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INCREASING BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH  
IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE YOUNG ADULT  
CLASS AT HORSE CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN MANCHESTER, KENTUCKY

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by  
Dustin Lee Sims  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

INCREASING BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH  
IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE YOUNG ADULT  
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MANCHESTER, KENTUCKY

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For the glory of God

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## PREFACE

This project could not have been completed without the help of many individuals God has placed in my life. I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who transferred us from darkness to light and forgave us our sins (Col 1:13). Without Him, none of this would be possible. Seeking to be faithful as His church has encouraged me to pursue this project.

Second, I thank my wonderful wife who is the love of my life. She is a blessing to me and an amazing helpmate (Gen 2:18). She has sacrificed much time and energy as I have continued through school. We have grown together through our studies. After nineteen years of marriage, I continue to love her more and more each day. She is a blessing from the Lord. God has blessed us with two amazing children who always keep us learning. It is a joy to see them grow and watch God work in their lives. I am thankful and proud of the individuals they are growing to be.

Third, I want to thank Horse Creek Baptist Church. Their partnership in completing this project cannot be overstated. It is a privilege to serve as their pastor. The love they show to my family and the support they provide will never be forgotten. My hope is for this project to serve the church well as we seek to be the church God has called us to be.

Dustin Lee Sims

Manchester, Kentucky

May 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of Horse Creek Baptist Church is to reach and help people become fully committed, developed, and functioning followers of Jesus Christ. This mission statement is meant to demonstrate the church's desire to carry out the Great Commission through reaching people for Christ, discipling them, and sending them out to do the same. For this to happen, the church must recognize its mission comes from its identity. Members must understand the identity of the church, and what it means to be a member of the church in a local context. For these reasons, the purpose of this project is to increase biblical understanding of church identity and membership in the young adult class at Horse Creek Baptist Church in Manchester, Kentucky.

#### **Context**

Horse Creek Baptist Church has been established as a church for over 150 years in Manchester, Kentucky. They are a staple within the community of Clay County. One would be hard pressed to find many people in the community that has not had some form of connection with the church either currently or in the past. Horse Creek has had opportunity to make an impact on many individuals within the county, state, country, and world through missions and ministry activities. Although Horse Creek is a strong and mission minded church, there are two areas that must be addressed in this project.

First, the church often derives its identity as a church body from the community rather than from the Scriptures. Clay County is a close community with great care and concern for one another. One will find it a wonderful place to live and minister. People in the community rally around each other. It is easy to go to a football game on a

Friday night and see many friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. Basketball games are opportunities to catch up with people in the community. Funerals are more of a community event than just a family gathering. Churches are respected and viewed as organizations within the community. Many community events, meetings, gatherings, and social opportunities are provided by these churches.

Although a church should seek involvement in their community, it should not obtain its identity from that community. This is where the weakness of Horse Creek is evident. The church can be guilty of viewing itself as a community organization rather than the body of Christ. Often, the church is busy concerning itself with what it does, while neglecting the biblical precedent of its call and identity in the Scriptures. This results in individualism as it becomes easy to view oneself as an individual coming together with others to accomplish something rather than one body which contains individual members. This results in seeing oneself as a volunteer in a service organization instead of a member within the body of Christ. There is a major difference between the two as the former leads to understanding identity based on what is done rather than how the Scriptures describe the church.

Therefore, much of the focus is on what is done to the neglect of why it is done and the identity of those who are the church body. To explain further, Horse Creek is a wonderful church who loves to minister to its community. This is done by providing its outreach center for community events, hosting community meetings, providing meals for people in the community, using its vans for food delivery, and any other needs that are presented. This is an important part of the ministry of the church, and it is a wonderful way to minister to the community. However, activity is completed without an understanding of identity. This does not mean there is a contrast between activity and identity. In fact, when a church understands its identity, there is purpose to its activity. This propels ministry forward and produces a missional focus in the church. The church ends up serving more. The difference is now there is purpose and activities are directed to

carrying out the call God has placed on the church. It is not about staying busy; it is about being the church as God intended. One's understanding of identity deepens the activity of the church.

Second, membership is not viewed from a biblical perspective. The church, much like other churches, has more people on its roll than attendees. This often gives the picture the church has a large membership, but this is not the case. Because the church views itself, whether realized or not, as an organization within the community, membership is not viewed in high regard. This is not to say the church does not value new members, rather, they are unwilling to place a great importance on their members staying active and displaying the characteristics of membership. Often, those on the membership roll neglect attendance, attend other churches, move out of town, or fail to participate in the ministries of the church without having their name removed or being contacted. When the idea of contacting those on the roll is discussed, it is usually met with a lack of concern. To hold members accountable is met with strong opposition. The reason for this opposition taking place is because the church does not have a proper understanding of how the Scriptures identify the church and how that affects the church's understanding of membership.

The major concern needing to be addressed in this project is the problem of identity and membership. This is the major weakness of Horse Creek Baptist Church. When considering the weaknesses listed above, a lack of understanding church identity will be an issue which will help address all other weaknesses of the church. When the church understands how the Scriptures present its identity, it will understand who it is as a church body, value membership, and understand its call as a church body to fulfill the Great Commission. These issues will be addressed together as one because they are connected. The church would do well to understand its identity and in turn, value membership and serve based on this identity. Knowing that God has ordained the church by His grace to carry out His mission changes the focus of the church. This results in an

understanding that the church is created by God's grace and empowered by His grace to share His grace to the world.

Within the past three years, the church has started a Young Adult Class. This was completed at the request and leading of the pastor. It is also taught and led by the pastor. The goal of this class is to reach young adults with the gospel, train them in the foundations of the faith, and teach them to be leaders within the church. The class has doubled in size from six to twelve since its start with continual growth likely. This group will provide a solid core for increasing understanding of church identity and membership as they will soon take leadership positions within the church. Successful completion of this project in the Young Adult Class will be helpful in expanding this project to the rest of the congregation.

### **Rationale**

Jesus states, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:14-16).<sup>1</sup> Paul would continue this theme of light when speaking to the Philippian church about their behavior, particularly how they relate to one another. When they avoid fighting, as Paul mentions in this case, they "appear as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15). When examining these Scripture verses, it is evident that the church is to make an impact. What is often lost is that the church is to be a light to the world because it belongs to The Light of the world (John 8:12). The church is to live out its identity. Christ's Church is to make an impact in this world as it sets out to fulfill the Great Commission, love God, love its neighbor, and function as the Body of Christ. This is a result of understanding its

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible.

identity and letting this identity drive its ministry. However, this does not seem to be evident in the contemporary church. Often, the church experiences an identity crisis.

This is the case at Horse Creek Baptist Church. As stated above, much of the church's identity is from the community and not from Scripture. This has become even more clear at the time of this writing due to a pandemic around the world. Many members have stopped attending the gatherings of the church, including online. Because of the pandemic, ministries have temporarily shut down and activity is at a minimum. Working in and along with the community was a key component of Horse Creek's identity and that is not possible to the level it once was accomplished. Much of the discussion among members has centered on the church not being the church because we cannot do all the activities we once did. The biblical picture of the church has not been the focus.

However, Scripture paints a different picture. Certainly, the church is to be active and involved with our communities. Surely, the church is to carry out its ministries within and outside of the local church body. This is part of carrying out the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and the Great Commandments (Matt 22:36-40). These facts cannot be denied. However, what the church does is to overflow from its identity. The image of the body of Christ helps the church to understand its identity. This image is key to understanding the church's identity and key to Horse Creek's recognition of itself as God's church and not a community organization like the rest of the community organizations within Clay County. Horse Creek Baptist Church has been sent out by Christ and called for his purposes. It must recognize who it is based on its identity.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to increase biblical understanding of church identity and membership within the Young Adult Class at Horse Creek Baptist Church in Manchester, Kentucky.

## **Goals**

Three goals were necessary for the successful completion of this ministry project. Each goal built upon one another. There were three goals for this ministry project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of church identity and membership among the Young Adult Class.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum which focuses on church identity and membership in Scripture that will be taught in both the Sunday morning and weekly discussion group.
3. The third goal was to increase understanding of church identity and membership through this curriculum among the Young Adult Class.

Definitive research methodology was used to measure the successful completion of these goals.<sup>2</sup> The research methodology and tools used are described in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of this project depends upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of church identity and membership among the Young Adult Class. This goal was measured by responses to a 25-statement survey related to church membership and identity. Participants responded to each statement using the Likert scale. This goal was considered successfully met when at least ten members in the class take the survey.

The second goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum which focuses on church identity and membership in Scripture that will be taught in both the Sunday morning and weekly discussion group. This goal was measured by an expert panel of pastors and professors who evaluated the curriculum based on a rubric focused on biblical accuracy, method of teaching, level of understanding, and application. The panel

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

consisted of two pastors of two sister churches and two professors from Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. The scores were measured from insufficient (1) to exemplary (4). This goal was considered successful if the curriculum receives a score of 3 or higher in every category.

The third goal was to increase understanding of church identity and membership through this curriculum among the Young Adult Class. This goal was measured by a pre- and post-curriculum survey. The pre-curriculum survey was completed with the first goal. The post-curriculum survey was completed after the eight weeks of teaching were completed. This goal was considered successful if students in the class displayed an increase in average scores from the pre- to post-curriculum surveys. A t-test was used to measure scores.

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

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

*Church identity.* Church identity as defined in this project is the biblical description of the church through the image of the body of Christ given in Scripture in four passages: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:1-16, and Colossians 1:18a, 2:19. This is not an exhaustive definition of this term but is the one used in this project.

*Church membership.* For the purposes of this project, Jonathan Leeman provides a clear definition of church membership: “church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s discipleship and the Christian’s submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.”<sup>3</sup>

Two limitations were applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Leeman. *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 58, Kindle.



post-survey were contingent on the honest responses of participants. To mitigate this limitation, the surveys were completed confidentially with names only used for comparison of pre- and post- curriculum survey. Second, the effectiveness of the curriculum was dependent on consistent attendance in the class. To mitigate this limitation, each lesson was provided through video chat for those who cannot physically attend.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the project was narrowly focused on the Young Adult Class and not the whole church. Teaching on church identity and membership is important for every member of the church, but greater attention can be given if it is limited to a smaller group and then expanded further. Second, the project was restricted to an eight-week study. This gave adequate time to teach and evaluate the effectiveness of that teaching.

### **Conclusion**

There is much to say about the identity of the church and membership within the church. The following chapters will seek to examine this topic biblically, historically, and practically. Chapter 2 will examine passages of Scripture that present images of the church. Chapter 3 will focus on the historical understanding of the church from a Baptist perspective and the practical implications of understanding church identity and membership. Chapter 4 will present the details of the project. Chapter 5 will discuss reflections from the project.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

The image of the body of Christ is one of the more well-known images presented in the New Testament. Most in the church would answer positively if they were asked if the church is the body of Christ. However, what exactly does it mean for the church to be the body of Christ? Does it have any implications for how one understands membership within a local body of believers? The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the image of the body of Christ provides an understanding of the church which can be applied to membership in the local church. The implications of these truths provide an understanding of membership in the local church that demonstrates its importance. The image speaks of the universal church; however, Paul applies it specifically to the local congregation(s) in Corinth (1 Cor 12:27). The universal church manifests itself most clearly within local churches.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, principles found within this image of the church in the New Testament can be applied to local congregations.

A proper understanding of the body of Christ image requires an examination of its use in the New Testament. This will enable application of the image to church membership. There are four passages of use in the New Testament. These passages are 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:1-16, and Colossians 1:18a, 2:19. Each passage will be examined with a focus on key themes presented with an implication provided for understanding these themes within a local church. Finally, an application of the themes for membership in the local church will be provided. The scope of this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29.

does not allow for every teaching of each passage to be presented. However, there will be much information presented to aid in understanding each passage which will help prevent one from stretching the image beyond its purpose. After understanding the passage in its context, one can make application to local church membership.

Before examining each passage, it would be helpful to observe the nature of this image. As Thiselton has noted, “Few terms have undergone so many twists and turns in the history of Pauline scholarship than body and body of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> There are various understandings of this image.<sup>3</sup> The two primary understandings are analogical and ontological. Fee stresses the importance of carefulness when studying this image. He takes it to be a metaphor.<sup>4</sup> Fung also believes it to be a metaphor, emphasizing Paul’s use of the phrase “just as” in Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12.<sup>5</sup> Taylor is most helpful in stating “there is both analogy and ontological reality involved in Paul’s argument; that is, the analogy of the body is an apt metaphor of the reality that the church is the body of Christ constituted by the Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> Taylor’s view seems to be the best explanation from Paul’s use of the image. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul states, “Now you are Christ’s body . . .” He does not say they are like Christ’s body but that they are Christ’s body, indicating this is their identity. In Romans 12:5, Paul uses the phrase, “one body in Christ,” again indicating identity. In Ephesians 4:12, Paul speaks of the body as identity when he says the building up happens to “the body of Christ.” From these verses, it

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 990.

<sup>3</sup> For more discussion on the subject, see Dunn who presents various viewpoints. James Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, in vol. 38b of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 722-23.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 601-02.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, “Body of Christ,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 78.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 28 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 294-95.

seems best to understand the image to speak of the nature of the church.

However, caution must be exercised. The image cannot be stretched too far.

Avery Cardinal Dulles provides further comment on this:

Further, the designation of the Church as Body of Christ is in danger of leading to an unhealthy divinization of the Church. It seems to suggest the erroneous position of Pelz that the Church is one organism together with its head, and that the union is therefore a biological and hypostatic one. If the Holy Spirit were conceived as the life principle of the Church, all the actions of the Church would seem to be attributable to the Holy Spirit. This would obscure the personal responsibility and freedom of the members and would make the presence of sin and error in the Church — even on the corporate and official level — unintelligible.<sup>7</sup>

As Dulles noted, it cannot be seen as elevating the church to the status of the divine in which the church as the body is an extension of the incarnation of Christ. Rather, the church is identified as the body of Christ because the church is the representation of Christ on earth, carrying out His activity.<sup>8</sup> The church is also united with Christ, “called into fellowship” (1 Cor 1:9) with Him. This union with Christ provides the basis for understanding how this image functions. The church is the body of Christ because the church is united with Christ.

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

Now that the nature of this image has been discussed, an examination of each passage should be completed. The first passage is 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. In this passage, Paul deals with an issue prevalent in the Corinthian church: elevation of certain members and certain gifts above all others. Chapters 12 and 14 present teachings on spiritual gifts and their use with special emphasis given to prophecy and tongues in chapter 14.

Centered between these two chapters is a discussion of love which is to be pursued above all else. Love is to be the motivation for how one uses his spiritual gifts in the church. In

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<sup>7</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image, 2002), 47, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 959.

chapter 12, Paul presents this image of the church as a way of instructing the Corinthians of the unity and diversity that exist within the church. Verses 1-11 discusses various spiritual gifts and the source of those spiritual gifts, the Spirit (VV. 4, 11). In verses 12-27, Paul presents the image of the body. In verses 28-31, Paul returns to discussing spiritual gifts and the necessity of diversity of those gifts. It is verses 12-27 where discussion of the body of Christ image is most prevailing. Three themes are presented which will be discussed below: unity and diversity, equality and importance, and care and concern.

### **Unity and Diversity**

In verses 12-14, Paul emphasizes the body of Christ as one who is made up of many members. These members make up one body. All who belong to the body have been baptized into the body through one Spirit. Paul's use of the word "one" in these verses indicates the unity the body. His use of the terms "members" and "many" indicates the diversity of the body. Both are emphasized and presented equally.<sup>9</sup>

The church being both unified and diversified presents a problem. Unity and diversity would seem to contradict one another. However, it is within this diversity that unity is pictured. Garland emphasizes that unity is present in plurality, but it does not mean uniformity. Each individual integrity is still present. However, "unity dominates diversity."<sup>10</sup> Fee presents a different view. Diversity is a need because one body is made up of different members. "Paul's concern is for their unity; but there is no such thing as true unity without diversity."<sup>11</sup> Fee's interpretation should be followed. Paul presents both unity and diversity equally as important to the body. Verse 12 provides the key for this

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 296.

