/ the church.
    - c. 2 Corinthians 2:6
      - i. The punishment was by a majority. You cannot have a majority w/o a definite set of people.
  - 2. Conclusion: How can you kick someone out who was never in?
  - c. Summary: Church government and church discipline demonstrate that the church is not merely a loose aggregation of individuals.
- III. Didn't I become a member of the church when I was saved?
  - a. The Nature of the Church.
    - i. Ecclesia: An assembly united by a common salvation in Jesus Christ by the preaching of the gospel, brought together into the Body of Christ.
      - 1. At least 3 biblical expressions (we will focus on two).
  - b. "I am a member of the Universal (Invisible) church and not the Local (Visible) church.
    - i. In the NT participation in a local assembly is assumed.
    - ii. Paul uses the image "Body of Christ" to speak of the Universal church (Ephesians & Colossians).
    - iii. Paul uses this same image to speak of being joined to a local assembly in 1 Corinthians.
      - 1. The local assembly is a body and you are individually a member of it. You may be a foot, or an eye or hand. We are all mutually dependent and called to dedicate our talents to the body.
    - iv. Romans 12:4-5: Presupposes a commitment of believers in a local area to one another.
  - c. When regenerated, a person is joined to the universal Body of Christ. They are then joined to a local assembly. Committed to a people who hear the word, observe the ordinances and to the "one another" passages in the Bible.
- IV. What church should I join?
  - a. Questions to ask.
    - i. The Bible is the best determiner.
      - 1. Does the church challenge my worldliness? Does it call me to accountability for sinful actions? Does it teach sound doctrine (even scary doctrines like hell), does it honor God in worship.
      - 2. Too many are looking for entertainment, fun, allowance to remain in rebellion to Christ, feel good messages.

- b. A word about membership at CORP?
  - i. We require 3 things
    - 1. The person is a believer, the person is baptized, and the person attends a “membership” class.
  - ii. Why a membership class?
    - 1. It is important for the sake of unity that we are all on the same page regarding what we teach, how we are structured, our associations, and our vision/purpose/goals.

V. Conclusion

- a. Church membership is assumed and is biblical.
- b. Local church membership is the norm in Scripture.
- c. A good church holds the Bible as its sufficient guide loves you enough to accept you where you are, loves you enough to make certain you don't stay there

APPENDIX 3  
CHURCH COVENANT

Church On Randall Place Covenant

Having been brought by God's grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we now, depending upon the Holy Spirit, establish this covenant with one another.

We commit to love one another (1 John 4:7) by:

Building up one another (Ephesians 4:29)

Encouraging one another (Hebrew 3:13)

Serving one another (1 Peter 4:10)

Praying for one another (Ephesians 6:18)

Exhorting one another (Hebrews 10:24)

Rebuking and Correcting one another (II Timothy 4:2),

When necessary, disciplining one another (Matthew 18:15-17),

Bearing with one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2),

Forgiving one another (Colossians 3:13),

Doing nothing that would cause a brother to stumble (Romans 14:13)

Maintaining unity with one another (Ephesians 4:3)

Obedying God's word (John 14:23)

Submitting to our leaders (Hebrews 13:17)

Meeting together regularly to support and treasure the biblical preaching of the whole counsel of God, fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread (Hebrews 10:25, Acts 2:42).

We will contribute cheerfully and generously to the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the advancement of the gospel both to our neighbors and the nations. (Matt. 28:19; Luke 12:33; 2 Cor. 9:7)

We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

## APPENDIX 4

### ENTRY POINT CURRICULUM AND CLASS NOTES

#### ENTRY POINTS<sup>1</sup>

- I. Welcome
  - a. Introduction
  - b. What is the church? Why is there a church? When did the church begin?
- II. What is the Church?
  - a. Meaning of the word
    - i. Translation of the work *ἐκκλησία* (ekklesia) which means an “assembly.”
      1. Used to refer to an assembly of any kind, even those that were not specifically religious in nature (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).
        - a. Refers to those who are “called out.”
    - b. The word is used in several ways in the New Testament (NT) when referring to the gathering of believers in Christ
      - i. The whole body of the redeemed throughout history ((Eph 5:23, 25, 27, 29; Heb 12:23)
      - ii. The whole body of professing believers throughout the world ((1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Matt 16:18).
      - iii. Referring to a local assembly of believers gathered in one place or city (Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 1:2).
        1. This is the most common usage in the NT.
    - c. There is the Church (big C) and the church (little c).
      - i. At conversion you became part of the Church.
      - ii. Are unbelievers a part of the Church? Are unbeliever's part of the church?
    - d. The gospel
      - i. Creation, Sin, Judgment, Jesus, Life.
      - ii. Repent and believe.
      - iii. Our belief must extend from our head and into our hearts and place our trust completely in Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus means that we surrender to Him as Lord. To say that Jesus is Lord is to say He is the boss allowing Him access to every area of your life and

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<sup>1</sup>Underlined words correspond to blank spaces in the student guide.

saying “yes” to all that He calls you to do. To surrender to Jesus means we give Him control and allow Him to direct our ways. As you make the decision to allow Jesus to have control of your life the Bible says that we should make this decision public and follow Him in baptism and church membership.

- iv. If what you have been reading makes sense to you. Would you be willing to receive God’s gift of eternal life? Are you willing to place your faith in Jesus right now and turn from your sin?
- e. What are some biblical images for the church?
  - i. Body of Christ
  - ii. Family of God
  - iii. Fellowship of the faith
  - iv. The elect
- f. Summary
  - i. The church is a gathering of believers for the purpose of worship.
    - 1. John Calvin: Where the proper teaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments.
    - 2. The church is not any gathering of believers.