<sup>10</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 590.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 601-02.

understanding. Paul states that the “body is one and yet has many members,” thus emphasizing the one body made up of many members. He continues by stating that “all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body,” thus emphasizing the many members who make up the one body. The picture is clear: there can be no body without the many members and the many members are not separate but make up one body. Therefore, there must be diversity for the body to be the body. As the human body has many parts which function to make up one body, so is the body of Christ. So, unity is found in the diversity of the body as each one does its part in the body.

Paul states the reason for this connection of the various members of the body: “for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” This presents a question of what this baptism in the Spirit means. There are various positions, but an understanding of this phrase must emphasize the common experience of all believers. Thiselton believes that to point to some special movement of the Spirit upon certain individuals after salvation “undermines Paul’s entire argument and emphasis.” He believes baptism to mean water baptism each believer experienced which marked their new identity as a people of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Ciampa and Rosner agree because to say that some in the church have not had the same experience would make some “second class Christians.”<sup>13</sup> Fee sees this as referring to the common experience of salvation for those who belong to Christ. However, he sees it as being used in a “metaphorical sense.” He explains further:

For the Corinthians, of course, the point of reference for the metaphor would be their own baptism (immersion) in water. But that is not the same thing as suggesting either that Paul intended the rite here or that they would have thought him to be referring to it ... Rather, as indicated above, this is most likely a piece of Semitic parallelism, where both clauses make essentially the same point. It is the clearly metaphorical sense of this parallel clause that argues most strongly for a metaphorical, rather than literal, meaning for baptism in the first clause.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 998.

<sup>13</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 596, Kindle.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 604-05.

Although Fee presents a good argument, it is best to side with Thiselton. Paul presents water baptism as the point of reference that each member of the church can look to as a picture of their new identity in Christ. Therefore, it becomes the mark by which they can look at the beginning of their incorporation into the body. It does not create the body, but only presents the picture of inclusion into the body.<sup>15</sup> It is not some special baptism of the Spirit after salvation because Paul emphasizes that all members have experienced it. It is common to each member. Being able to point to water baptism as a picture of one's new identity fits Paul's argument.

Thus, this baptism in the Spirit speaks of a common experience of every believer (pictured in water baptism) which brings one into the body of Christ. When one comes to know Christ, he receives the Spirit, which incorporates him into the body of Christ. That incorporation is pictured when he takes that first step of obedience by following through with water baptism. The baptism does not provide him the Spirit, but only displays what has taken place in his life through Christ. Thus, his baptism is a reference point, shared by all believers, that marks his new identity as part of the body of Christ.

From the above discussion, an implication must be mentioned as a way of summary. The body of Christ image presents the church with both unity and diversity. The church is diverse because it is made up of people from all walks of life. When one becomes a part of the body, all other distinctions become secondary. The church should be a demonstration to the world of unity precisely because of diversity. It is in Christ that the barrier wall is broken down (Eph 2:14). The church as the body of Christ expresses this.

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<sup>15</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 592.

## Equality and Importance

In verses 15-20, Paul presents the equality and importance of each member of the body using an illustration of different body parts speaking about themselves saying, “I am not a part of the body.” It is evident from this passage that what Paul had in mind is one part of the body thinking that because it did not see itself as important as another, it was not really needed as part of the body. The illustration used by Paul helps him to get his point across. There is not one part of the body that is not needed. He personifies the body parts to expose a possible situation at Corinth. There could have been envy from one Corinthian believer for another. It is also possible that one believer may not have felt a part of the body in the same way others do. Whatever the case, Paul presents this situation to show “there is no insignificant, unimportant, or inconsequential member of the body.”<sup>16</sup> Every part is needed to make up the body. Paul demonstrates through three truths presented.

First, every member of the body is equal.<sup>17</sup> Paul uses different parts of the body and compares them to one another as if the parts are speaking themselves. The point is one member looking at another member and feeling inferior or envying their function. Paul states that this does not make the member “any the less a part of the body.” This is against the thinking of Robertson and Plummer. They present the argument that although each part has a function in the body, all those in the church are not equal. “Some have special gifts, some have none; some have several gifts, some only one; some have higher gifts, some have lower . . .”<sup>18</sup> However this seems to take away from Paul’s argument. It is precisely this situation that has presented itself in Corinth. They were guilty of elevating some spiritual gifts above others (chapter 14), lifting certain leaders above

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<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 297-98.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 297-98..

<sup>18</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1986), 270.



others (chapter 3), and defrauding their fellow members of the body (chapter 6). It seems obvious this would create a hierarchy among members of the church with some feeling superior and some feeling inferior. Paul, by using this personified picture of certain members of the body, speaks out against this kind of problem. Each member of the body is necessary and equal because if one part does not work, the body would “collapse into a chaotic nonentity.”<sup>19</sup> “The failure of one little valve can shut down the whole bodily system. The implication is that there is no unimportant gift or person in the body of Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

Second, every part of the body has a function to perform within the body.<sup>21</sup> Paul gives a hypothetical situation of one part of the body being the actual body. If one were only to have an eye or an ear, there would be no other function of the body being performed. So, the body suffers if one part of the body is not functioning as it should. Each has a role<sup>22</sup> and that role contributes to the overall function of the body. As each function of the body is necessary, one must also understand that if only that function were being completed, the body would shut down. “It is a deceptively seductive step to move from prizing the sight given by an eye as the most precious and wonderful gift, to the assumption that this is what really makes the body the body that it is.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, the diversity of the body is by God’s design.<sup>24</sup> Paul states plainly that God has placed the members in the body in the way that He desired. This points the reader to understand that God has designed the member to function in a certain way. Thus, He has connected the body in a way that each part works according to His design.

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<sup>19</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1002.

<sup>20</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 594.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 298.

<sup>22</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 600.

<sup>23</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1003.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 298.

To think of some as less important or others as more important is to disregard God's design.<sup>25</sup>

From the above discussion, it is again important to present the implication as a way of summary. Each member of the body of Christ must understand his or her function within the body. Every member is important and equal. There may be a difference between the spiritual gifts or functions of each member, but all are needed. This is by God's design. To break away from God's design is to put the body into disarray. Each part, no matter how small, must function for the body to be a body.

### **Care and Concern**

In verses 21-27, Paul speaks of the care and concern members are to display to one another by again presenting an illustration of different parts of the body speaking to one another and stating, "I have no need of you." It is not the case where one member can say to the other that there is no need for that member. Each one is to express care and concern for the other. Three key principles are evident from this passage concerning the body. Each will need to be discussed.

First, each member needs the other members of the body. Paul presents a scenario where the eye tells the hand there is no need for it. He also says the head tells the feet there is no need for it. He says this cannot happen. This seems to present a hierarchy where one member views himself as superior to the others to the point where he believes he does not need the other. Taylor sees this as a reaction to how the Corinthians are treating one another at the Lord's Supper table, where the more notable are treating the less notable dishonorably.<sup>26</sup> Fee concurs, emphasizing those who are prominent despising those who have little. "Rather, it is both in their self-sufficiency and in their demeaning of

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<sup>25</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1004.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 298-99.

others to the point of saying, I have not need of you.”<sup>27</sup> The problem presents itself when power or status gets involved. One has a certain temperament and believes his role as more important and therefore looks at others as less gifted.<sup>28</sup> This can happen easily in a church when the human problem of ego presents itself. One desires the power and status in the church and believes he should be the leader or make the decisions. The cure for this is understanding God’s design of each member needing the other.

Second, those that are deemed weaker are both necessary and more honored. Fee views the weaker members of the body as the internal organs.<sup>29</sup> This is most likely what Paul means. It is the internal organs that are often viewed as weaker because they are internal and much more vulnerable to diseases. However, these internal organs, weak and vulnerable as they may be, are necessary for life. Without the functioning of these organs, life cannot continue. “A body can survive without eyes, ears, hands, and feet, but it cannot survive without the function of these unpresentable parts.”<sup>30</sup> These are more honored because they are covered. These parts, especially the sexual organs, are prone to cause embarrassment if displayed. “Yet, paradoxically, our very embarrassment over the so-called less presentable parts leads to care and attention in how we cover or even adorn them.”<sup>31</sup>

Paul’s point is that each member is needed and requires care and concern on the part of the whole body. If there are parts of the body which seem less needed or not as prominent, this is only in a human classification. God has given honor to the “member which lacked.” There can be no ranking of individuals in the body of Christ because each one is a part of the body and must be recognized as necessary for the body to function.

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<sup>27</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 612-13.

<sup>28</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1007.

<sup>29</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 613.

<sup>30</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 596.

<sup>31</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1009.

Third, Paul presents the fact that each member of the body is connected because it is one body. This requires that each member care for all other members of the body. There is to be “no division” and care must be the “same” for one another. Paul views the body as one made up of many. The reason for this emphasis is to illustrate that one part affects the other. It is one body and therefore, every part is part of the body. There is a common bond and status. What affects one member affects all members. Why? Because there is no breaking away one member from the identity of the body as a whole. “... if the ear and fingers of a musician are praised, or if the hands and feet of an athlete are praised, a person receives congratulations for his or her coordination as a whole. The whole person is described as a good musician or as a good athlete . . .”<sup>32</sup>

Paul’s point is clear: if care and concern are not provided for one member of the body, then the whole body suffers because that one member is part of the body. If care and concern are provided for that one member, then the whole body benefits because that one member is part of the body. Ultimately, this points to Christ. If they give disgrace to any part of the body of Christ, they are disgracing Christ himself because the church is Christ’ body.<sup>33</sup> This picture of the body is specifically applied to the Corinthian church/churches in verse 27, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” The reason for this application of Paul is to point to the local body meeting in Corinth as the body of Christ. They are the local body of Christ. It also calls them to apply what Paul has just presented concerning the body.

To summarize this portion of the passage, one must understand Paul’s point of emphasis on care and concern within the body. Each member is an important part of the body and should be given the same care and concern as other members. The connection of each member to the body reminds the reader of the common bond of the body because

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<sup>32</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1011-12.

<sup>33</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 609.

it is one. If one part is hurting, then the whole body hurts because of that part's connection to the whole body. If one part is honored, then the whole body is honored because of that part's connection to the whole body. Mutual care and concern should be displayed within the body of Christ.

### **Romans 12:3-8**

In this passage, Paul presents another picture of the church as the body of Christ. In this context, Paul is continuing his thought from the previous verse which calls on Christians to be renewed in their minds. Longenecker is correct in stating that the inclusion of “for” is the key to understanding this continuation of the topic of renewing one's mind.<sup>34</sup> However, this renewing is directed to how one views himself within the body of Christ, the church. Two themes are present in this passage concerning the body: pride and judgment, and function. Each will be discussed below.

#### **Pride and Judgment**

In verse 3, Paul speaks of each member not thinking “more highly of himself” than he should. Each one is to use judgment and understand that God has given to each one a “measure of faith.” The context of verses 1 and 2 help explain why Paul would write this to the Roman church. Dunn believes it provides at least the possibility that Paul sees some kind of faction in the church. This would have come from his experience with the Corinthian church. However, it does not mean he has a specific group he is referencing, only that exalting oneself in one's thinking is a common problem.<sup>35</sup> This certainly is possible, but it seems best to view this as a natural connection to the renewal that is to take place in the believer's life. It was key to his understanding of how one's life

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<sup>34</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 927-28.

<sup>35</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 720-21.

is changed by the gospel.<sup>36</sup> One will display this renewal of mind by how one views himself within the body. Right thinking leads to a proper view of oneself and fellow believers.

Paul then presents the right kind of thinking. This thinking is directed by the measure of faith one has from God. But what does measure mean? It seems best to understand this to emphasize the gifting each one possesses. Schreiner believes this measure to be a “quantity of faith or trust that each believer possesses.”<sup>37</sup> Moo thinks it is speaking of the one common grace given by the Lord from which spiritual gifts find their source.<sup>38</sup> Sanday and Headlam see this faith as “the sign and measure of the Christian life ... for all those gifts which are given to man with or as the result of his faith.”<sup>39</sup> Kruse is probably the most helpful:

The view that the measure of faith is to be interpreted as the basic faith of all believers has the advantage of reinforcing Paul’s aim of minimizing division and promoting unity among Jewish and Gentile believers. The view that it should be interpreted in connection with the various gifts of ministry of different believers has the advantage of relevance to the immediate context, and it therefore probably preferable.<sup>40</sup>

If one is to decide, it is best to agree with Kruse and Schreiner. This measure would then express the need for each believer in the body to view himself by the standard of faith (gifting) God has given him. This fits in better with the overall context of this passage and provides a foundation for how one can avoid pride by not thinking of himself as higher than other members within the body.

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<sup>36</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 759.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 1307, Kindle.

<sup>38</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 761.

<sup>39</sup> William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (1902; repr., New York: T&T Clark, 1952), 355.

<sup>40</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 469.

The implication of this theme for the body stresses the importance of how each member relates to the other. Too often, members within the body can view themselves as more important than others. This leads to an unhealthy dynamic in the church. If one is to rightly view oneself, he should first understand that it is by the grace of God that he has a gift. Second, he should understand that gift as a part of the whole. God has given a measure and each measure adds up to the whole. To view oneself as highly prized or above others in the body is to “think more highly of himself than he ought to think.”

### **Function**

The next theme presented in this passage is how each member of the body is to function. Paul presents this in verses 4 and 5. This understanding comes from a right measurement of oneself.<sup>41</sup> Paul uses an illustration from a human body to bring about his point. A human body requires the proper working of each part. Each part has a function within the body. The body can work only if all parts are functioning as they are designed. For instance, if the kidneys stop functioning as they are designed, the whole body will feel the effects of that stoppage. There is design and purpose to each part of the human body.

This is the same for the body of Christ. Paul will transition in verse 5 by the phrase, “so we,” from the human body to the body of Christ. Each member is part of the body and “members one of another.” This phrase provides the foundation for understanding the need for each member of the body to function so the whole body is benefited. This calls for members to support the good of the body which also promotes the good of the member.<sup>42</sup> Each member’s function is unique and distinct to that

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<sup>41</sup> David G. Peterson, *Romans*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 445.

<sup>42</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 355.

member.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, no other member can function the way that member has been designed to function within the body. To reference Paul's use of the human body: the kidneys cannot function like the stomach and the stomach cannot function like the kidneys. When each part of the body functions as it should, the body is healthy.<sup>44</sup>

In verse 6, Paul stresses the importance of using the different gifts, given by the Lord, properly. The point of his statement is to emphasize that gifts are given to be used in the way they were designed. This means the gifts are to be used toward maintaining and strengthening the body's unity.<sup>45</sup> Gifts are given for the benefit of the body and the body will function properly as each gift is used within the body.

One finds a key understanding of the body of Christ from these verses. The importance of each member functioning is key to the health of the body as a whole. Just like the human body, the proper working of each part in the church (the body of Christ) is key to the church's healthiness. This does not mean the church cannot continue to work, it only means the church is not working to its full capacity. If one part of the human body is injured, the body will compensate for that injury by other parts working harder. However, this is not ideal and can lead to other injuries and illness. This is the same for the church. The body can continue but one part not functioning can hinder other parts of the body.

### **Ephesians 4:4-16**

In Ephesians, Paul's use of the image of the body of Christ is most detailed. It centers on verses 1-3 which state the importance of how each member of the body treats the others. In verse 3, Paul emphasizes the importance of maintaining the unity which the church possesses through the Spirit. It is not a call to establish something that does not

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<sup>43</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 1309.

<sup>44</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 928-29.

<sup>45</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 764.



already exist, but to preserve what is already a reality.<sup>46</sup> Three themes emerge from this passage that helps in understanding the image of the body of Christ. These are gifting, roles, and growth.

## **Gifting**

In verses 4-6, Paul gives a trinitarian basis for the unity of the body. This is because components of the Christian faith, mentioned in these verses, “revolve around the three persons of the Trinity.”<sup>47</sup> However, these elements and the trinitarian basis must not be understood as different modes within the Godhead. Paul is not presenting different works of the three persons of the Godhead as separate works. Paul is emphasizing unity within the Godhead, which then becomes the basis for unity of the body. He uses these verses to set up his discussion of diversity in the body in verses 7-16. Thielman is correct with his insight: “The section serves as a theological basis both for the practical admonitions to unity in 4:1-3 and for the emphasis on unity amid diversity in 4:7-16.”<sup>48</sup> The constant use of one within the work of the Trinity points to the unity within the body.

This oneness is expressed in the body through various gifts given to members within that body. It is preserved through the use of these gifts.<sup>49</sup> These gifts are distinct and perform a service for the benefit of the entire body.<sup>50</sup> These gifts are given according to Christ’s plan. He determines the amount and who receives each gift.<sup>51</sup> Paul’s statement

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<sup>46</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 511.

<sup>47</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 513.

<sup>48</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 256.

<sup>49</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 521.

<sup>50</sup> Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 339-340.

<sup>51</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 413.

of “each one” reveals that each member of the body has a gift. If these gifts are given for the benefit of the body, then each has a purpose. So, each person in the body has a call to edify the church.<sup>52</sup>

Paul’s emphasis on the gifts is important to mention. Each member using their gifts is important for the growth of the whole body. Arnold describes this connection. “The Christian community is essential for growth to maturity because Christ has sovereignly endowed every individual with special abilities to minister to all the other members.”<sup>53</sup> If the body is going to mature, each part must work as it has been gifted to work. This truth is portrayed further by Paul’s explanation in verse 16 of growth taking place as a whole body and not individually. So, because of the unity of the body, each part contributes to the whole. This has been mentioned above in the discussion of Romans 12:3-8, but the emphasis here is on spiritual gifts contributing to the growth of the body. As the body grows, it grows in unity. Each member contributes by using his or her gifting within the body for the benefit of the body.<sup>54</sup>

What are the implications of this for the church? First, there should be acknowledgment and gratitude for the various gifts within the body. Each is dependent on the other.<sup>55</sup> It is precisely because of the various gifts that contribution to the growth of the body can take place with each member. As each believer encourages and builds up the others,<sup>56</sup> there is growth. Christ is the source of this growth because He is the one who has distributed the gifts and empowers each member to use them.

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<sup>52</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 263.

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 407.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 412.

<sup>55</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Epub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 859, Kindle.

<sup>56</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 960.

## Roles

In verse 11, Paul presents individuals who have been gifted as given to the church. This list does not speak of gifts given, but of gifted individuals given to the church. The list is understood in various ways. Arnold sees it as a list of individuals within the community who have been gifted “to establish churches, minister the Word of God, and equip others for service in the church.”<sup>57</sup> Bruce understands these gifts as being the persons who are given.<sup>58</sup> Thielman views Paul’s focus to be more on the activities these individuals engage in rather than the position.<sup>59</sup> Each of these provides a helpful understanding of Paul’s usage. It is best to understand this list as gifted leaders given to the church for the equipping of each member to grow in their use of their spiritual gift. This fits the context of what Paul has already said about Christ giving each member a gift. These gifts are to be used in service within the body. The leaders mentioned in verse 11 help members grow in that use.

The reasons for these leaders being given to the church are given in verse 12. They equip the church in the work of ministry. This results in the body of Christ being built up. This verse has been interpreted in two ways. Thielman helpfully notes:

The first view takes this phrase as coordinate with the preceding phrase, which is translated as for the equipping of the saints. On this view, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers not only bring the saints to full maturity, but they also do the work of ministry ... The second view claims that the phrase fill out the meaning of the term, now translated as preparation or equipping. The five groups of verse 11, then, prepare or equip the saints for the work of ministry.<sup>60</sup>

Bruce agrees with Thielman, citing that the second and third phrases are dependent on the first because there is a different preposition used in the first phrase.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the first

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<sup>57</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 428.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 345-46.

<sup>59</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 273.

<sup>60</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 349.

prepositional phrase “sets the agenda for the work of the gifted leaders.”<sup>62</sup> This should be the preferred understanding. Paul has already mentioned that Christ has given each believer in the body a gift. These gifts are to be used in service for the body. It would be against what he has already presented to teach that only the leaders do the work of ministry. There would be no reason for every member to have a gift. Bruce is also correct in pointing out the diversity of service needed in the community. Diversity of service needs a diversity of gifts.<sup>63</sup>

With this understanding, one can move forward in discussing this passage. Gifted leaders equip the saints who do the work of ministry. There is mutuality of service being completed. Every member is called to do the work of ministry and there is no distinction between those who are leaders and those who are not.<sup>64</sup> Each has a role. There is no place for the view of “professionals serving a group of consumers.”<sup>65</sup>

As each fulfills their role, the body of Christ is built up. Paul emphasizes the need of every member doing their part. Leaders’ responsibility is to equip. The people are responsible for the work of ministry. Both are contributing to the body in different but equally important roles. When these roles are fulfilled, there is growth. When these roles are neglected, growth is hindered. It is important to note here that the equipping of the saints by the leaders and the work of service should be in accordance with how Christ has given the gifts. He gave them for a reason, and they should be developed and used according to that purpose.

The implications of this for the church are important to note. First, Christ is the one who gives gifts to His church. These gifts are because of His grace and not one’s

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<sup>62</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 441.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 349.

<sup>64</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 549.

<sup>65</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 439.

ability or status in the body. Second, these gifts are given for use in the church. There is design to how they are to be developed and used. Third, the gifts are to be used in the role for which they were given. Gifted leaders are to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The saints are to do the work of ministry. Each role is important and essential to the growth of the body. Every person has a role and when that role is not fulfilled, the growth of the body is hindered.

## **Growth**

In verses 13-16, Paul provides further explanation of the goal of building up the body. The connection of these verses to the previous one is that of the church being built up. It is not speaking of Christ's continuing to give gifted leaders to the church until unity is attained. Rather, it is speaking of the building up of the body into that unity of the faith.<sup>66</sup> Arnold is correct in asserting that the three statements in this verse do not express three different goals but three aspects of one goal.<sup>67</sup> The goal is the maturity of the body. This happens when the body attains the unity of the faith, grows in the knowledge of Christ, and measures to the stature of Christ. Each one must be discussed.

One must now seek to understand what unity of the faith means. Because of Paul's emphasis on unity, it should be understood as something that does not divide but is the source of unity for believers. Hagner believes it to happen when the church realizes that faith is "faith in the one person, Jesus Christ."<sup>68</sup> This is not adequate because when one becomes a part of the body is when one has placed his faith in Christ. It would seem, then, the church already realizes faith is in Christ alone. Thielman, on the other hand, believes it to be an acknowledgment of "a particular body of doctrine."<sup>69</sup> This would

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<sup>66</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 444.

<sup>68</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 555.

<sup>69</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

seem to put the goal as that which cannot be reached. The church has often differed between different denominations. This would be an almost impossible goal to be reach on this side of eternity. Bruce views it as that which binds believers together.<sup>70</sup> This would indicate something that has already happened. However, Paul sees this as something that is yet to be attained by using the word, “until.” It seems best to understand faith as belief in Christ and all that it entails. Faith in Christ is that which binds the church to one another. However, faith in Christ entails all that Christ accomplished being imparted to the believer when he places his trust in Christ for salvation. This includes spiritual gifts and their use in within and for the body. It also includes the call to be like Christ. The unity of the faith, then, would entail the body moving toward being like Christ. This fits with Paul understanding of the church growing as a body in verse 16. This seems to best fit the context of the passage. The church moves toward this goal on this side of eternity but will never reach it. However, they are to continue to pursue it, nonetheless. It will only be fully realized on the other side of eternity.

The body is also to grow in the knowledge of Christ. This knowledge is for the church and not just for individuals.<sup>71</sup> This knowledge is knowledge of Christ. But what does this knowledge entail? Hagner is helpful here: “This knowledge is not an abstract but a concrete knowledge of Christ, which is the opposite of the deceitful doctrines promoted by people as mentioned in verse 14.”<sup>72</sup> Thielman is right in his assertion of the knowledge being an experiential knowledge, although he believes this to be personal.<sup>73</sup> Paul has emphasized the need for the body to grow as one body. Therefore, this growth of knowledge is to happen corporately. Certainly, individuals within the body will grow at

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<sup>70</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 350.

<sup>71</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 553.

<sup>72</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 554.

<sup>73</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

different levels and speeds; however, as each one grows, he helps the others in the body to grow as well. The church grows in this knowledge as it understands more and more of Christ and rejects the false teachings that continually threaten the body.

The final aspect of the maturity of the body is that the body is to measure to Christ's stature. This points to Christ as the standard by which the church is to grow. This entails "reflecting his virtues and likeness."<sup>74</sup> Hagner believes this statement to apply to spiritual gifts and their use. As believers use these gifts in the measure they were meant to be used, "then the body will measure to Christ's full stature." He continues, "This does not imply that the church completes Christ. Rather, as the gifts from Christ are used then the church will measure up to Christ's full stature."<sup>75</sup> Thus, the church will give a full picture of Christ to the world. If the church is the body of Christ, then it should reflect Christ. Stature here, then, points to the standard to which the church is to grow. "The glorified provides the standard at which his people are to aim: the corporate Christ cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ."<sup>76</sup>

One final point should be highlighted from this passage. The growth presented is a corporate growth and not an individual growth. Paul's use of man in verse 13 is singular, indicating the church as one. In verse 16, Paul speaks of the growth of the body and not individuals. So, how is one to understand this growth when the body is made up of different individuals. First, individuals within the body cannot be separated from the body and still grow. There is a connection of each individual part. This has already been discussed above and requires not further information. Second, growth is a shared experience. As the human body works together to provide what is needed for the body, so does the body of Christ. For example, the human body consist of teeth which eat the

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<sup>74</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 447.

<sup>75</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 557.

<sup>76</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 351.

food, an esophagus which carries the food to the stomach, a stomach which digests the food, and intestines which absorb nutrients and get rid of waste. All of this works together for the benefit of the body. Paul speaks of every joint working and doing its part for the body. Therefore, as each individual grows, he is to use that growth to contribute to the body which results in maturity of the whole body.<sup>77</sup>

It is at this point, one must understand the implications for the church. First, there is a goal which the church should aim. That goal is to be like Christ. There is no need for churches to try and be like other churches which are having success. There is much to learn from other churches, but each local body is to strive to be like Christ. Second, growth takes place as a body. When one is disconnected from the body, growth does not take place. One must be connected to the body to receive the benefit of others' spiritual gifts. One part helps the other part grow toward Christ.

### **Colossians 1:18a, 2:19**

In these two verses, Paul presents two key themes concerning the body of Christ image. In 1:18a, the context is within a creedal statement concerning Christ's identity. In 2:19, the context is the contrast of growth from God within the body and following false teaching which has no place in the body. Two themes emerge concerning the image of the body of Christ. These are source and vulnerability.

#### **Source**

In Colossians 1:18a, Paul speaks of Christ as the head of the body. Christ as the head indicates He is the source of life for the body. Melick sees this relationship of Christ as the head and the church as the body as organic.<sup>78</sup> This is acceptable only if it does not push the image too far. Bruce is helpful here:

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<sup>77</sup> Hagner, *Ephesians*, 558.

<sup>78</sup> Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, in vol. 32 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 220.



Thus, in speaking of the church as the body of Christ, one thinks of it as vitalized by his abiding presence with it and his risen life in it; one thinks of it as energized by his power; one may even (without transgressing legitimate bounds) think of it as the instrument through which he carries out his work on earth. But to think of it as an extension of his incarnation is to exceed the limits which the Pauline exposition of the body permits.<sup>79</sup>

Rather, one should view this organic relationship in terms of the life that animates the church and the connection the church has with Christ.<sup>80</sup> Melick goes too far in pushing the image to convey the idea that the head is incomplete unless it has the body.<sup>81</sup> Paul's purpose is to demonstrate that Christ is the source of the church and that the church, as the body, is not complete without the head.

The implications of this understanding for the church cannot be overstated. If the church is to understand its identity as the body of Christ, then it must understand its source as Christ Himself. The church is to be the body, but it is to act and work in line with the head. This means the church does not exist for itself, but for Christ. This also means the church cannot seek to be self-sufficient but must continually stay connected to the head.

### **Vulnerability**

Much has already been stated concerning identity and the connection each member has with the other. However, in Colossians 2:19, Paul provides a different angle to be considered as he points to the danger of members not staying connected to the body. In verses 16-18, Paul presents the false teaching that is a threat to the church at Colossae. When Paul mentions this false teaching, he contrasts it with the teaching that is connected to the body. The indication is that some are following teachings which are not the truth. Moreover, one is vulnerable to these teachings when one is not connected to the body.

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<sup>79</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 70-71.

<sup>80</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 71.

<sup>81</sup> Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 221.

What does this have to do with the theme of vulnerability? It is precisely because one has disconnected himself from that body that a selfish mindset had emerged. “This self-inflation and pride in private religious experiences come of not maintaining contact with the head ... each part of the body functions properly so long as it is under the control of the head.”<sup>82</sup> When one disconnects himself from the body, individual identity becomes more prominent than corporate identity. This leaves one vulnerable to attacks and deception. Disconnecting from the body is not trivial, it is a serious matter for the “body to be dislocated from the Head.”<sup>83</sup>

The implication of this for the local church is obvious. The local church provides a place where the Word of God is taught and preached, and the work of the corporate body is most visible. It is a place where doctrine is discussed, and one can grow in one’s understanding of the Word (assuming the church is faithful in teaching the Scriptures). It is in the protection of staying connected with the local body that one can recognize the need for connection to the body.

### **Application**

After examining each passage where this image is used, application can now be made to membership in the local church. The themes from this image can be applied to membership in the local church. “For any who question the propriety of using phrases like “church members” or “church membership,” it is worth noting that the body image gives us both the precedence for such language and the proper understanding of it.”<sup>84</sup>

Paul stresses the unity, diversity, equality, care, and concern for each member in the body. Membership in a local body provides a place where these elements can be

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<sup>82</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 273.

<sup>84</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 46.

practiced. This entails members caring for each other, recognizing the importance of every member. Those who are members of the same local body must also recognize the equality of each member. There should not be factions in the church. One member should not be elevated above another. The diversity of the church should remind the local body that membership will include individuals from all walks of life, social status, income, ethnicities, and cultures. It is precisely because of this diversity that true unity can be displayed.

It is important here to mention how members in the body should act toward other members. One should be willing to express care and concern for other members without expectation of receiving anything in return. It is because one recognizes the importance of each member to the function of the whole body that he is willing to take the first step in expressing care. Also, it is important for each member to treat other members with respect. There should be no elevation of self above any other member.

Next, Paul provides a picture of how essential each member is to the functioning of the local body. Each member has a part to play. They have been gifted by Christ to serve in the church. This is most prominently expressed in a local body of believers. This demonstrates the importance of being connected to a local church. It is in the local church that one can learn of his spiritual gift, grow in the use of that gift, and use it to serve the body. Membership in a local church is important for one to use the gifting he has received from Christ.

This also has application for those who are already members in a local church. If a member is not functioning properly, the whole body is affected. One must be willing to do his part in helping the body function. Each part has a place, and each part must do his part for the body to be healthy. This means there is no place for a member to gather with the church without helping in the ministry. Each role is important for the body to function as a body. Even one member not functioning can cause the body to be unhealthy.

Members must also understand the roles they play in the local body. Leaders

are to provide a place where equipping of the members is essential. Members should be ready to carry out the work of service in ministry. Everyone is called to work, and this work should be consistent to one's role. When the leader is asked to do all the work in the local church, the body suffers. When members do not do their part, ministry does not expand to its designed point. The call to do the work of ministry is a call to every member in the local body.

Another application for the local church is in how each member votes. The context of this writer is in a church where the congregation votes on major issues and decisions. Each member is called to remember the source of the body, which is Christ. Christ is the head. This means that each member should seek to make decisions that will honor Christ. It means that prayer and the reading of Scripture should direct the church both individually as members and the body as a whole. Each decision should not be based on the majority but what Christ wants for the church. He is the head, the source of the church and the standard by which the church should be moving towards. This leaves no place for members to put their wants and desires above what is beneficial for the body to grow toward Christ. It also leaves no room for members to seek division for the sake of getting one's way.