### III. The Church in the Big Story of the Bible

- a. God created the world as a place where He is known, served, respected and worshipped.
  - i. Humanity was placed in a garden (cosmic temple). Psalm 69.
    - 1. Man is called to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and have dominion.
    - 2. The goal is that the glory of God will cover the land as the waters cover the sea.
  - ii. Humanity sinned and was cast out of the land.
- b. Genesis 12:1-13
  - i. God continues His program that His glory will cover the land.
- c. Exodus
  - i. A new people of God.
    - 1. Enter land of promise (from the east) , meet the captain of the Lord’s host
      - a. Allusion to Genesis where angel is placed at east entrance.
      - b. Entering a new Eden. The nation is a new Adam.
        - i. Through them the nations will be blessed.
  - ii. Israel transgresses and is cast out of the land
    - 1. They will experience a new act of redemption (return)
      - a. Jer. 16: This new act of redemption will eclipse the first.
- d. How the NT interprets the story
  - i. Mark 1:1. “Gospel” is derived from Isaiah
  - ii. Mark 1:2: Make ready the way of the Lord
  - iii. Mark 2: Paralytic is healed. “That you may know...
    - 1. He is able to do what He says.
  - iv. Mark 3: Jesus names 12 disciples. Reconstitutes the 12 tribes w/ Himself as the focal point.

- v. Mark 6:30: Feeding 5,000. Like Israel was fed by God in the wilderness.
- vi. Mark 9 (transfiguration)
  - 1. Listen to Him (Deut 18, a prophet like Moses).
- vii. John 2: A new temple. 15:38 the Temple torn
  - 1. At exile the temple was destroyed
  - 2. At crucifixion the temple is destroyed, the curtain of the old way to God is torn, and Jesus is now the new way.
- viii. Ezekiel 38: A temple blueprint w/o walls or gates
  - 1. No need as the people live under the new David
  - 2. A new temple is created corresponding with Revelation where there is resurrection, life under the reign of David, a new Jerusalem and a new Eden.

#### IV. Does the Bible Call Me to Join a Church?

- a. 4 different people (from Membership Matters #3)
- b. Theology of the church (Ecclesiology)
  - i. Ephesians
    - 1. Chapter 1-2 addresses how we came to be Christians (grace)
    - 2. 2:11-22
      - a. Who has been brought together?
        - i. By what means? The blood of Christ
    - 3. 3:1-12
      - a. There is a mystery spoken of (3,4)
      - b. \*What is the mystery that Paul is speaking of (6)
      - c. For what purpose? (9-10)
  - ii. John 13:34-35
    - 1. 1 John 4:20
  - iii. John 17:21
  - iv. The church is a community of people who are different from one another but who share Christ in common and who live together in unity and love which gives praise to God
- c. Application
  - i. Love between believers is not optional, and the Church is messy.
    - 1. Attending a church w/o investing in messy, difficult, God-glorifying relationships w/ people you have nothing in common with but Christ fails to demonstrate the wisdom of God. The church is not isolation. The world understands that.
- d. Church Membership
  - i. It is countercultural. We have been indoctrinated into a consumeristic culture. Where we are consumers to be served
    - 1. In the church we are to be providers, engaged in the difficult job of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.
      - a. Some practical ways to be providers
        - i. Attend regularly and on time
        - ii. Pray through the church directory.
        - iii. Encourage others to do the same

ii. Biblical evidence

1. 1 Corinthians 5:11-13

a. Paul distinguishes between those inside and outside of the church.

i. What markers does Paul use to make this distinction? The church can only discipline those who have made some form of formal commitment to the church. Inside/outside shows a clear understanding of commitment.

2. 2 Corinthians 2:6

a. The punishment inflicted by the majority is sufficient for him. \*What majority is Paul speaking of? It must be a majority of a defined whole.

3. 1 Corinthians 12

a. Use of spiritual gifts

b. Vs. 12. There is a connection with others. We are part of a whole.

4. Summary:

a. Support commitment to a local church (we call it membership).

b. Church membership makes a clear distinction between those inside and outside

i. 2 Cor 6:14. Membership is available only to those who show evidence of repentance and faith.

iii. 5 Reasons to join a church

1. For non-Christian

a. 1 Corinthians 5

i. It helps us understand that we are really following the Lord, not just saying we are Christians.

b. WE demonstrate a countercultural visible representation of God's working in the world

2. For weaker Christians

a. Linking arms with weaker believers help them grow

b. God's plan is not all about you.

3. For stronger Christians

a. This is what love is, that Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

b. Joining together w/ others for the mission of the local assembly

4. For the leaders

a. We have never heard your testimony, possibly don't even know if you are a Christian

b. You are saying "I am going to settle in here and try to prosper here spiritually.

c. Discipline, congregationalism

5. For God
  - a. In Acts the Lord added to the church. Being a Christian meant being part of the church.
  - b. Christ identifies with His church (Saul on Damascus Road).
- e. Expectations of a member
  - i. To yourself
    1. Repent, believe and be baptized.
    2. Agree to be held accountable and hold accountable this body of believers
    3. Agree to our statement of faith.
  - ii. Towards others
    1. Work and pray for the unity of the Spirit and bond of peace
      - a. Act charitably, love one another. Guard reputations, care on how we speak
    2. Watch care over others.
      - a. Bear one another's burdens, challenge when we see others compromise
    3. Not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for one another
    4. Rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor to bear one another's pain and sorrow.
  - iii. To the whole body
    1. We will seek to live a godly life
    2. Support the ministry of the church. Contribute cheerfully to support the spread of the gospel
    3. When we move from this place we will seek as soon as possible to unite with some other church.
- V. The Church On Randall Place
  - a. Who we are
    - i. Purpose and vision
      1. Connect with Christ, Connect with others, Connect others to Christ.
    - ii. Strategy
      1. It is our desire that all we do would accomplish one of these three objectives
        - a. Our main worship service is the primary vehicle for connecting people with Christ
        - b. Disciples will grow and be strengthened as they integrate into small, focused groups that meet throughout the week where they connect with others.
          1. It is important that we make every effort to join together in a small group.
        - c. In these small groups, spiritual gifts will be recognized and developed so that disciples might go and serve others.