This does not just apply to congregational churches but any church, regardless of church government and polity. Regardless of whether one belongs to a church where the members vote or not, the goal of growing toward Christ still stands. Every decision by those who make the decisions in each church should be to please Christ. Ministries, gatherings, meetings, or whatever else the church does should move towards growth into Christ who is the head of the church.

One final application for membership needs to be mentioned. When members are disconnected from the local body, they are vulnerable to attack and selfishness. This is no more clearly illustrated than examining the events of the past two years during the Covid-19 pandemic. Members have cut themselves off from the local body and have now

found many ways, all which center around self, to stay disconnected. Individualism became the prominent factor in decisions made. This is the result of disconnect from a local body. If one does not stay connected to the body, one cannot grow.

### **Conclusion**

From the above examination, the image of the body of Christ provides key themes for understanding and practicing church membership in the local church. As the nature of the church is examined through this image, the importance of membership in the local church is illustrated. This is not because the image speaks directly to membership. It is because the image provides an understanding of the church universal, displayed in local bodies, where membership provides an opportunity for one to actively express one's identity as a member of the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 3  
HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING  
OF CHURCH IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP IN  
BAPTIST CHURCHES

Baptists have always held to an understanding of the church being composed of believers. This is a central component of Baptist belief.<sup>1</sup> However, there seems to be a gap between what Baptists have historically practiced as an outworking of this belief and what contemporary Baptist churches practice. The belief has not changed, but the emphasis on that belief seems to have weakened. For example, contemporary Baptist churches have continually struggled with a discrepancy between their membership rolls and attendance. In the report from the 2020 annual church profile of the Southern Baptist Convention, there were 14,089,947 people recorded as members in 47,592 cooperating churches. However, weekly attendance only averaged 4,439,797.<sup>2</sup> There is a major difference between members and those members who attend the weekly gathering of the church.

Perhaps this is a sign that understanding church identity and membership in the present-day Baptist church is not common knowledge. It also points to the fact that this understanding needs to be taught. Historically, how did Baptist churches understand church identity and membership? Were there common biblical principles that were understood concerning the church? Also, what are the practical implications for

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<sup>1</sup> John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “Fast Facts,” last modified January 5, 2022, <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts/>. It is important to mention that COVID-19 greatly effected these numbers but really only amplified what was already an issue in the Southern Baptist Convention.

practicing regenerate church membership and why is it important to do so? These questions deserve an answer. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical Baptist understanding of church identity and membership and the practical implications of practicing regenerate church membership in Baptist churches.

### **Historical Understanding of Church Identity and Membership**

If one is to understand the Baptist church, one must understand its distinctives. One of the key distinctives is regenerate church membership; that is, the church should be “comprised only of individuals who provide credible evidence they have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.”<sup>3</sup> More will be discussed on this below, but it is mentioned here to demonstrate that the church and its make-up are key teachings of the Baptist church, especially in regards to membership. It is the “chief contribution of Baptists to the wider Christian community.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, the identity of the church and who is allowed to be a member in that church have historically been foundational teachings within Baptists’ congregations. Baptists have traditionally agreed with other Christian denominations on key teachings such as the Trinity, salvation in Christ alone, the virgin birth, the necessity of evangelism, etc. However, ecclesiology is where Baptists have differed and been unique among other Christian denominations. This is especially the case concerning church identity and membership. To appreciate this difference, key historical Baptists’ teachings on church identity and membership will be presented in the first part of this chapter. Historically, Baptists have understood the church as a covenant community. This covenant community is centered on the Word and practices the two ordinances given in Scripture. Membership in this community is limited

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 330, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Dever, “Regaining Meaningful Church Membership,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcom B. Yarnell III, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 52.

to those who are baptized believers. Church discipline must be practiced to protect the witness and identity of this community.

### **The Church Is a Covenant Community**

The first historical mark among Baptists for understanding the church is that the church is a covenant community. Benjamin Keach, an English Baptist minister who lived from 1640 to 1704 and pastored Horsley-down Church in London, wrote much on this subject. He is known as perhaps the first to introduce hymn singing in England and as an operator of a bookshop.<sup>5</sup> However, his key contribution for the church is his writings on the nature of the church.<sup>6</sup> Concerning the idea of the church as a covenant community, he wrote:

And when admitted members, before the church they must solemnly enter into a covenant, to walk in the fellowship of that particular congregation, and submit themselves to the care and discipline thereof, and to walk faithfully with God in all his holy ordinances, and there to be fed and have communion, and worship God there, when the church meets (if possible) and give themselves up to the watch and charge of the pastor and ministry thereof: the pastor then also signifying in the name of the church their acceptance of each person, and endeavor to take the care of them, and to watch over them in the Lord, (the members being first satisfied to receive them, and to have communion with them) and so the pastor to give them the right hand of fellowship of the church, or church organical.<sup>7</sup>

To join a church in Keach's mind was to commit oneself to the church. This was a commitment to a community where believers would place themselves under the charge of the pastor as well as the church.

This commitment was more than just spoken words. It was the realization that the church was a divine institution which was built upon Christ and his directives.<sup>8</sup> With

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<sup>5</sup> William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), 239-40.

<sup>6</sup> James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2019), 84.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Keach, "The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display'd," in *Polity*, ed. Mark Dever, (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964), 77.



this recognition, believers would covenant together to be the church as Christ intended to church. It was the joining together of believers to carrying out the commands of Christ. They declared in their joining of the church that they intended to join with that particular church by covenant to carry out the commission of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

It was also a commitment to one another. This commitment was mutual. The person joining the church would commit to carry out the duties of a church member. The church would also commit to the new members to help them in their growth. Together, they would commit to the mutual benefit of one another. Again, Keach is helpful here: “A church of Christ, according to the gospel-institution, is a congregation of godly Christians, who as a stated-assembly (being first baptized upon the profession of faith) do by mutual agreement and consent give themselves up to the Lord, and one to another, according to the will of God . . .”<sup>10</sup> Through this commitment, everyone in the church would work as one body for the mutual edification of one another. Through this, God would be glorified, and the church would grow up into Christ as their head.<sup>11</sup>

This commitment to one another also spoke of accountability to one another. Baptist teachers would go to great lengths to demonstrate this accountability by presenting what Scripture teaches concerning duties and practices of members toward one another. Some of those listed were to love one another, not speaking evil toward one another, bearing with one another, sharing with each other their grievances, promoting peace and harmony, edifying one another, helping each other grow, stirring up one another, being confidential about church meetings, helping the poor, avoiding lawsuits,

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<sup>9</sup> Greg Wills, “The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Dever, *Polity*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Keach, “The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d,” 64-5.

<sup>11</sup> Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, “A Summary of Church Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church,” in Dever, *Polity*, 118.

and holding each other accountable for attendance.<sup>12</sup>

Often, the expression of this belief was presented in written form through church covenants. Various covenants can be referenced throughout Baptist history. These covenants were presented in a way that defined what the church believed about common beliefs, especially regarding how members were to act toward one another. It was expressed through various uses of words. The *Covenant of the Baptist Church at Caerleon*, written in 1770, stated that members “give themselves to one another according to the will of God to be a part of the visible church of Christ here upon earth”<sup>13</sup> The *Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church*, written in 1783, states that those who belong to the church join “to one another in covenant promising by the grace of God to act towards each other as brethren in Christ.”<sup>14</sup> The *Covenant of J. Newton Brown’s The Baptist Church Manual*, written in 1853, and used by many Baptist’s churches from that point forward, presents the church as gathering together as they “most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

Most covenants would mention how members were to treat one another. There would be some basic doctrinal teachings about belief in God and what the church believes about Christ. There would also be some commitments members would make to Christ and each other. As one joined the church, one would sign the covenant stating one’s obligation to the church and the church’s obligation to the new member.

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Jones, “Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory: Done by Appointment of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,” in Dever, *Polity*, 150-51.

<sup>13</sup> “Covenant of the Baptist Church,” in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. Timothy George and Denise George, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 185.

<sup>14</sup> “Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church,” in George and George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> “Covenant of J. Newton Brown’s The Baptist Church Manual,” in George and George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, 223.

## **The Church Is Centered on the Word of God and Practice of the Ordinances**

The second historical mark of Baptists concerning the church is that the church must be centered on the Word of God and practice of the ordinances. The church is to determine its practice based solely on the Word.<sup>16</sup> This means that practices that are not governed by the Word are to be put aside. Baptist churches are to organize themselves around the Word. Their identity is to be a people who demonstrate their commitment to God's Word, and this is shown through their practice.<sup>17</sup> This means their worship, practice, ministries, and service in the name of the Lord must have biblical precedence. This is the reason they assemble themselves together as a body.<sup>18</sup>

This is demonstrated clearly as one reads various confessions of faith in Baptist tradition. For instance, the First London Confession of 1644 states, "every particular member of each church, how excellent, great, or learned soever, ought to be subject to this censure and judgment of Christ."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, a Baptist confession of faith entitled, *The Faith and Practise of Thirty Congregations*, written in London in 1651 states, "That the only foundation of the Church of God, is the doctrine of the Apostles or prophets, as they spring from Jesus Christ the chiefe cornerstone, whereon this or any-other people are to be built together as the house of God."<sup>20</sup>

As one continues through history, one would be hard pressed to find any Baptist confession that does not present God's Word as the standard. The Second London Confession in 1688 speaks of churches being "under the censures and government

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<sup>16</sup> Van Ness Nowlin, *The Baptist Spirit* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1926), 318.

<sup>17</sup> J. O. Rust, "Why Converted Church Membership," in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1900).

<sup>18</sup> John L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2012), 74.

<sup>19</sup> William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. Bill J. Leonard, 2nd Revised ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2011), 156.

<sup>20</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 168.

thereof, according to the rule of Christ.”<sup>21</sup> The Baptist Faith and Message, 1963, says that the church is to be “committed to his teachings” and operates “under the Lordship of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> The updated Baptist Faith and Message 2000 clarifies these statements by presenting the church as “governed by His laws,” operating “under the Lordship of Christ,” and “responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.”<sup>23</sup> What is clear from the references above is that Baptists have always been people who are governed and guided by the Bible. God’s Word is the standard for faith and practice in Baptists churches.

Baptists have also emphasized the practices of the ordinances. There are two ordinances that are practiced among Baptist church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The reason for the practice of only two ordinances is because of Baptists’ commitment to the Word as the standard of faith. Baptists have traditionally practiced what is known as the regulative principle. This principle teaches that only what is commanded in Scripture should be practiced. If Scripture does not command something regarding worship, it is not to be practiced. Only what is commanded in Scripture should be practiced.<sup>24</sup> This chapter is not focused on presenting beliefs on these two ordinances so a brief word of explanation will suffice for Baptists’ understanding. These do not impart any grace but are a recognition of the grace found in Christ, given by the grace of Christ. They are ordained by Christ to be symbols of the new covenant relationship believers have in Christ. Baptism is the initial symbol and the Lord’s Supper is the ongoing symbol.<sup>25</sup>

Baptism is the initial mark of obedience for those who have trusted in Christ. It symbolizes a believer’s new identity in Christ. It pictures one giving himself to God. It is

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<sup>21</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 288

<sup>22</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 413.

<sup>23</sup> “The Baptist Faith and Message,” Accessed August 30, 2022. <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>

<sup>24</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 429.

<sup>25</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 323.

also the prerequisite for membership in the church. “As profession is necessary to church-membership, so is baptism . . . profession is the substance, and baptism is the form; but Christ command required the form as well as the substance.”<sup>26</sup> It does not save but demonstrates that one has been saved. Therefore, baptism is reserved for those who have professed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. There is no indication in Scripture of baptism being for any other person than one who has trusted Christ. This means that baptism is not for infants.

The second ordinance given in the New Testament is the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. This teaching is given in the Gospels (Matt 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; and Luke 22:19-20) and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. There are two elements used in this practice: the bread and the fruit of the vine. The bread symbolizes the body of Christ which was broken. It reminds those who partake of the Lord’s Supper that Christ laid down his life as a sacrifice like the Passover lamb in the Old Testament. It is a reminder that Christ substituted Himself and took the penalty for sins. As the bread is broken, those who participate in the Lord’s Supper remember the body of Christ broken. The other element is the fruit of the vine. The point of the fruit of the vine is to remember the blood of Christ which was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. When believers take the cup, they are reminded of the sacrifice Christ made on the cross by shedding his blood. It is a beautiful picture of the unity of the church as they continually practice the Lord’s Supper. According to Benjamin Griffith, when one is received into the church they receive “such a one into the communion and fellowship of that church in particular.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Griffith, “A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” in Dever, *Polity*, 101.

## **Only Baptized Believers Can be Members of a Local Church**

Perhaps the most distinctive mark of Baptist churches throughout history is the belief in regenerate church membership. For Baptists, the nature of the church is at risk if individuals are allowed to be members who have not trusted Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>28</sup> If the church is to be the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, etc., then it is essential that church membership be reserved for only those who are believers. To allow members who are not converted is to discredit the nature of the church as a body of believers.

Baptist teachings concerning this belief in regenerate church membership stem from the teachings of Scripture. Baptists have understood the Scriptures to teach that the nature of church is those who are “saints by calling” and those called to obedience to Christ, require that members are believers.<sup>29</sup> Second, the exhortations given in Scripture to the church “presume that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus; and the motives by which they are enforced are such as could be expected to have no force upon any other presumption.”<sup>30</sup>

Two distinctive steps are required for church membership in Baptist churches. First, there must be a public declaration of faith in Christ. This is not simply a statement but is the result of both words and actions. The church is to observe the potential member’s life to determine if there is fruit of salvation. Potential members are to “declare to the church what God hath done for their souls,” and then the church is to “enquire after, and take full satisfaction concerning their holy lives, or good conversations.”<sup>31</sup> The point of this inquiry is to gain knowledge of the individual and guard the identity and

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<sup>28</sup> Rust, “Why Converted Church Membership,” 222.

<sup>29</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 284-285.

<sup>30</sup> William Williams, “Apostolical Church Polity,” in Dever, *Polity*, 538.

<sup>31</sup> Keach, “The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d,” 65.

reputation of the church. To allow just anyone to join the church would demonstrate to the world a confused identity of the body of Christ. This in turn affects the witness of the church and the name of Christ. To allow membership to those unconverted is to make the church a “harlot.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Baptists have rejected the teaching that the church should be mixed.<sup>33</sup>

This brings up the question that has often been attached to Baptist churches. How can one really know for sure? The answer is that one cannot really know for sure, but the church is to do its best to take as much time as possible to “make a church a spiritual body.”<sup>34</sup> This does not mean that there will not be some who slip in the church who are not truly converted. John L. Dagg, who provided the Southern Baptist Convention its first systematic theology,<sup>35</sup> presents the answer to this question most clearly:

But the objection may be present in another form. The failure of a church to keep out false professors, does not necessarily arise from moral delinquency in its members; it may be wholly owing to the unavoidable fallibility of human judgment. Since their failure is not criminal, it is not a violation of divine law; and, therefore, the divine law does not provide for a perfectly pure church ... The objection in this form would be embarrassing, if the church which admits a false professor, were the only party concerned in the transaction. But the false professor himself is a party, and the most responsible party. He does not love Christ; and this want of love not only unfits him for a place in the church, but is criminal ... Churches are often criminally careless, both in the reception of members, and in the discipline of them when received. If the piety of churches were very fervent, men of cold hearts could not remain happy among them, and could not continue to have their true character concealed.<sup>36</sup>

This means that if someone slips in the church who is truly unconverted, then it is a

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<sup>32</sup> Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, “A Summary of Church Discipline: Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church,” 122.

<sup>33</sup> Warren McWilliams, “The Church Seeks to be Regenerate,” in *Defining Baptist Convictions: Guidelines for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Charles W. Deweese, (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1996), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Rust, “Why Converted Church Membership,” 209.

<sup>35</sup> Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 99.

mistake that can happen because humans are fallible. Sometimes, it is possible for the church to make a mistake. The church is at fault if it does not take the time to examine and treats membership lightly. Ultimately, the person is at fault because they have presented themselves falsely to the church as a genuine follower of Christ. Time will reveal those who are genuine and those who are not because the church's faithfulness in following Christ will shine forth the light of Christ. When light shines in darkness, it reveals. When an unbeliever is in the midst of genuine believers shining forth the light of Christ, their true status will not be able to remain concealed.

One may wonder as to the process of hearing potential members' testimony of salvation to join the church. This process was not taken lightly. It involved appearing before the congregation, being interviewed by the congregation, and giving satisfactory evidence that one had been converted. Potential members were given an opportunity to attend a monthly meeting, usually on a Saturday. They were allowed to share their testimony before the church. The church would ask them questions concerning their salvation and life since their profession. The church was satisfied if the potential member demonstrated sorrow, repentance, and grief over their sins. They had to express their joy of trusting Christ and present evidence of a changed life. Upon approval, they gained membership to the church once they were baptized.<sup>37</sup>

Baptists understood that their teaching on regenerate church membership was restrictive. However, they understood it to be biblical. They also wanted to guard the church so that the church would be an effective witness for Christ in the world. They desired to be careful without closing the door too tight. "In admitting persons to baptism and then into the church, all precaution should be attended to, and carefulness used, that we open not the doors too wide on the one hand, nor on the other keep them too

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<sup>37</sup> Wills, "The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 23.



closed.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, they welcomed new members and wanted to see the church grow, but they would not compromise what the Scriptures taught to have greater numbers.

The second step for membership was baptism. Baptism was the second part of their public profession of Christ. Baptism was reserved for those who had trusted in Christ. For instance, in the *Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association, 1816*, it stated that believers were the only “fit subjects,” and the mode of baptism was immersion.<sup>39</sup> Both the 1963 and the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* state that a church is made up of “baptized believers.”<sup>40</sup> Baptism was the visible, outward mark of a believer which was publicly demonstrated to the church. Upon this baptism, the person was admitted into membership. To allow those who were not believers to be baptized was to go against the will of the Savior.<sup>41</sup>

This baptism was not just a religious ritual. It was an act whereby the person demonstrated his obedience. Regeneration was proclaimed through their words and declared in baptism.

This public profession of faith is the voluntary act of an intelligent moral agent declaring his conversion. No one is ever admitted into a Baptist church until he professes conversion. Again, Baptist demand that the convert shall further declare his faith in baptism, a public immersion of the believer in water. Thus we require two professions of the applicant for church membership; one in word of confession, the other in the act of baptism. In the former the convert speaks his faith; in the latter he acts his faith in the solemn symbolism of immersion.<sup>42</sup>

For Baptists, then, baptism followed profession and was a prerequisite for membership.

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, “Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory: Done by Appointment of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,” 152.

<sup>39</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 375.

<sup>40</sup> See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 413. See also “The Baptist Faith and Message,” Accessed August 30, 2022. <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>

<sup>41</sup> P. H. Mell, “Corrective Church Discipline with a Development of the Scriptural Principles Upon Which it is Based,” in Dever, *Polity*, 422.

<sup>42</sup> Rust, “Why Converted Church Membership,” 209.

This first step of obedience was a demonstration of one's faith. It was a visible step of obedience and pictured one's conversion. This is evident as one reads various Baptist confessions of faith.<sup>43</sup>

### **Church Discipline Must Be Practiced**

Closely related to regenerate church membership is the practice of church discipline. Baptists throughout history have regarded these as necessary for the practice of the other. If one does not guard the membership of the church, one has no basis for practicing church discipline. Those who are unbelievers will not readily accept discipline. Also, if a church does not practice church discipline, it allows those who are not truly regenerate to continue in practice within the church without the conviction of a congregation who shines forth the light of Christ.

What is interesting concerning church discipline is that just as a day was set aside for accepting members, many Baptists taught that a day should be set aside for discipline. Discipline was not to be practice on the Lord's Day. That day was set aside for worship. If a church was to practice discipline (and they should), it should be done on a day where the subject matter would not "hinder their meditation in the Word which they have newly heard."<sup>44</sup> If it was practiced on the Lord's Day, it would be the only thing the people would remember. Thus, it would hinder the thought and application of what was preached from the Word.

However, the setting aside of a day for discipline is a practice that should not be overlooked. If one sets aside a day for a certain activity or reason, one is demonstrating the importance of that activity or reason. Therefore, as Baptist practices are observed, it is evident that church discipline was an important practice throughout

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<sup>43</sup> See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*.

<sup>44</sup> Keach, "The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display'd," 70.

Baptist history. If Baptist churches set aside a day for discipline, then one can understand the importance of that practice.

A church should practice church discipline because Christ had given them the authority to do so. “By virtue of the charter and the power aforesaid, which Christ hath given to his church, his spiritual corporation, they are enabled to receive members in, and to exclude unworthy members as occasion may require ...”<sup>45</sup> Again, this authority was given by Christ. It should be used in accordance with what the Scriptures say about the practice of such discipline. However, if a church does not practice this discipline, it is neglecting a task given to it by Christ.

The purpose of discipline was to restore a member who had neglected their call to follow Christ by engaging in belief or practice which was against what Scripture taught. The goal was not to remove the member, though that would happen if they did not repent; rather, restoration, guarding the teachings of Christ, and guarding the witness of the church. The church was to put forth every effort to restore the person without compromising on the teachings of Christ. “That the people of God ought to have a tender respect towards them as long as there is any hope of being instrumental in the use of that means which God hath appointed for the recovering them out of the snare of sin ...”<sup>46</sup>

The church was to practice discipline with great care. It was not to be performed without much prayer and Scriptural support. As with all practices of the church, it was to glorify Christ. Faithful practice of church discipline would bring glory to God. If it was practiced in a way contrary to Christ’s command, it would bring dishonor to Christ, harm the member, and harm the church. “That which primarily tends to the glory of a church is the foundation on which it is built, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Griffith, “A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” 99.

<sup>46</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 169.

<sup>47</sup> Keach, “The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d,” 84.

## **Historical Conclusions**

From the discussion above, it is evident that Baptists have taken the nature of the church seriously. It is one of the chief contributions Baptists have made to the broader spectrum of theology. Members of a church join together in covenant commitment for edification of each other. They join to serve Christ and seek to obey him as he has commanded. Regenerate church membership is essential to preserving the nature of the church. It is a foundational characteristic of Baptist belief.<sup>48</sup> Only those who have trusted Christ and have followed in believer's baptism may join the church because only those who are believers can perform the tasks given to them by Christ. Church discipline is necessary for preserving the witness of the church.

## **Practical Understandings for Church Membership**

If a church puts into practice what Baptists have historically taught and practiced, it will have benefits for both the church and the individual. The focus of this section is not to present ideas for implementation, but to discuss the practical benefits of regenerate church membership in Baptist churches. There are eight benefits of practicing regenerate church membership which will be discussed below. The first four are for the benefit of the church. The last four are for the benefit of the individual.

## **Regenerate Church Membership Guards the Practice of Church Government**

Baptists believe that church government should be congregational; that is, the congregation governs itself as members are able to vote. In this form of church government, the congregation is the final human authority under the Lordship of Christ. If the congregation is to govern themselves in a way that glorifies Christ, it must be made up of believers. Baptist understanding of church government is dependent upon the

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<sup>48</sup> Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*, 330.

church being believers because only believers can receive the guidance of Christ to make decisions that advance the kingdom and are obedient to his will. Those who are believers can, through the Holy Spirit, hear God's voice and respond in obedience. As each individual responds in obedience, they help the congregation to move in the direction Christ is leading.<sup>49</sup> This is both a privilege and responsibility.<sup>50</sup>

The church is to be the body of Christ and make decisions based upon what Christ has commanded in the Scriptures. If the church is mixed in its make-up, it cannot expect to have each member seek the Lord and what he desires for the church. However, if the church is made up of only believers, it can better expect to have each member seek the Lord in the decisions made. Regenerate church membership guards how the church governs.

### **Regenerate Church Membership Guards the Witness of the Church**

The church's witness to those within and those outside the church would be greatly enhanced by a renewal of this practice concerning membership. At the present time, one would only have to look at Baptist roll books to find many names but few attendees. It has become easy to walk down the aisle, make a profession, and be accepted into membership within the church after baptism. This is such a short process that many can join quickly. This results in a church that has many members but few who attend and serve. The witness of the church is hurt. If the members do not take the church seriously, those outside the church will not as well.

This practice causes great confusion. There are many who have walked the aisle to join the church without any evaluation. There have been some who have joined the church without being genuine believers. They simply have their name on a

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<sup>49</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 111.

<sup>50</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 181.

membership roll but do not belong to Christ. They live their lives thinking they are good before God because they belong to a church. They are deceiving themselves. If the current practice of membership within contemporary churches continues, then the church contributes to this deception. This is dangerous and causes great confusion.<sup>51</sup> The church cannot continue to treat membership lightly.

When evaluating the practice of membership, churches must recognize the importance of members serving in the church. This is another area that causes great confusion within and outside the church. Members are allowed to attend sporadically, neglect their spiritual gifts, neglect serving in the church, and still be considered active members. Becoming a member of a church is reduced to nothing more than being a member of a country club. If one pays their dues, they get the recognition and benefits while attending when they want. The outside world sees no difference.

If the church is going to be the witness it is called to be, it must renew the practice of membership. Membership must become meaningful. Society is watching. When a church is practicing meaningful membership, it puts on display what it means to follow Christ (Eph 2:7,10).<sup>52</sup> It shows the world there is something better. It is a display of God's grace in action. "It's God's evangelism program."<sup>53</sup>

It also provides an environment in which the church is better prepared to carry out its mission (Acts 13:1-4). The kingdom of God is advanced through the church through receiving new converts and sending out missionaries for the gospel.<sup>54</sup> Through cooperation, the church makes the gospel visible to a lost and dying world. This is done

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<sup>51</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 175, Kindle.

<sup>52</sup> Believers are walking displays of the grace of God.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 82, Kindle.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Biblical Basis for Church Membership," in *Those Who Must Give An Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, ed. John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), chap. 2, sec. 5, para. 2-4, Kindle.

by exposing false gospels, interacting with other Christians, thus showing the world what the Christian community looks like, meeting the needs of those most vulnerable, and sharing the good news as a body. These tasks are better completed by acting together as a body.<sup>55</sup> When a church practices meaningful membership, members understand the call, understand their commitments, understand their role, and are held accountable by fellow believers to carry out this call. By treating membership lightly, the church provides an atmosphere where the call of the church can also be taken lightly.

### **Regenerate Church Membership Provides an Atmosphere of Effective Church Discipline**

Church discipline has disappeared in many contemporary Baptist churches. It often produces the opposite results of its intent because many churches are not prepared for its implementation. Effective church discipline starts with recovering meaningful church membership. This is for two reasons: meaningful church membership provides an atmosphere for a better practice of church discipline, and it holds both the church and member accountable.

First, an atmosphere for better practice of church discipline because a congregation led by the Holy Spirit will seek to practice it in a way that will honor Christ and restore the member. Hammett writes, “Church discipline and regenerate church membership are related in that the former can be effectively practiced only by a congregation composed of the latter . . .”<sup>56</sup> A congregation composed of believers in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, will have love as their main motivation for practicing church discipline. They will also have restoration as the goal for the member needing discipline (Gal 6:1-2; Matt 18:15-20). As a result, church discipline can be practiced

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<sup>55</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 164-65.

<sup>56</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 115.

more effectively and in a way that advances the kingdom of Christ. Meaningful church membership is the first step in restoring and effectively practicing church discipline.<sup>57</sup>

Second, meaningful church membership also holds both the church and member accountable. This is mentioned under this section of church discipline because effective church discipline means that the church and member recognize their accountability toward one another. Churches will seek to have proper membership rolls to maintain responsibility for its members. This allows them to have the latest information needed concerning their contact information, their current stage of growth, and much more. Members will realize their commitment to the local church as the church sets forth a standard and practice in obedience to Christ.<sup>58</sup> As the church holds to the standard of Christ in the church, it provides an example for all its members to follow. This maintains the genuineness of membership.<sup>59</sup>

### **Regenerate Church Membership Provides a Greater Atmosphere for Obedience to Christ**

All churches should want to honor Christ. If one was to survey churches, one would find this to be the case. However, words and practice are two different items. To honor Christ is to commit to what He is committed. Christ is committed to the church.<sup>60</sup> The Bible presents the church as the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33; 2 Cor 11:2). This means that Christ is the groom. If he is the groom, then the church as the bride should be faithful to him. If the church is to be the bride of Christ, it must be composed of those

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas White, “The Why, How, and When of Church Discipline,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), chap. 10, sec. 1, para. 1, Kindle.

<sup>58</sup> Merkle, “The Biblical Basis for Church Membership,” chap. 2, sec. 3, para. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 115.

<sup>60</sup> Sam Rainer, *7 Basics of Belonging: The Meaning of Church Membership* (Franklin, TN: Church Answers, 2021), 10, Kindle.



who belong to Christ. Therefore, the church should be comprised of members who have trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior.

In this atmosphere, a church that emphasizes regenerate church membership emphasizes an atmosphere of faithfulness. When a body of believers is committed to Christ and to one another, Christ is magnified.<sup>61</sup> It demonstrates to the world that one belongs in Christ's kingdom and represents Jesus to the world. Through the church, believers are made visible to the world as the church observes, questions, and evaluates them for membership, then welcomes them into the church where they can serve in obedience to Christ.<sup>62</sup> This lifts up the name of Christ. Meaningful church membership continues (after baptism) a practice of faithfulness that motivates the church in all its practices. The church is faithful in its evaluation, care, discipleship, and accountability for its members. Members are faithful in their work, responsibility, gathering, and practice to the church. In this, both the church and individual members of the church display faithfulness to Christ.

### **Membership Helps One Be Accountable**

Having discussed the benefits for the church, one can now discuss the benefits of meaningful membership for the individual. Every believer will have days in which they struggle. There will be temptations that will seek to draw him into sin. There are weaknesses in every believer which can ensnare them at any moment. Every believer needs the church for accountability. This is essential for three reasons: believers are not called to live and grow in isolation; the church is a family; and leaders will be held accountable for believers in the church.

First, believers are not called to live and grow in isolation. Accountability has already been mentioned above in the historical section, but it is important to mention it

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<sup>61</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 125.

<sup>62</sup> Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, 79.

here again. The Bible presents those in the church as accountable to one another as there is one body (1 Cor 12:26-27; Eph 5:21). Believers need the support of one another to walk in this Christian life. Also, the body is to grow together, not separately (Eph 4:7-16). Each individual part is important for the growth of the body. Meaningful membership provides an atmosphere where this support and growth can take place. Mark Dever summarizes this well:

Positively, how does the Bible present the Christian life? It is a life not lived in isolation but lived out with other Christians. Christianity is personal but not private. Truly following Christ is committed and regular, not casual and occasional. This is what we mean when we think of being a church member. It is a formal commitment to love and to be loved by those Christians we live around, whom we regularly interact with, whom we desire to hold accountable, and to whom we are held accountable. A certain assembly has accepted the responsibility to teach us, to lead us, to love us, and to care for us, and to correct us when we need it.<sup>63</sup>

Second, the church is a family. There are several references in the Bible for the church as the family of God (Eph 2:19-22; 1 John 3:1-24; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 3:15). If one is part of the family of God, would one not want to be part of a local expression of that family? Membership provides an opportunity for those who have trusted Christ to gather with a local church and fulfill their responsibilities to the family. It also allows the church to fulfill their responsibilities to the fellow family member. Hammett declares: “So, why church membership? It is inescapable for anyone claiming to be a Christian. Salvation itself plunges a believer into God’s community, under God’s Fatherhood of his family, the church.”<sup>64</sup>

Finally, leaders will be held accountable for believers in the church (Heb 13:17). Leadership in the church is to point believers to Christ and continue to exhort, discipline, and provide an example for what this looks like. This is an impossible task without meaningful membership because without commitment to the church and the

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<sup>63</sup> Dever, “Regaining Meaningful Church Membership,” 48.