2. Evangelism and Mission
  - a. Elements of the gospel
    - i. God, sin, judgment, Jesus, repent.
  - b. Outreach to the community.
    - i. Payson Helping Payson
    - ii. Skate Park
    - iii. Block Party
  - c. Global missions
    - i. Missions to Kenya, Virgin Islands, Honduras.
- b. How we are structured
  - i. The Bible recognizes two offices in the church
    1. Elder (overseer [bishop], pastor)
    2. Qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1
  - ii. Elders
    1. Plurality
    2. Guide the church spiritually and in administration
    3. Men
  - iii. Deacons
    1. Responsibility of day to day issues
      - a. Acts
    2. Acts of service
    3. Male and Female
  - iv. Congregation
    1. It is the responsibility to have a voice in certain church matters
      - a. Yearly budget, purchase property, major capital improvements, new staff.
  - v. Our meetings
    1. 4 per year, meeting quarterly
      - a. November: accept budget
      - b. Feb, May, Aug.
- c. Our Affiliation
  - i. The Church On Randall Place is affiliated denominationally with the Southern Baptists Convention. That is expressed by our affiliation with three autonomous Baptist groups.
    1. The Valley Rim Association of Southern Baptists. This is a fellowship of approximately 50 churches located in the East Valley (Chandler, Apache Junction, Mesa, and Queen Creek) and the Central Rim country (Tonto Basin, Payson, Star Valley, Pine, Tonto Village). We cooperate together to reach these areas for Christ. We currently give 3% of our annual budget to support this ministry
    2. The Arizona Southern Baptist Convention (ASBC). Over 400 churches cooperate together in order to evangelize our state. We currently give 7% of our annual budget to the ASBC. They in turn send 20% of that to the Southern Baptist Convention

3. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This is an affiliation of over 42,000 churches with over 16 million members. It is the largest affiliation of churches in the USA. It is very diverse group of churches where over 80 languages are spoken and nearly every social and racial group is represented. SBC churches baptize over 1,200 new believers each day and start nearly 5 new churches each day
- d. Why are we not independent?
    - i. We are! Every SBC church is locally autonomous. We have no denominational hierarchy or control. Each church chooses:
      1. It's own pastor
      2. It's own building and property
      3. It determines its own programs and strategies.
  - e. Advantages of Affiliation
    - i. It allows us direct relationships with churches of like faith and practice who believe the Bible with which to participate and identify
    - ii. It allows us to participate in the largest mission endeavors in the world. Through cooperating together financially, "The Cooperative Program" supports over 10,000 missionaries in over 153 countries
  - f. Cooperative Program
  - g. What we believe
    - i. See Constitution
  - h. Ordinances
    - i. Baptism
      1. Immersion
      2. Believers
    - ii. Lord's Supper
      1. We remember the act of laying down His life for others.
      2. It challenges our self-sufficiency and "me-ism" that promotes self.
  - i. Spiritual Gifts
    - i. I Corinthians 12
      1. For the good of the body.
      2. God has gifted each to participate in His church.
- VI. Conclusion
- a. Questions
  - b. If there are those who seek membership please make contact. If you desire to move your membership from another church let me know.

## ENTRY POINTS CLASS NOTES

- I. Welcome
- II. What is the Church?
  - a. Meaning of the word
    - i. Used to refer to an \_\_\_\_\_ of any kind.
  - b. In the New Testament
    - i. The whole body of \_\_\_\_\_ throughout history (Eph 5:23, 25, 27, 29; Heb 12:23).
    - ii. The whole body of \_\_\_\_\_ believers throughout the world 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Matt 16:18).
    - iii. Referring to a local \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ gathered in one place or city (Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 1:2).
  - c. There is the Church and the church. At conversion you became part of the Church
  - d. The gospel
    - i. Creation, sin, judgment, Jesus, life.
    - ii. One must \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - e. What are some biblical images of the church?
    - i. \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ
    - ii. \_\_\_\_\_ of God
    - iii. \_\_\_\_\_ of the faith
  - f. Summary
- III. The Church in the Big Story of the Bible
  - a. God created the world as a place where He is \_\_\_\_\_, served, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. The story of rebellion, exodus and restoration.
  - c. How the NT interprets the story.
    - i. Mark
    - ii. John
- IV. Does the Bible Call Me to Join a Church?
  - a. 4 different people
  - b. Theology of the church (Ecclesiology)
    - i. Ephesians 1-3
    - ii. John 13:34-35
    - iii. John 17:21
    - iv. The church is a \_\_\_\_\_ of people who are \_\_\_\_\_ from one another but who share \_\_\_\_\_ in common and who live together in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ giving praise to God.
  - c. Application
  - d. Church Membership
    - i. It is \_\_\_\_\_
      1. In the church we are to be \_\_\_\_\_ not consumers

- a. How?
      - i. Attend regularly and on time.
      - ii. \_\_\_\_\_ through the directory.
      - iii. \_\_\_\_\_ others to do the same.
    - ii. Biblical evidence
      - 1. 1 Corinthians 5:11-13
        - a. Paul distinguishes between those \_\_\_\_\_ and those \_\_\_\_\_ the church.
      - 2. 2 Corinthians 2:6
        - a. What majority was Paul speaking of?
      - 3. 1 Corinthians 12
        - a. Use of spiritual gifts
      - 4. Summary
    - iii. 5 Reasons to join a church
      - 1. For \_\_\_\_\_ Christians
      - 2. For \_\_\_\_\_ Christians.
      - 3. For \_\_\_\_\_ Christians
      - 4. For the \_\_\_\_\_
      - 5. For God
  - e. Expectations of a member
    - i. To yourself
      - 1. \_\_\_\_\_ believe and be \_\_\_\_\_
      - 2. Agree to be held \_\_\_\_\_ and hold others \_\_\_\_\_ to this body of believers.
      - 3. Agree to our statement of faith.
    - ii. Towards others
      - 1. Work and pray for the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Spirit and the bond of \_\_\_\_\_.
      - 2. Watch care over others.
      - 3. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves
      - 4. \_\_\_\_\_ at others happiness and \_\_\_\_\_ to bear one another's pain and sorrow.
    - iii. Towards the whole body
      - 1. We will seek to live a Godly life.
      - 2. Support the ministry of the church, contributing cheerfully.
      - 3. When moving from this place seek as soon as possible another gospel believing church.

V. The Church On Randall Place

- a. Who we are
  - i. Purpose and vision
    - 1. Connect with \_\_\_\_\_
    - 2. Connect with \_\_\_\_\_
    - 3. Connect \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. Strategy
  - iii. Evangelism
    - 1. Elements of the gospel
      - a. God, sin, \_\_\_\_\_, Jesus, \_\_\_\_\_

- b. How we are structured
    - i. The Bible recognizes two offices in the church
    - ii. Elders
      - 1. Plurality
      - 2. Guide the church \_\_\_\_\_ and in \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. Deacons
      - 1. Responsible for day to day issues
    - iv. Congregation
    - v. Our meetings
      - 1. 4 per year.
  - c. Our Affiliation
    - i. We are affiliated denominationally with the Southern Baptist Convention. This is expressed by our affiliation with three \_\_\_\_\_ Baptist groups.
      - 1. Valley Rim Association
      - 2. Arizona Southern Baptist Convention
      - 3. The Southern Baptist Convention
  - d. Why are we not independent?
    - i. Every SBC church is \_\_\_\_\_
      - 1. We choose our own \_\_\_\_\_
      - 2. Building and property.
      - 3. Determine our own \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - e. Advantages of Affiliation
  - f. What we believe
    - i. See our Constitution and by-laws
  - g. Ordinances
    - i. Baptism by \_\_\_\_\_
      - 1. Only for believers.
    - ii. Lord's Supper
- VI. Conclusion
- a. Questions

APPENDIX 5

PRE-TEST/POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE:  
SECTIONS 1 AND 2

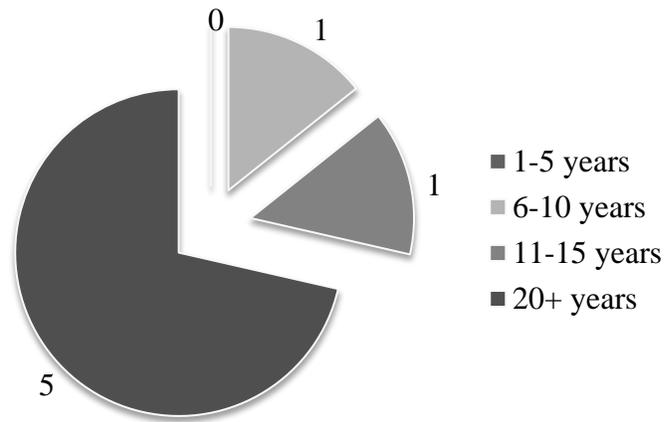


Figure A1. How long have you been a Christian?

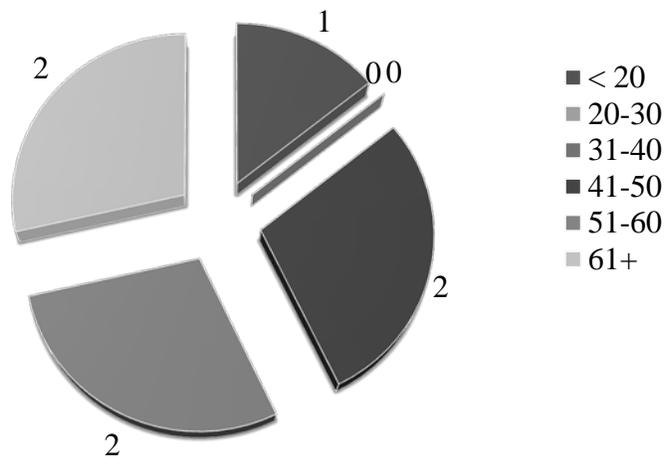


Figure A2. What is your age?

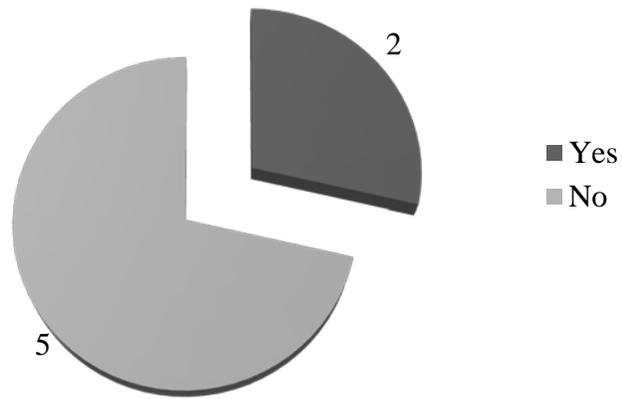


Figure A3. Have you ever heard a sermon on the importance of the local church?

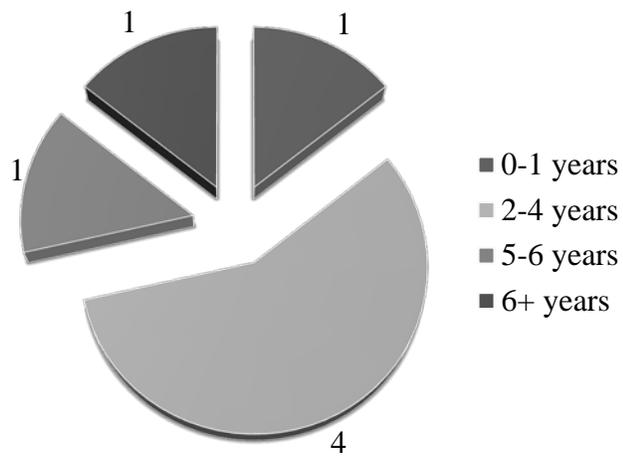


Figure A4. How long have you been attending the Church On Randall Place?

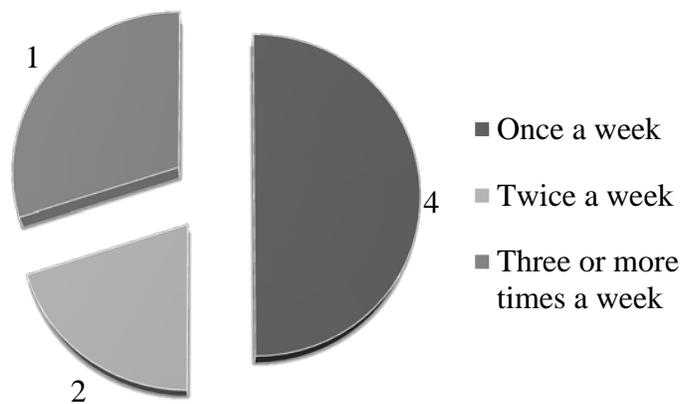


Figure A5. How often do you attend church or church functions?