<sup>64</sup> John Hammett, “The Why and Who of Church Membership,” in Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, chap 8, sec. 2, para. 10, Kindle.

leadership, believers demonstrate they are unwilling to be held accountable. If one chooses not to join a local church, one is communicating to other believers and leadership that he does not want to be accountable. Merkle is helpful here:

church membership is needed to foster biblical accountability. Church members are called to obey, submit, and receive admonishment from their leaders. By refusing to commit to a local church, needed accountability is lacking, and sheep often wander away from the fold (and sometimes away from the Good Shepherd).<sup>65</sup>

Meaningful membership is important for this leading and accountability to take place in the life of the church.

### **Membership Provides the Best Atmosphere to Learn and Use One's Spiritual Gift(s) in Service**

All believers have a spiritual gift (Eph 4:7-8; 1 Cor 12:1-11). Each believer is called to use that gift in service to the church (1 Pet 4:10-11). Since this is the case, it is most logical to realize that connection to a local church through membership is the best way to serve. Two reasons must be grasped: believers have different gifts and service to one another requires connection with one another. First, believers have different gifts. Some have certain gifts in one area, and some have certain gifts in another. Each one is necessary for the growth and outreach of the church. Each one is dependent on the other so the full contribution of the gifts can be used in service to one another. If one has joined himself to a local church, one has the opportunity to learn his gift and use it in service to the rest of the church. That individual can also benefit from the use of gifts by other believers in the church. This is God's design for the church.<sup>66</sup>

The second reason builds upon the first. When one is connected to a local church, one knows the direction in which he can use his gifts. He can better understand the needs of the congregation. He understands his role better in the congregation. This

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<sup>65</sup> Merkle, "The Biblical Basis for Church Membership," chap. 2, sec. 2, para. 8, Kindle.

<sup>66</sup> Merkle, "The Biblical Basis for Church Membership," chap. 2, sec. 4, para 2, Kindle.

comes from the accountability and connection he has with other members. He gets the privilege of serving alongside others, learning from them, and helping them grow in the use of their gifts. This is possible as one joins himself to a local church. To neglect membership is to hinder one's proper use of his gifts. To join and serve in a local church is to take serious one's responsibility, especially regarding one another.<sup>67</sup>

### **Membership Provides an Opportunity to Experience the Care of the Body**

Another benefit of joining a local church in membership is the care one receives from the body. When a church receives a new member into the congregation, they are committing to take responsibility for that member. It has already been mentioned of the service toward one another. It is important to further mention that those who are members of a local church have the opportunity to experience the love of the church when they struggle. They also get the benefit of pastoral care. There is help available when one is struggling to find God's will. Other believers can help seek God's guidance (Pro 15:22) in those situations.<sup>68</sup>

Members also receive the support of having access to others who have similar experiences. They get to walk along with one another, providing support and comfort when needed (2 Cor 1:3-5). The benefits of the corporate nature of Christianity are then displayed. Mark Dever provides five reasons this should be the focus of believers:

(1) We need to give up trying to live the Christian life on our own. We need to covenant together with others to follow Christ. (2) If you commit to a church, you commit to a local body of people who will try to help you work through challenges and problems. (3) The New Testament clearly shows that our following Jesus is supposed to involve care and concern for each other. (4) Church membership is our opportunity to grasp hold of each other in responsibility and love. (5) In the church,

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<sup>67</sup> John Hammett, "The What and How of Church Membership," in Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, chap. 9, sec. 1, para. 1, Kindle.

<sup>68</sup> Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 179-180.

discipleship is both an individual project and a corporate activity as we follow Christ and help each other along the way.<sup>69</sup>

When this takes place, the care of Christ takes place within the church. If one joins himself to a local church, he gets to experience this care.

### **Membership Provides an Opportunity to Grow**

Healthy things grow. All believers are to grow in their relationship with Christ (2 Pet 3:18; Phil 2:12-13). Connection with other believers challenges one to continue to grow. Much has been mentioned concerning this already, but a couple key truths should be mentioned. First, committing to a local church provides consistent access to faithful preaching and teaching. As one sits under faithful preaching, he can grow in the knowledge of God's Word. This helps him learn to study and apply the Word in a better way. He has an opportunity to be discipled and then to disciple others. He learns and then has an opportunity to put into practice what he learns by investing in others (2 Tim 2:2).

Being a member of a church also helps one grow as it gives a chance to participate in ministry. This may seem out of place under this section, but it is important to realize that one learns best when one applies what he has learned. This happens as one grows in his relationship with other believers. He can carry out the role God has for him which increases his growth. As one becomes more involved, one has more chances to learn where he is to serve. He can then grow in that area. Sam Rainer summarizes this well:

As you become more involved as a member, you will find a lot to like about your church. You will also find things you dislike. The church is like a family – some healthier than others. The goal is to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. God has placed you in this congregation for your own good. But God also placed you here for the good of others. Those inside the church and those outside the church need your help.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 165-169.

<sup>70</sup> Rainer, *7 Basics of Belonging: The Meaning of Church Membership*, 13.

As one continues in the church as a faithful member, he gets the opportunity to grow and help the church grow.

### **Practical Conclusions**

From the discussion above, there are numerous benefits in restoring the practice of meaningful church membership in Baptist churches. Churches will see church government guarded, the witness of the church better exhibited, an effective atmosphere of church discipline, and a greater atmosphere of obedience to Christ. Individuals can receive needed accountability, have a place to learn and use one's spiritual gifts in service to others, experience the care of the body, and grow. Meaningful church membership is essential for the health of individual believers and the church.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The focus of the ministry project was increasing biblical understanding of church identity and membership. The main component of this project was an eight-week curriculum concentrated on church identity and membership. The first four weeks were focused on church identity and the final four weeks focused on church membership, using the image of the body of Christ as a basis. This curriculum was called, “Church Identity and Membership Curriculum.” It provided a roadmap for study. Other elements used were a curriculum evaluation, a pre-test survey, and a post-test survey. These elements provided assistance in accomplishing the project’s three goals: (1) assess the current understanding of church identity and membership among the Young Adult Class; (2) develop an eight-week curriculum which focuses on church identity and membership in Scripture that will be taught in both the Sunday morning and weekly discussion group; (3) increase understanding of church identity and membership through this curriculum among the Young Adult Class. The following is a detailed description of the project implementation. The project began during the first week of October 2022 and continued for twelve weeks.

#### **Week One**

Week one was dedicated to developing the curriculum for the project. Development began during one of my seminars entitled, *Foundations of Teaching*. We were to write a curriculum plan which could consist of subjects we would teach in our projects. I developed the curriculum with the plan of teaching on four images of the church in the New Testament, using them as a basis for discussing membership.

However, after writing chapter two of my project, I realized that only one image could be covered: body of Christ. Therefore, it became necessary to rewrite my last four lessons of the curriculum.

I began by editing the first four lessons. These lessons were written with the following subjects in mind: (1) Who is the church? (2) What does a church do? (3) What are the ordinances of the church? (4) How does a church function? There was some minor editing to complete concerning application. This was completed quickly with the rest of the week's time given to the last four lessons.

The last four lessons took the most time to complete. As stated earlier, I needed to rewrite the last four lessons. They would be written on the subject of the image of the body of Christ. This image would be used as a basis for teaching about church membership. I debated on the titles of the lessons but settled with titles that would provide the direction of each lesson. The last four lessons were entitled: (5) Unity, Diversity, Equality, Importance, Care, and Concern in the Body; (6) Pride, Judgment, and Function in the Body; (7) Gifting, Roles, and Growth in the Body; (8) Source and Vulnerability in the Body. After writing these lessons, week one of my project was completed.

## **Week Two**

Week two consisted of securing an expert panel of pastors and professors to evaluate the curriculum. This was to help to ensure the curriculum was sufficient in four areas: biblical accuracy, sufficiency for teaching, appropriateness of understanding, and application. I was able to contact two pastors from sister churches in the state and two professors from Clear Creek Baptist Bible College who agreed to evaluate the curriculum. I contacted each individual, explained the project, and provided the curriculum for them to evaluate. To guide the panel in their evaluation, I provided an evaluation rubric. This evaluation rubric was entitled, *Church Identity and Membership*



*Curriculum Evaluation* and it consisted of the four categories of evaluation. Scores could range from 1 (insufficient) to 4 (exemplary). For the curriculum to be used in the project, I set a standard of every category requiring a 3 (sufficient) or above. I asked each member of the panel to be honest and provide feedback under the comments section. They were given a week to review and evaluate the curriculum.

Upon receiving feedback from the panel, I was able to move forward with the project. Every category received a 3 or above with the majority receiving a 4. Each individual on the panel provided feedback which was helpful for enhancing the curriculum to a greater level. This helped me to see areas that needed to be changed as well as areas that were strengths. I was able to make changes to the curriculum in time for the first week.

There were two major changes suggested for the curriculum. The first was to provide more illustrations. The evaluator felt that this would provide more interaction with the students. I agreed with the evaluator, so I committed to developing more illustrations as a taught the curriculum. This is reflected in the final draft located in the appendix.

The second change suggested was to offer more interaction with the final four lessons. The evaluator thought that more interaction was provided for the first four lessons. The last four did not deliver as much. I read through the curriculum again and determined that he was right. To remedy this, I provided more questions for the final four lessons.

### **Week Three**

Week three consisted of providing the pre-curriculum survey to all participants. The survey consisted of twenty-five questions related to church identity and membership. The survey was entitled, *Church Identity and Membership Pre-Survey*. The goal of this survey was to discover current knowledge of each participant on the subject. This was to

meet my first goal of the project which was to assess the current understanding of church identity and membership among the Young Adult Class. I encouraged all the participants to answer as best they could without overthinking each statement.

Upon receiving the surveys, I entered them into an excel spreadsheet. I began analysis of the results by determining the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of each statement. I gave each scale item a number to calculate the results. I used these numbers to set the range for interpretation. My goal was to determine which areas needed to be emphasized the most during teaching of the curriculum. The first area was membership. Concerning the statement, *only those who have trusted Christ for salvation can be members of a local church*, participants had an average score of 3.84. This put the responses as an average in the agree somewhat range. This demonstrated either a lack of knowledge or lack of conviction concerning regenerate church membership. Further examination was needed.

To continue investigation, statements two through four needed to be analyzed alongside statement one. Statement two stated, *a church's membership can consist of both believers and unbelievers*. Again, the average answer was 3.11 which put it as an average in the range of disagree somewhat. Statement three provided even more answers. It read, *Christians joining a local church is not evident in the Bible*. Responses from this statement averaged a 1.79, strongly disagree, which indicated that respondents believed that the Bible supports Christians joining a local church. Finally, statement four provided an average of 3.32 which again put it as an average in the range of disagree somewhat. It read; *it is a sin for a Christian not to join a church*.

Final examination could be concluded by examining statement seven on the survey. This statement read; *a person who has trusted Christ should be baptized before being allowed to join the church*. The class had an average of 3.16 which fell into the range of disagree somewhat. This was surprising to me as each one in the class had made a profession of faith in Christ and had been baptized. It would seem that instruction and

counsel would have been given to each one prior to their baptism concerning its meaning and connection to church membership. Table 1 below presents these results.

Table 1. Pre-Curriculum Survey Results on Church Membership

Statements	Average
<b>Statement 1</b>	3.84
<b>Statement 2</b>	3.11
<b>Statement 3</b>	1.79
<b>Statement 4</b>	3.32
<b>Statement 7</b>	3.16

From the above discussion, the class average reveals that they believe membership in a local church is supported by the Bible. However, their responses concerning who should be allowed to be a member of the church was inconsistent with biblical understanding of regenerate church membership. Traditionally, Baptists have understood the Scriptures to teach that only those who had trusted Christ and followed through with believer’s baptism could join themselves to a local congregation. Church membership does not seem to be highly understood or valued among participants in the class. This could be from lack of knowledge or lack of conviction concerning the church.

The second area of concern was church discipline. Statement ten read: *the local church has the authority to affirm or deny a person’s profession of faith.* Respondents indicated they disagreed with this statement by an average score of 2.16. This was not unexpected. I anticipated a negative response because of the amount of individualism present in modern churches. Accountability from the church toward individuals is not held in high regard. Everything is believed to be personal.

Statement eleven provided a further indication of individualism in the church. The statement stated, *a member who is not active in the church should be disciplined.* The

class averaged a score of 2.58 which put it in the range of disagree. This was not unexpected but provided a better understanding for the current state of my church. From this survey, it is evident that church discipline is not as valued in my church as it should be biblically. Results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Pre-Curriculum Survey Results on Church Discipline

Statements	Average
<b>Statement 10</b>	2.16
<b>Statement 11</b>	2.58

These areas of concern were dealt with in the curriculum. It was my hope that participation in this study helped clarify and strengthen their belief in church identity, church membership, and church discipline. When I finish teaching, I provided a post-curriculum survey and compared the results.

#### **Week Four**

Week four began the first week of teaching the curriculum. The topic of discussion was lesson one: Who is the church? This lesson explored the identity of the church. An examination of 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, and Ephesians 5:27 provided a biblical basis for our discussion. A working definition of the church, adapted from Gregg Allison,<sup>71</sup> was provided which would be examined throughout the first four lessons. The lesson outcome provided direction for the lesson: by the end of the session, the students will learn how the Bible identifies the church and will evaluate their current understanding based on that knowledge. Evaluation will be completed using questions to generate discussion. Participants were taught that the church consists of only those who

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<sup>71</sup> See Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29-30.

have trusted Christ. A later lesson will explore baptism as a prerequisite for membership. A discussion of the local and universal church was also provided. Participants were encouraged to interact with the lesson through discussion and questions. Two questions were given for follow-up in a discussion group throughout the week. These questions were as follows: Was there anything that changed/clarified your belief on the identity of the church? What are some ways you can make an impact on others in the church regarding their understanding of the identity of the church?

The weekly discussion did not provide any discussion. I was able to form a group discussion and presented the questions mentioned above. Not one student participated in the discussion. I continually encouraged discussion throughout the week; however, they did not respond. I asked one of the students the reason for the silence. This student informed me that they were not comfortable discussing in a group. I believed this would get better with each week.

### **Week Five**

Week five continued teaching of the curriculum. The topic of discussion was lesson two: What does a church do? This lesson explored the functions of the church. The lesson outcome was as follows: by the end of the session, the students will have a greater understanding of what the church does and how their church can carry out this calling. This will result in an evaluation of current ministry practices. An examination of Acts 2:37-47 provided an example of the six functions of the church: evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, prayer, ministry, and worship. Students were taught that every church was to carry out these six functions, even though it may look different in each congregation. Participants were encouraged to evaluate their current level of proficiency in each area through a chart numbered from one to ten with one being the least functioning and ten being the most functioning. All participants were then challenged to answer the following six questions through a discussion board throughout the week: What is one way you can

improve in evangelism? What is one way you can improve in discipleship? What is one way you can improve in fellowship? What is one way you can improve in ministry? What is one way you can improve in prayer? What is one way you can improve in worship?

This week also presented another opportunity for discussion. The questions mentioned above were posted on the discussion post. Early in the week, there were not responses. During the middle of the week, I received the first response. Two days later, a second response was provided. This was encouraging and a greater development from the first week.

### **Week Six**

Week six involved teaching lesson three entitled: What are the ordinances of the church? This lesson examined the two ordinances of the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The lesson outcome presented a clear picture of the direction of the lesson: by the end of the session, students will develop a greater understanding of the purpose of baptism and the Lord's Supper and will be able to share ideas on how the church can better emphasize their meaning and purpose through discussion at the end of the lesson. Three passages were examined: Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 26:26-28, and 1 Corinthians 11:17-30. Each ordinance was studied with a focus on their meaning and purpose. Ideas were shared on how the church can better emphasize their meaning and purpose. The session ended with questions for further discussion. These questions were as follows: what are practices we can change to better display and guard the meaning of baptism? What are some ways we can enhance the celebration of the Lord's Supper to better display and guard the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

Week six provided more feedback through discussion. It was encouraging to see several responses from various individuals in the class. There was a total of three responses. This was only one more than the previous week but those who responded were different than those who responded the previous week. This was an encouraging

development because it demonstrated that others in the class were becoming more comfortable discussing. Another important aspect of the discussion was that it was evident that much thought was utilized in answering the questions. The meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper were understood in their responses.