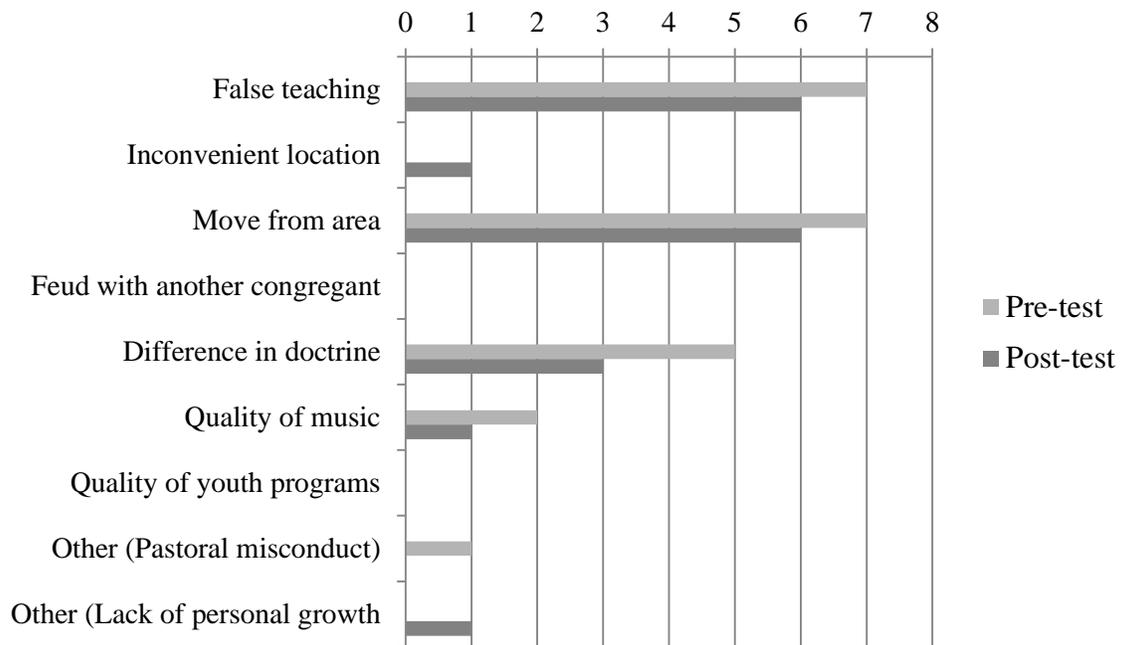


Figure A6. Reasons you believe are appropriate for seeking a new church.

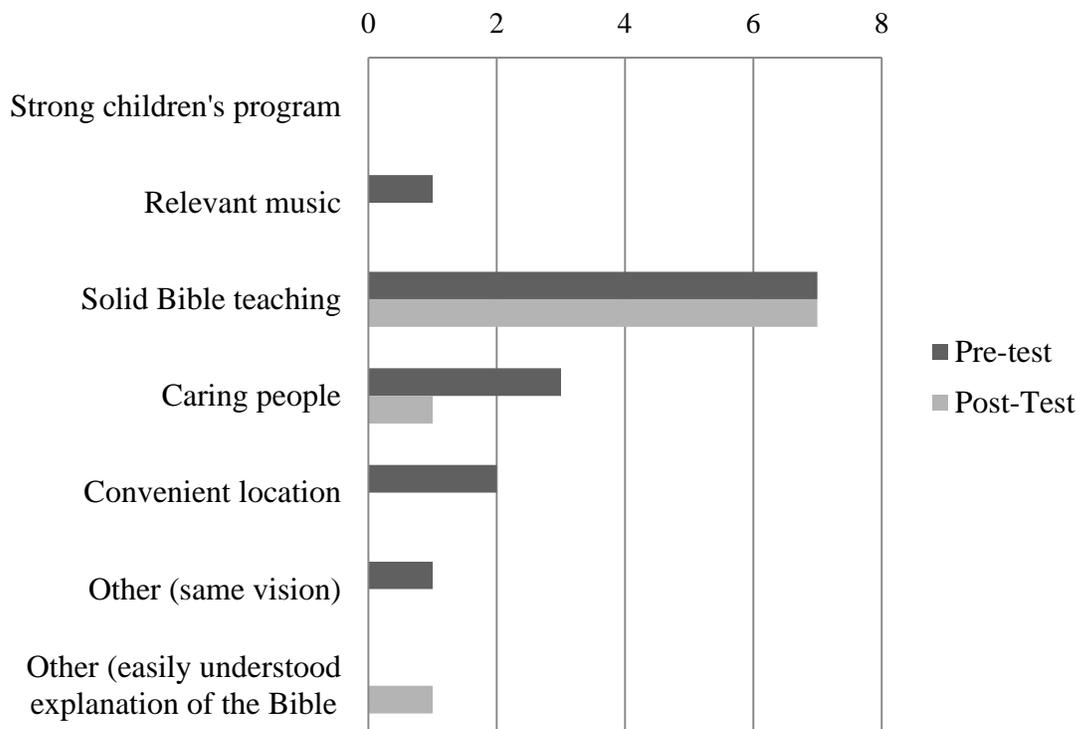


Figure A7. What is your primary reason for choosing a church?

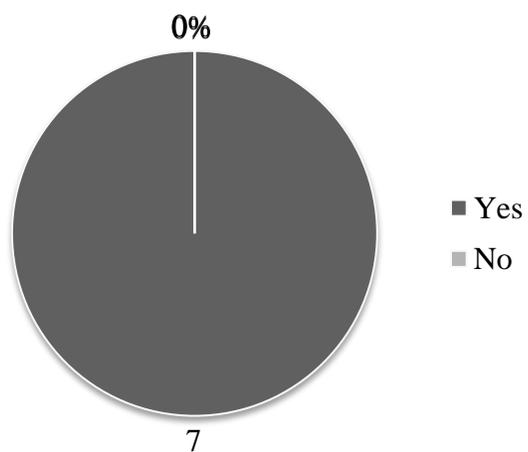


Figure A8. Have you ever left one church for another?

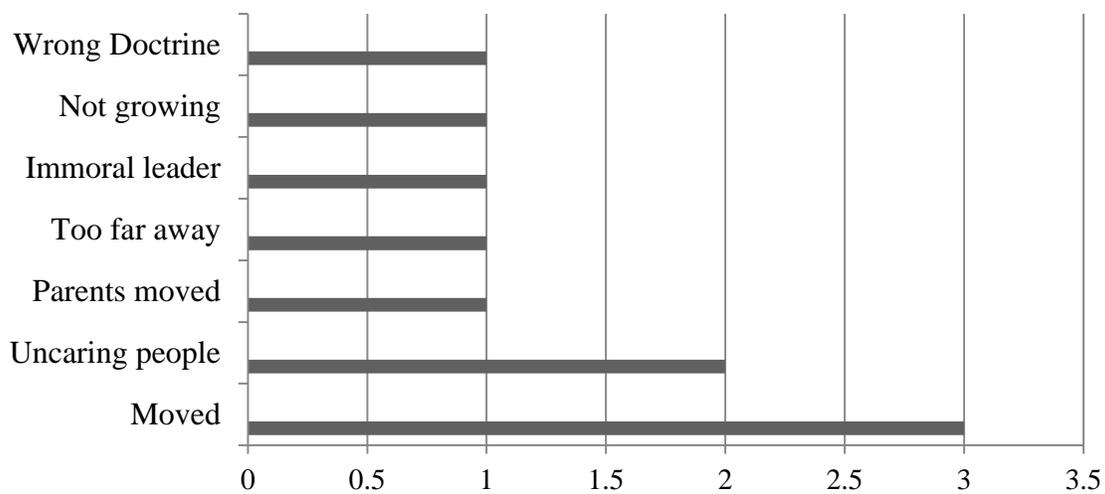


Figure A9. Reasons for leaving one church for another

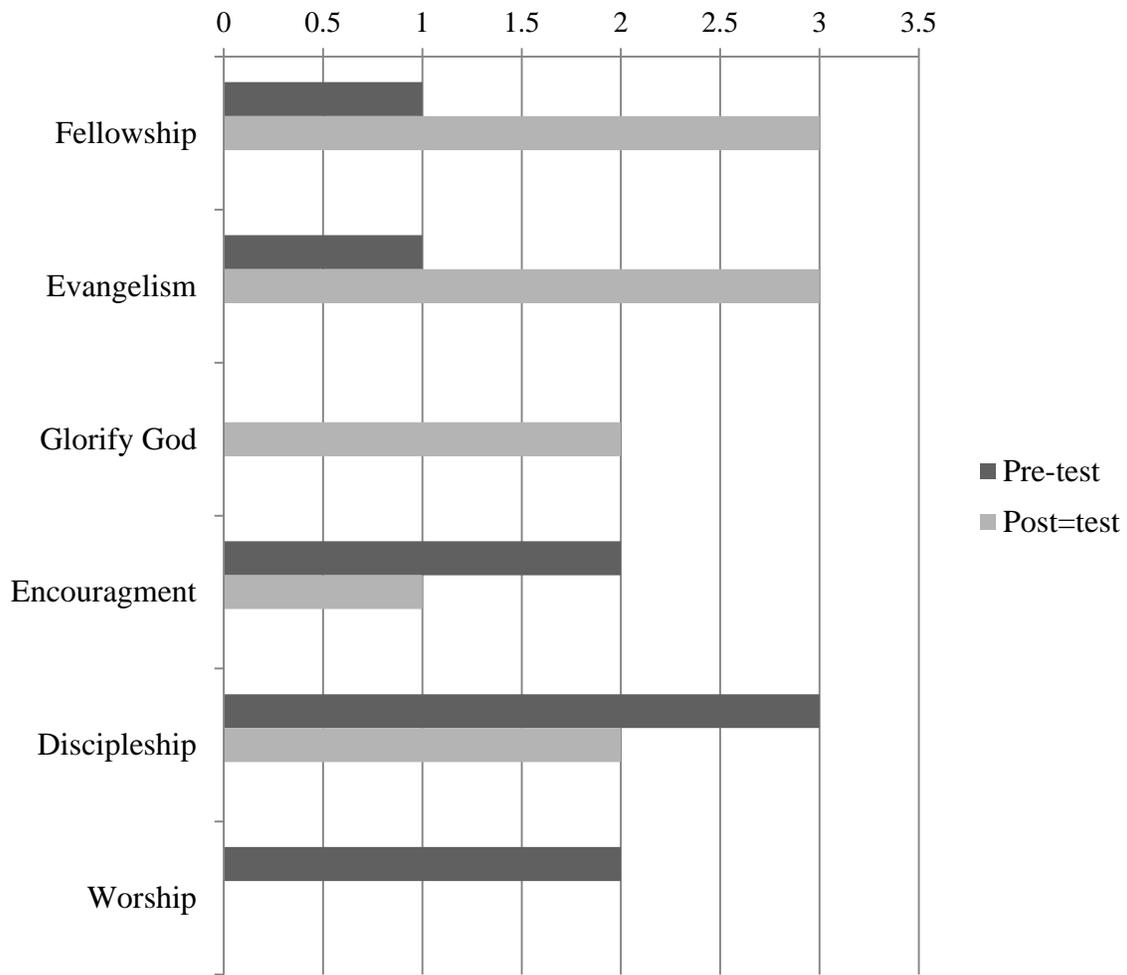


Figure A10. Why did God establish the church?