### **Week Seven**

Week seven's subject dealt with the role of the pastor, deacons, and church members in making decisions. It was entitled: How does a church function? The lesson outcome was as follows: by the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of church government and the importance of the congregational approach to making decisions. This will be completed through discussion of ideas to better present a congregational approach to church government. A discussion of the leadership of the pastor and service of the deacons will take place as well. Five passages of Scripture were examined: Matthew 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-7, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

From the passages listed above, discussion was provided concerning the congregational approach to making decisions. It was understood that the pastor is to lead with congregational participation. We discussed the qualifications of the pastor and one of the key primary calls of the pastor which is equipping the members of the church to carry out the work God has for them. We also discussed the role of deacons by emphasizing their call to serve the church. Finally, the class was presented with the following questions for discussion throughout the week in the discussion message: Do you understand how decisions are made in the church here at Horse Creek Baptist Church? What are some ways we can improve/enhance this at Horse Creek?

Week seven provided no discussion. The questions were presented but there were no responses. This was disappointing because of the progress made in the previous weeks. However, upon examination of the questions, it may have been the nature of the

questions that caused them not to respond. If they responded, it would essentially point to areas in which I could improve. This would have been fine with me but may have been uncomfortable for them.

### **Week Eight**

Week eight began discussion of the topic of membership. The last four lessons would focus on the image of the body of Christ, emphasizing the principles of the image for membership. Lesson five was the first lesson on this topic. It was entitled: Unity, Diversity, Equality, Importance, Care, and Concern in the Body. The passage of Scripture studied was 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. The lesson outcome was as follows: by the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning unity, diversity, equality, importance, care, and concern for each other within the body.

The first part of the lesson focused on unity and diversity in the body. Students were taught that both the oneness of the body and the many members that make it up. There can be no body without many members and unity is found in diversity as each one does its part in the body. A local body is a gathering place where people from all walks of life come together as the body of Christ, bound by their common confession of Christ. Both are emphasized and it is a witness to the world that the church is the place where unity is found in diversity, as we are united in the truth.

The second part of the lesson focused on equality and importance in the body. Every member of the body is equal and should function within the body by doing their part. This is God's design and is necessary for the health of the body. To see one member as more important than the other is to ignore God's design.

The third part of the lesson emphasized care and concern within the body. No member should see themselves as more important than the other. Even members who seem weaker are necessary. Without the functioning of each member, even those who



may be viewed as unnecessary by some in the church, the church will not be healthy. Each member within the body is connected and what happens to one member affects all members.

The final part of the lesson focused on discussion. This discussion was presented in class and provided on a discussion post to be discussed throughout the week. Questions were meant to provide an evaluation of how each member of the class measured in these three areas. The questions were as follows: What are some ways we can display this unity and diversity better to the world? What are some ways we can display this unity and diversity better within our church? How can you better understand your function within the body? How can we grow in our care and concern for members in the body?

This week's discussion seemed harder for the students to answer. There were three responses which was consistent with previous discussions. However, one student expressed in her response that she felt these questions were harder than the previous questions. When I followed up and asked why she felt they were harder than the previous questions, she answered by expressing the need to think a little harder on these questions than what was asked the previous weeks. Nevertheless, the answers provided were well thought out and provided key contributions to the class's understanding of the subject.

### **Week Nine**

Week nine continued highlighting the subject of membership. The passage of reference was Romans 12:3-8. It was entitled: Pride, Judgment, and Function in the Body. The learning outcomes were as follows: by the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning pride, judgment, and function within the body.

The first part of the lesson concerned pride and judgment. Students were presented with the issue of thinking too highly of oneself. Upon discussion, many shared

their understanding of pride as an issue, however, they also shared that what is most evident in many of them was thinking too lowly about themselves. We deviated from the lesson at this point to talk about a healthy balance between recognizing how God has gifted us, using what he has given us, and humbly appreciating this gift as a steward. We are to use what God has given us with a proper balance. We do not think too lowly so that we never do anything. We do not think too highly believing that we have all we have and can do all we do on our own. It was at this point that we refocused ourselves to the content of the lesson.

The second part of the lesson concerned the function of members in the body. Design and purpose were stressed concerning the working of each individual part. Just as the body has many parts, so the body of Christ has many individual members who work for the benefit of the body as a whole. As members do their part based on their gifting, it provides for the body which in turn provides for the member. Every member has a function within the body.

The final part of the lesson focused on discussion. This was a little different this week than previous weeks due to a spiritual gifts inventory being provided. I took time to explain the inventory as a guide to help them understand their spiritual gift. This would coincide with the discussion questions this week. These discussion questions were as follows: What are your spiritual gifts? How can you better use your spiritual gifts in the function of the body here at Horse Creek Baptist Church? Upon surveying the class by asking them to raise their hands, only one knew their spiritual gift(s). I encouraged them to take the inventory and answer the questions after completing it.

I presented the discussion questions, but there were no responses this week. This was disappointing as I expected to see some progress from the previous weeks. My hope was that upon taking the spiritual gifts inventory, many would have an idea of their spiritual gift(s). This would have provided a great foundation for discussing their service

in the body. I made the decision to discuss this at the beginning of week ten and provide another chance for discussion after the lesson.

### **Week Ten**

Week ten explored the topic of gifting, roles, and growth in the body. Learning outcomes for the week were as follows: by the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning gifting, roles, and growth for each member of the body. The passage of discussion was Ephesians 4:1-16. This topic provided a further opportunity to explore spiritual gifts since there was no discussion the week before.

The first section of the lesson highlighted the importance of gifting in the church. Each gift is distinct and performs a service within the body. Because Paul uses the phrase “each one” (Eph 4:7), every believer has a gift to be used for the benefit of the body as a whole. We explored the picture of unity this demonstrates to the world and within the body.

The second section discussed various roles in the body. Focus was given to verse eleven. We discussed that this list was not spiritual gifts but speaks of gifted leaders given to the church. These leaders prepare and equip members to carry out the work of using their spiritual gift in the body. These mutual roles help the body to grow up into Christ. When one’s role is neglected, it hinders the body.

The final section discussed growth of the body. Three aspects were presented that Paul list in the passage: unity of the faith, growing in the knowledge of Christ, and the body measuring up to Christ’s stature (Eph 4:13-16). After discussing each one, we focused on the importance of every member connecting to the body. No part of the body can grow on its own. If one does not stay connected to the body, one cannot grow. The growth is corporate and each individual helps contribute to that growth.

The session ended with presentation of discussion questions for the week. First, the three aspects of growth were mentioned. The class was asked to rate Horse Creek's measurements in these three areas on a scale of one to five. Five was the highest rating and one was the lowest. The class believed the church to be around a three on unity of the faith, four on growing in the knowledge of Christ, and a one on measuring up to Christ's stature. This was interesting to me and insightful. It prepared for further discussion throughout the week concerning the following question: what are three ways you can contribute to the church's goal of being like Christ concerning unity of faith, growing in the knowledge of Christ, and measuring up to Christ's stature? I also encouraged them to share concerning the previous week's discussion on spiritual gifts.

Discussion for the week centered on the previous week's discussion question. There were not any responses from the previous week's question, so I presented it again as the first question in the discussion board. There were several responses as many shared their results from the spiritual gift inventory. It was the most interactive discussion of the study. There was no time left to discuss the current week's discussion question. I determined that the spiritual gift question was of more importance for the time being.

### **Week Eleven**

Week eleven studied the topic of source and vulnerability in the body. The verses of study were Colossians 1:18 and 2:19. The learning outcomes for the week were as follows: by the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning source and vulnerability of each member of the body. At the end of the session, we summarized the topic of membership by exploring eight reasons meaningful membership should be practiced in the church. This provided a basis for further study for each student.

The first section of the lesson focused on the source of the body. Emphasis was placed on Christ being the head of the body. The body is to grow up into the head. Christ

directs the body, and the body is to act and work in line with the head. We discussed the fact that the church does not exist for itself, but for Christ. The church must continually stay connected to the head.

The last section focused on vulnerability when one does not stay connected to the body. Paul speaks of teaching that does not grow up into the head (Col 2:19). This is false teaching and if a member disconnects himself from the body, he is vulnerable to this false teaching. When one does not stay connected, the individual becomes more important than the body, therefore, one is vulnerable to the attacks that will take place. The local body provides a place where one can hear the Word of God taught, preached, and discussed. It is also the place where the work of the body is most visible. When one stays connected to the body, there is protection.

The last section presented eight reasons for meaningful membership. These were divided between benefits for the body and benefits for the individual. For details on these benefits, please see appendix III. The lesson ended with two discussion questions presented: how can you take what you have learned in these sessions and apply them? How can you take what you have learned in these sessions and teach them to others? I also mentioned to them that I would be presenting the post-curriculum survey for them to take the following week.

Discussion for week eleven was limited, following the trend of the previous weeks. There were three responses, but the responses were significant. These responses revealed that the class was beneficial for the students in the study. They realized the importance of being a member of a local church. Their desire was to take membership seriously and help others to understand its importance.

## **Week Twelve**

Week twelve was dedicated to completion of the post-curriculum survey. I passed them out to everyone who participated in the class. There were a few individuals

who were not able to participate in every lesson, but they received the PowerPoints and notes from each session. Everyone who took the pre-curriculum survey also took the post-curriculum survey. This provided me the opportunity for full comparison of results from each survey.

When I received the surveys, I entered them into an excel spreadsheet. Just like the pre-curriculum survey, I analyzed the results by determining the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of each statement. I also used the same scale as the pre-curriculum survey to calculate the results. This allowed me to apply the same criteria to the post-curriculum survey as I used on the pre-curriculum survey to determine how the scores changed on the areas of emphasis from the pre-curriculum survey.

The first area was membership. This was an area that showed inconsistencies from the pre-curriculum survey. Analysis of statements one, two, three, four, and seven helped determine the results from the pre-curriculum survey concerning membership. Statement one, *only those who have trusted Christ for salvation can be members of a local church*, provided an average score of 3.84 on the pre-curriculum survey which put it in the agree somewhat range. The post-curriculum survey revealed an average score of 5.84. This put the results in the strongly agree range showing significant growth with conviction to membership only for those who have trusted Christ.

Further analysis was revealed when investigating statements two through four. Statement two stated, *a church's membership can consist of both believers and unbelievers*. The pre-curriculum survey results were 3.11 which put it as an average of disagree somewhat. The post-curriculum survey results saw an average score of 1.16. This put the results in the range of strongly disagree. Again, this demonstrated a stronger conviction concerning regenerate church membership.

Statement three read, *Christians joining a local church is not evident in the Bible*. The pre-curriculum survey results saw an average score of 1.79 which put it in the range of strongly disagree. The post-curriculum survey results saw an average score of

1.11 which was still in the strongly disagree range. So, consistency remained on this statement.

Statement four provided further evidence of their understanding of regenerate church membership. It stated, *it is a sin for a Christian not to join a church*. Pre-curriculum survey results put it in the range of disagree somewhat with an average score of 3.32. Post-curriculum results provided an average of 4.53 which put it in the range of agree. Again, there was significant improvement in their understanding of the importance of church membership.

Statement seven provided final analysis about church membership. It stated, *a person who has trusted Christ should be baptized before being allowed to join the church*. Results from the pre-curriculum survey saw an average score of 3.16 which fell into the range of disagree somewhat. Post-curriculum results fell in the range of 4.89 which increased the scores into the agree range. This further demonstrated improvement concerning regenerate church membership and its importance. Table 3 provides a comparison of results from the pre-curriculum and post-curriculum survey.

Table 3. Pre- and Post- Curriculum Comparisons on Church Membership

Statements	Pre-Curriculum Average	Post-Curriculum Average
<b>Statement 1</b>	3.84	5.84
<b>Statement 2</b>	3.11	1.16
<b>Statement 3</b>	1.79	1.11
<b>Statement 4</b>	3.32	4.53
<b>Statement 7</b>	3.16	4.89

From comparison of the results above, it is evident that the class demonstrated an understanding of regenerate church membership. They showed consistency with their

understanding of membership being supported by the Bible and who should be allowed to be a member based on what the Bible teaches. I was pleased with the results. It exhibited that they now better understood the importance of practicing regenerate church membership.

The second area of concern from the pre-curriculum survey was concerning church discipline. Statements ten and eleven provided feedback in this area. Statement ten on the pre-curriculum survey showed an average score of 2.16 which put it in the range of disagree. It read, *the local church has the authority to affirm or deny a person's profession of faith*. Post-curriculum survey results demonstrated a score of 2.42 which was still in the range of disagree. There was not much change in their understanding of this statement.

Statement eleven stated, *a member who is not active in the church should be disciplined*. Pre-curriculum results saw an average score of 2.58 which was in the range of disagree. Post-curriculum results showed an average score of 4.11 which was in the range of agree somewhat. This showed improvement but demonstrated that they were still not convinced of the practice of church disciplined. Table 4 compares the pre-curriculum and post-curriculum survey results.

Table 4. Pre-and Post-Curriculum Comparisons on Church Discipline

Statements	Pre-Curriculum Average	Post-Curriculum Average
<b>Statement 10</b>	2.16	2.42
<b>Statement 11</b>	2.58	4.11

Upon examination of the two statements mentioned above, it is evident that church discipline is still an area that needs to be taught. After looking over the curriculum, I determined that I did not discuss it as much as I should. It was mentioned in



the study but was not emphasized in a way that the students would see its importance. The results from the pre- and post-curriculum surveys provided further evidence of this conclusion.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides analysis, evaluation, and reflection on the project. First, an evaluation of the project's purpose will be provided by comparing the results of the pre- and post-curriculum surveys using a t-test. Second, an evaluation of the project's goals will be offered by restating each goal and analyzing how each goal was accomplished. Next, an evaluation of the project's strengths will be completed followed by an assessment of the project's weaknesses. This will help further strengthen this study for further teaching. Then, theological, and personal reflections will be given. Next, I will evaluate implementation of the project by stating what I would do differently if given the opportunity to implement it again. Finally, a conclusion to the project will be provided.

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

Evaluation of the project involved two assessments: a pre-curriculum and a post-curriculum survey. Results were measured by using twenty-five statement survey based on a six-point Likert scale. The pre-curriculum survey was used to measure the initial understanding of students concerning church identity and membership. Concerning areas would be identified and reevaluated at the end of the curriculum. The post-curriculum survey was used to measure how much growth happened as a result of the eight-week curriculum concerning church identity and membership, particularly in the areas of concern identified from the pre-curriculum survey. Each question received a score of one for "strongly disagree" to six for "strongly agree."

The two areas of concern were church membership, particularly who should be allowed to be a member, and church discipline. Both areas are essential for a healthy

understanding of church identity and membership. However, I wanted to determine if the overall understanding of church identity and membership increased. To accomplish this, I performed a t-test on the results of the pre-curriculum and post-curriculum surveys. To receive accurate results, I determined which of the statements expected a negative response. I changed the scores by placing them in reverse order for negative response statements. “Strongly disagree” would now receive a score of six and “strongly agree” would receive a score of one.

Results from the t-test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-curriculum survey scores:  $t_{(18)} = -11.177$ ,  $p < .0001$ . The average score increased from 103.158 pre-survey to 126.947 post-survey. The absolute value is larger than the t-critical one-tail and the p value is less than 0.05. These results demonstrated an increase in knowledge concerning church identity and membership in the class.