APPENDIX 6

PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Table A1. Average responses to question 1

Question 1			
Upon confession of faith in Christ I became part of the church.			
	Pre-Test Average	1.43	
	Post-Test Average	1.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A2. Average responses to question 2

Question 2			
A church exists wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.14	
	Post-Test Average	3.43	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A3. Average responses to question 3

Question 3			
Unity of disciples is foundational in God's redemptive purposes.			
	Pre-Test Average	1.57	
	Post-Test Average	1.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A4. Average responses to question 4

Question 4		
The church is the means by which God accomplishes His redemptive plan.		
Pre-Test Average	1.57	
Post-Test Average	1.71	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A5. Average responses to question 5

Question 5		
Church discipline (including excommunication) is no longer relevant.		
Pre-Test Average	4.14	
Post-Test Average	4.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A6. Average responses to question 6

Question 6		
Modern culture has little impact on one's attitude regarding spiritual matters.		
Pre-Test Average	4.14	
Post-Test Average	4.14	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A7. Average responses to question 7

Question 7		
In order to grow a church must appeal to felt needs.		
Pre-Test Average	3.3	
Post-Test Average	3.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A8. Average responses to question 8

Question 8		
Church attendees are not interested in theology.		
Pre-Test Average	4.57	
Post-Test Average	4.43	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A9. Average responses to question 9

Question 9		
Theology must be emphasized if a church is to grow.		
Pre-Test Average	1.43	
Post-Test Average	1.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A10. Average responses to question 10

Question 10		
Doctrinal studies are inappropriate in a church setting.		
Pre-Test Average	4.00	
Post-Test Average	4.29	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A11. Average responses to question 11

Question 11		
Weekly church attendance is important.		
Pre-Test Average	1.57	
Post-Test Average	1.86	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A12. Average responses to question 12

Question 12			
Attending numerous churches is an appropriate option for spiritual health.			
	Pre-Test Average	4.14	
	Post-Test Average	4.29	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A13. Average responses to question 13

Question 13			
Commitment to a single local church stifles spiritual growth			
	Pre-Test Average	4.43	
	Post-Test Average	4.86	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A14. Average responses to question 14

Question 14			
In order to be relevant a church must adopt current cultural trends.			
	Pre-Test Average	4.00	
	Post-Test Average	4.29	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A15. Average responses to question 15

Question 15			
Some form of church membership was the norm in the New Testament.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.43	
	Post-Test Average	2.29	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A16. Average responses to question 16

Question 16		
A person can be committed to a local church without becoming a member.		
Pre-Test Average	1.71	
Post-Test Average	1.86	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A17. Average responses to question 17

Question 17		
Church discipline can only be enacted on a church member.		
Pre-Test Average	2.29	
Post-Test Average	2.43	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A18. Average responses to question 18

Question 18		
I would leave a church that required church membership in order to serve in a ministry position		
Pre-Test Average	3.71	
Post-Test Average	4.00	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A19. Average responses to question 19

Question 19		
I would not seek membership in a local church requiring a membership class.		
Pre-Test Average	3.86	
Post-Test Average	4.14	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree		

Table A20. Average responses to question 20

Question 20			
Church membership is explicitly taught in the New Testament.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.43	
	Post-Test Average	2.39	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A21. Average responses to question 21

Question 21			
God works primarily through a corporate community.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.89	
	Post-Test Average	2.43	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A22. Average responses to question 22

Question 22			
God works primarily through an individual.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.43	
	Post-Test Average	2.71	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A23. Average responses to question 23

Question 23			
I would attend a membership class if one were offered.			
	Pre-Test Average	2.57	
	Post-Test Average	2.14	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A24. Average responses to question 24

Question 24			
The primary purpose of the church is to evangelize.			
	Pre-Test Average	1.57	
	Post-Test Average	2.00	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A25. Average responses to question 25

Question 25			
Teaching the Scriptures is the most important element of a worship service.			
	Pre-Test Average	1.43	
	Post-Test Average	1.14	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A26. Average responses to question 26

Question 26			
Music is the most important element of a worship service.			
	Pre-Test Average	3.43	
	Post-Test Average	4.00	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A27. Average responses to question 27

Question 27			
The nation of Israel was not to “evangelize” other nations.			
	Pre-Test Average	3.00	
	Post-Test Average	3.86	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A28. Average responses to question 28

Question 28			
The uniting of Jew and Gentile into one group is a mystery revealed in the New Testament.			
	Pre-Test Average	1.71	
	Post-Test Average	1.86	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A29. Average responses to question 29

Question 29			
The main purpose of going to church is to help me become a better person.			
	Pre-Test Average	3.29	
	Post-Test Average	4.00	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

Table A30. Average responses to question 30

Question 30			
Most local churches are comprised of both believers and unbelievers			
	Pre-Test Average	2.29	
	Post-Test Average	1.57	
1= Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree			

APPENDIX 7

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Table A31. Responses to question 1

Question 1: Upon confession of faith in Christ I became part of the church.				
Pre-Test			Post-Test	
Possible Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Agree	3	42.85%	4	57.14%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant movement.

Table A32. Responses to question 2

Question 2: A church exists wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus.				
Pre-Test			Post-Test	
Possible Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	0	0%
Agree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Undecided	0	0%	1	14.28%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	3	42.85%

Conclusion: There was a sharp decrease away from strongly agree, as well as significant increase towards strongly disagree.

Table A33. Responses to question 3

Question 3: Unity of disciples is foundational in God's redemptive purposes.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3	42.85%	4	57.14%
Agree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A34. Responses to question 4

Question 4: The church is the means by which God accomplishes His redemptive plan.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3	42.85%	2	28.57%
Agree	4	57.14%	5	71.42%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was a 33% decrease in those who strongly agree and a 25% increase in those who agree.

Table A35. Responses to question 5

Question 5: Church discipline (including excommunication) is no longer relevant.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	2	28.57%	4	57.14%

Conclusion: There was a 25% decrease in those who disagree and a 100% increase in those who strongly disagree. There was also a 100% decrease in those who were undecided.

Table A36. Responses to question 6

Question 6: Modern culture has little impact on one's attitude regarding spiritual matters.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	3	42.85%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was no change.

Table A37. Responses to question 7

Question 7: In order to grow a church must appeal to felt needs.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%
Undecided	2	28.57%	0	0%
Disagree	2	28.57%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	1	14.28%

Conclusion: There was a 100% decrease in those who were undecided, and a corresponding 100% increase in those who disagree.

Table A38. Responses to question 8

Question 8: Church attendees are not interested in theology.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	1	14.28%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	5	71.42%	3	42.85%

Conclusion: There was a 300% increase in those who disagree and a 40% decrease in those who strongly disagree.

Table A39. Responses to question 9

Question 9: Theology must be emphasized if a church is to grow.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	71.42%	4	57.14%
Agree	1	14.28%	2	28.57%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A40. Responses to question 10

Question 10: Doctrinal studies are inappropriate in a church setting.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	1	14.28%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	3	42.85%	5	71.42%
Strongly Disagree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was significant movement towards those who disagree, as there was a 100% decrease from those who agree or were undecided.

Table A41. Responses to question 11

Question 11: Weekly church attendance is important.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3	42.85%	3	42.85%
Agree	4	57.14%	3	42.85%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was a significant change in that one individual moved from strongly agree/agree to disagree.

Table A42. Responses to question 12

Question 12: Attending numerous churches is an appropriate option.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	4	57.14%	5	71.42%
Strongly Disagree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A43. Responses to question 13

Question 13: Commitment to a single local church stifles spiritual growth.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	4	57.14%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	3	42.85%	6	85.71%

Conclusion: There was a 75% decrease in those who disagree and a 100% increase in those who strongly disagree.

Table A44. Responses to question 14

Question 14: In order to be relevant a church must adopt current cultural trends.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	1	14.28%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	3	42.85%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A45. Responses to question 15

Question 15: Some form of church membership was the norm in the New Testament.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Agree	2	28.57%	4	57.14%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was a 100% increase in those who agree, while there was a 50% decrease in those who strongly agree and those who disagree.

Table A46. Responses to question 16

Question 16: A person can be committed to a local church without becoming a member.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Agree	5	71.42%	6	85.71%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A47. Responses to question 17

Question 17: Church discipline can only be enacted on a church member.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	3	42.85%
Agree	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Undecided	2	28.57%	0	0%
Disagree	1	14.28%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was a 200% increase in those who disagree.

Table A48. Responses to question 18

Question 18: I would leave a church that required church membership in order to serve in a ministry position.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Disagree	5	71.42%	5	71.42%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	1	14.28%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A49. Responses to question 19

Question 19: I would not seek membership in a local church requiring a membership class.				
Pre-Test			Post-Test	
Possible Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	6	85.71%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was significant movement from disagree to strongly disagree.

Table A50. Responses to question 20

Question 20: Church membership is explicitly taught in the New Testament.				
Pre-Test			Post-Test	
Possible Responses	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	3	42.85%
Agree	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A51. Responses to question 21

Question 21: God works primarily through a corporate community.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	2	28.57%
Agree	3	42.85%	2	28.57%
Undecided	2	28.57%	1	14.28%
Disagree	2	28.57%	2	28.57%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A52. Responses to question 22

Question 22: God works primarily through an individual.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Agree	5	71.42%	3	42.85%
Undecided	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Disagree	1	14.28%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	1	14.28%

Conclusion: There was a 40% decrease in those who agree.

Table A53. Responses to question 23

Question 23: I would attend a membership class if one were offered.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Agree	4	57.14%	4	57.14%
Undecided	2	28.57%	2	28.57%
Disagree	1	14.28%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: One individual moved from disagree to strongly agree.

Table A54. Responses to question 24

Question 24: The primary purpose of the church is to evangelize.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3	42.85%	2	28.57%
Agree	4	57.14%	4	57.14%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: One individual moved from strongly agree to disagree.

Table A55. Responses to question 25

Question 25: Teaching the Scriptures is the most important element of a worship service.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	57.14%	5	71.42%
Agree	3	42.85%	2	28.57%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

Table A56. Responses to question 26

Question 26: Music is the most important element of a worship service.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	1	14.28%	0	0%
Agree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Undecided	2	28.57%	0	0%
Disagree	3	42.85%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was strong movement from agree to disagree. There was a 100% decrease in those who strongly agree and a 100% increase in those who strongly disagree.

Table A57. Responses to question 27<sup>1</sup>

Question 27: The nation of Israel was not to “evangelize” other nations.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	2	28.57%	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	3	42.85%	3	42.85%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	3	42.85%

Conclusion: There was a 200% decrease in those who agree and a corresponding 200% increase in those who strongly disagree.

Table A58. Responses to question 28

Question 28: The uniting of Jew and Gentile into one group is a mystery revealed in the New Testament.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	28.57%	3	42.85%
Agree	5	71.42%	3	42.85%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%	1	14.28%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was no significant change.

<sup>1</sup>Only six responses were given to this question. One participant placed a question mark on both the pre-test and the post-test.

Table A59. Responses to question 29

Question 29: The main purpose of going to church is to help me become a better person.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agree	3	42.85%	1	14.28%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	3	42.85%	4	57.14%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	2	28.57%

Conclusion: There was a general movement from agree towards disagree/strongly disagree.

Table A60. Responses to question 30

Question 30: Most local churches are comprised of both believers and unbelievers.				
Possible Responses	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	1	14.28%	3	42.85%
Agree	4	57.14%	4	57.14%
Undecided	1	14.28%	0	0%
Disagree	1	14.28%	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Conclusion: There was a 200% increase in those who strongly agree.

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## ABSTRACT

### DEEPENING COVENANT COMMUNITY AT THE CHURCH ON RANDALL PLACE, PINE, ARIZONA

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This project explores the importance of the local church in God's plan of redemption as the means of deepening relationships among the congregants. The project seeks to design a framework for developing biblically healthy church members who are aware of God's plans for the church and the cultural forces that erode enjoyment of participating in his plan. Chapter 1 presents the purpose, goals, context, rationale, definitions, and limitations of the project.

Chapter 2 discusses the biblical and theological perspectives on the importance of the community of God. This chapter develops the historical role of the community of God as presented in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Specifically, this chapter explores the community of God as a holy, worshipping, and missional community.

Chapter 3 considers contemporary influences shaping the Western church. This chapter delves into the influence individualism and consumerism has on the attitudes of many church congregants.

Chapter 4 explains the four key phases of the "Deepening Covenant Relationship" project. Attention is given to the ten-week teaching series, and the development and implementation of the church membership curriculum and the church covenant. Finally this chapter describes the process of moving individuals into committed membership at the Church On Randall Place.

Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project goals. Strengths and weaknesses are considered, as well as alterations that could be made to strengthen the project for future use. This project asserts that a strong ecclesiology is necessary for a church to be healthy and for congregants to develop strong relationships. One's theology affects one's behavior.

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