Statement one provides a demonstration of this increase. It read, *only those who have trusted Christ for salvation can be members of a local church*. The pre-curriculum survey saw an average of 3.84 which put it in the range of agree somewhat. The post-curriculum survey saw an average of 5.84, placing it in the category of strongly agree. This showed an increase in understanding of those who should be allowed to become a member of a local church.

### **Evaluation of Project Goals**

Three goals were presented for this project: (1) to assess the current understanding of church identity and membership among the Young Adult Class; (2) develop an eight-week curriculum which focuses on church identity and membership in Scripture that will be taught in both the Sunday morning and weekly discussion group; (3) increase understanding of church identity and membership through this curriculum

among the Young Adult Class. Within each of these goals, measurements were provided to determine successful completion.

The first goal was accomplished through a pre-curriculum survey. Every student was given a survey with 25 statements related to church identity and membership. The goal was considered successful if at least ten members took the survey. The total number of participants was 19. The survey was completed before the first week of class. This goal was successfully accomplished.

The second goal was accomplished by developing an eight-week curriculum on the topic of church identity and membership. This was to be taught on Sunday mornings with a discussion group provided through the week. A rubric was developed to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum. This goal was considered successful if each category of the rubric received a score of 3 or higher in every category. An expert panel of pastors and professors would evaluate the curriculum based on the rubric provided. The panel consisted of two pastors and two professors at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. Each category received the score needed. This goal was successfully accomplished.

The third goal was accomplished through completion of a post-curriculum survey. This was the same survey taken before the eight-week curriculum was taught. Scores would be compared using a t-test. This goal was considered successful if students in the class displayed an increase in average scores from the pre- to post-curriculum surveys using a t-test. As stated above, the t-test results demonstrated an increase in the average scores from the pre- to the post-curriculum surveys with the p-value less than 0.05 and the absolute value larger than the t-critical one-tail. This demonstrated an increase in knowledge concerning church identity and membership in the class. Goal three was successfully completed.

### **Strengths of the Project**

I received great encouragement through this project. I was encouraged at the turnout of students who participated. My original desire was for at least ten students to participate in the class by completing the surveys and learning through the eight-week curriculum. However, there were 19 students. I was also encouraged at their commitment level. This was demonstrated through their use of video chat when they could not physically be present for every session. Participation was the first strength of this project.

A second strength of this project was the subject. Church identity and membership is an often-neglected subject in Baptist churches today. This was evident through the pre-curriculum survey results. Many students were not able to consistently answer statements in a biblical way on this topic. This provided confirmation for me on the choice of the subject matter for the project. It was also an interesting topic for the students as many shared with me how much they enjoyed and needed teaching in the areas of church identity and membership.

A third strength of this project was the opportunity to provide a foundation for leadership development within the church. This was a benefit I was hopeful would be achieved through this study because these young adults would eventually move into leadership positions in the church. Because they now have a foundational understanding of church identity and membership, they will be a core group for change with the entire church body. Because they have participated in this study, they will be able to teach others the importance of church identity and membership.

A fourth strength of this project was its historical component. In chapter three, I was able to research Baptist understanding of church identity and membership. This helped me to learn more of my own denomination's history of understanding with this topic. It encouraged me to know that Baptist's have always stressed and taught the importance of church identity and membership. They guarded the identity of the church and sought to teach its importance in the church. This was evident through the number of

resources the denomination produced. Interacting with these resources was valuable to me.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

There were several weaknesses present within this project. First, time was an issue each week. I decided to use the Sunday school hour to teach the curriculum. My reasoning for this was to provide a time which was already known as a teaching time. It was also a time they were already present at the church building. This meant that they would not have to set aside any extra time to complete the study. However, this was an issue because many are always late to Sunday school. This was the case throughout the study. We were able to complete the content of the material each week, but it often felt rushed. There was little time for discussion and reflection because we started late each week.

Another weakness of this project was the discussion component. It did not provide as much discussion as I anticipated for the project. For example, there were a couple of weeks when there was no discussion. To provide for discussion, I had to start a group discussion through Facebook messenger. This was the best option at the time as everyone in the group had a connection through that avenue. However, it was also easy to neglect discussion because one could simply not respond. This would have been harder to neglect if discussion was in person.

Another weakness of this project was the length of the curriculum. There were subjects I was not able to cover because there were not enough weeks to teach those subjects. For example, as mentioned in chapter four, there was little change concerning knowledge of church discipline. I was not able to teach on this topic as much as I would have liked. It was mentioned in one of the lessons, but it would have been more beneficial if I had a week dedicated to teaching it.

A final weakness of this project was failure to provide an avenue for further teaching on this topic by the students. I provided a final question for discussion, but it was not as effective as I had hoped. This was an important time because students were excited about the topic, and I could have used that excitement by providing opportunities for them to teach it to other people. This would not have been part of my project but would have further enhanced understanding of this subject for the entire church body.

### **Theological Reflections**

Since the start of my undergraduate work in ministry, I have always been drawn to the topic of ecclesiology. I have taught the subject in every church I have pastored. However, I did not always teach as faithfully as I should. I did not teach anything heretical but did not fully disclose the importance of church identity and membership. Researching for chapters two and three provided greater understanding of the subject.

First, one of the most fruitful insights was my study of the image of the body of Christ. This image provides a foundation for understanding the connection between believers. Just as a body is made up of many parts that work together for the function of the whole body, so each member does their part for the function of the body of Christ. This is most visible through a local church. Taking this image and applying it to membership in a local church provided insights that I did not have before. Especially helpful was the verses in Colossians which speak of the vulnerability of each member when they disconnect from the body.

Each passage of Scripture examined provided further understanding of the importance of membership. This presented a goal that each church should have for the local body. A church that functions as it was designed makes an impact on the world. This was especially helpful for me leading as a pastor.

Next, studying the confessions of faith proved to be a helpful guide for understanding the church. Knowing the Bible presents the church as a covenant community demonstrates the commitment we make to one another when we join a local church. It was also helpful to learn from those who had studied this subject in the past. The Bible states, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). In context, this verse is pointing the reader to chapter eleven to recall the life of faith lived by those in the Old Testament. It is also a reminder to the contemporary reader to look to the witnesses who have gone before. We are to look to those examples in Scripture, but we also have over two thousand years of church history to help us on our way. It must be understood that the Bible is infallible, and the church is not; however, we can learn from those who have studied the Scriptures before us.

Finally, examining membership from the perspective of the call of the church in Scripture was very helpful. The Bible calls members of the church to use their spiritual gifts for the growth of the body (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:1-16), stay connected with the body (Col 1:18; 2:19), care for one another (1 Cor 12:12-27), and grow in connection with the body (Eph 4:1-16). Each church is to practice biblical church government and decision making (Matt 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-7), consist of only believers as members (1 Peter 2:9), carry out the acts of the body (Acts 2:37-47), observe the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Matt 28:18-20; Matt 26:26-28), be centered on the Word (Col 3:16), and be obedient to Christ as the head of the church (Eph 4:15). Certainly, what is mentioned above is not the entire call of the church; however, what was mentioned helps us understand that carrying out the call Christ has placed on his church is best accomplished through a local body consisting of only members who are believers in Christ.



## **Personal Reflections**

The Doctor of Educational Ministry program has proven to be a life changing experience for me. First, I have grown in my ability to teach. I currently teach at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College and in my own Sunday school class in the church I pastor. As I have reflected upon the content, presentation, and interaction with professors and fellow students, I have recognized the importance of providing the best atmosphere for learning. Every assignment, lecture, and discussion had a purpose that enhanced the learning experience for me. This has encouraged me to find ways to enhance the learning experience for my students in the classroom and when I teach my Sunday school class.

Second, the content of each seminar caused me to think further on various topics. From the lectures to the books, I learned a great amount from the program. I found the professors approachable which benefited me as a student. My writing coaches were very helpful providing critique in a helpful and loving way, never compromising on their instruction, and always pushing me to continue to study further on the topic I was writing on. This was a great encouragement to me.

Finally, this project stimulated me to be a better leader in the congregation God has called me to lead. Completing the pre-curriculum survey and analyzing the results was an eye-opening experience for me as a pastor. I learned much of my congregation's understanding of church identity and membership. It helped me to realize the importance and urgency with which I need to exhibit teaching on this important topic. I cannot expect my congregation to demonstrate who the church is to the community if they do not understand church identity and membership.

## **What I Would Do Differently**

If given the opportunity to implement this project again, there are four changes I would make. First, I would choose another time to teach the curriculum. As stated in the weaknesses section, each lesson felt rushed because of the late start each week. If given

the opportunity, I would choose a time where I could teach for longer which would provide more time for discussion and content.

Secondly, I would choose a more efficient and effective method for discussion. Facebook messenger provided an avenue for discussion but was not as effective as I had hoped. If given another chance, I would provide more time for discussion in person. If this was not an option, I would have provided a video discussion group at an appointed time during the week. This would allow for somewhat of a face-to-face interaction. I would be able to call on individuals to share and it would be harder for students to ignore the discussion.

Next, I would lengthen the weeks of teaching. As I already stated, I was not able to adequately teach all the subjects I wanted because there were not enough weeks to cover those topics. I would extend the time another two weeks for a total of ten weeks. This would allow me to expand on areas I could only mention. It would also provide a week of discussion to talk about the questions given during each lesson of the curriculum. This would have helped them grow more in their understanding of the topic.

Finally, I would offer an opportunity for students in the class to teach its content to others. This could have been suggested from the beginning of the curriculum with a goal of them identifying one person for which they could share the content. This would have provided greater enhancement of the curriculum and accomplished a broader range of teaching to the entire congregation. This would help further the health of the church body.

### **Conclusion**

The Doctor of Educational Ministry program was life changing for me as a pastor and professor. It has encouraged me, shaped me, and challenged me to be a better pastor and teacher. I have experienced times of frustration and joy which God has used to push me ever toward growth as a believer. The time I spent learning in the seminars has

helped me learn to read and understand the Bible better. I have been encouraged through reading the book assigned. I have learned skills in writing, studying, and teaching through the assignments given. Finally, I have learned to be a better leader through content of this project. I can only hope that when my life here on earth is finished, I would have been a faithful steward of the ministry and call God has given me (1 Cor 4:2).

## APPENDIX 1

### CHURCH IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP SURVEY<sup>1</sup>

The following survey is the Church Identity and Membership Survey (CIMS). This survey consists of twenty statements concerning church identity and membership with a six-point Likert scale. The survey assesses each participants' current level of knowledge in church identity and membership.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey adapted from Biblical and Healthy Church Survey. Brandon Ray Scroggins. "Teaching Biblical Church Membership at Reformation Baptist Church in Wetumpka, Alabama" (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

CHURCH IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP  
PRE-SURVEY (CIMS)

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate knowledge and practice of church identity and membership. This research is being conducted by Dustin Sims for the purpose of collecting data for a doctoral ministry project. In this survey, you will answer statements concerning your level of agreement with certain characteristics of church identity and membership. There will also be a final survey you will be asked to complete at the end of this project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Your name will only be used to compare pre- and post-survey answers.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

General Questions

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Statements

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

SD – Strongly Disagree

D – Disagree

DS – Disagree Somewhat

AS – Agree Somewhat

A – Agree

SA – Strongly Agree

1. Only those who have trusted Christ for salvation can be members of a local church.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
2. A church's membership can consist of both believers and unbelievers.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
3. Christians joining a local church is not evident in the Bible.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
4. It is a sin for a Christian not to join a church.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
5. Christians should look for a church that matches their wants.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
6. A local church should have to answer to an association or convention.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
7. A person who has trusted Christ should be baptized before being allowed to join the church.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
8. The Lord's Supper should only be taken by believers who have been baptized.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
9. A church should allow Christians who are not members of any church to partake of the Lord's Supper.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
10. The local church has the authority to affirm or deny a person's profession of faith.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
11. A member who is not active in the church should be disciplined.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
12. A member should actively serve in the church.  
SD            D            DS            AS            A            SA
13. A church should allow non-members to serve in ministries of the church.

- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
14. The congregation is the final authority when making decisions in a church.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
15. I understand the image of the body of Christ used in the New Testament.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
16. One of the essential components of a church is unity, which is only possible if the church agrees on everything.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
17. Every church member needs to serve for the church to be healthy.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
18. Each member is responsible for each other.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
19. Each member is responsible for discipleship.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
20. Every member is gifted by the Holy Spirit.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
21. A believer can still grow as a Christian without participation in a local church.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
22. Watching a church service online is as beneficial as attending a service in person.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
23. The primary purpose of the local church is to reach out to the community.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
24. A believer is vulnerable to false teaching if they are not connected with a local church.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
25. I should give sacrificially and cheerfully to my local church.
- |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|----|---|----|





## APPENDIX 2

### CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND IDENTITY CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of two pastors of two sister churches in the church's association and two professors from Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. The panel evaluated the curriculum to ensure it is biblically accurate, sufficient for teaching, appropriate for understanding, and practically applicable.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Sufficiency for Teaching</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
<b>Appropriate for Understanding</b>					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
<b>Practically Applicable</b>					
The curriculum clearly details how church identity and membership are important for the church to understand and practice.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to understand the importance of church identity and membership and put it into practice.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3  
CHURCH IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP  
CURRICULUM

The following curriculum was used to teach the project. It was adjusted from the comments received from the expert panel. It consisted of 8 weeks of lessons taught concerning church identity and membership.

## **Church Identity and Membership Curriculum<sup>1</sup>**

**Project Name:** *Increasing Biblical understanding of Church Identity and Membership in the Young Adult Class at Horse Creek Baptist Church in Manchester, KY.*

Dustin Sims

### Context

- A study of church membership and identity in the Young Adult Class at Horse Creek Baptist Church
- Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church

### Content

- A study of church membership and identity, focusing on foundational questions within these areas. This study will focus on: (1) The identity of the church by answering questions such as: Who is the church? What does a church do? What are the ordinances of the church? How does a church function? (2) The importance of membership by examining the biblical image of the body of Christ in various passages of Scripture: 1 Cor 12:12-27, Rom 12:3-8, Eph 4:1-16, and Col 1:18a, 2:19

### Outline

#### Identity of the Church

- I. Who is the church?
- II. What does a church do?
- III. What are the ordinances of the church?
- IV. How does a church function?

#### Membership in the Church

- V. Unity, Diversity, Equality, Importance, Care, and Concern in the Body
- VI. Pride, Judgment, and Function in the Body

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<sup>1</sup> The outline for this curriculum is adapted from Lawrence Richards' method of Hook, Book, Look, and Took. Please see Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2020), 167-84.

VII. Gifting, Roles, and Growth in the Body

VIII. Source and Vulnerability in the Body

The final session will end with answering the question: Why should a church practice meaningful membership? This will bring each week to a summary and provide an opportunity for further discussion.

## **Subject: Week One: Who is the church?**

Date: October 23, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Cor 1:1-3, Philemon 1-2, Col 4:15, Eph 5:27

Key Ideas: Week 1 will introduce the students to the church. A biblical survey will be completed using 1 Peter 2:9 and Paul's letters to determine who makes up the church. It will be understood that the church is composed of those who have trusted Christ for salvation. It is not a mixture of believers and unbelievers.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, the students will learn how the Bible identifies the church and will evaluate their current understanding based on that knowledge. Evaluation will be completed using questions to generate discussion.

### **Opening**

Question: Who is the church?

Question: How would you define this question?

Illustration: Have someone come up to the board and draw a church. See if they draw a building or if they draw people.

Transition: Scripture defines the church as the people and not the building. However, we must understand that the Bible is narrow in its description of the people who belong to the church. We will examine that description as we do a survey of 1 Peter 2:9 and a few of Paul's letters.

### **Content**

## I. Definition

### A. Before examining our passages today, we need to present a definition of the church

1. For our purposes, we will use a definition adapted from Greg Allison: The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consist of two interrelated elements: the universal church and the local church. The universal church is visible through local bodies. These local bodies are a group of believers who have covenanted together to be centered on the Word and practice of the two ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.<sup>2</sup>
2. This definition will be referred to throughout the first four lessons. This lesson will focus on the first part.

### B. Question: Why is it important for us to determine a definition first?

## II. Biblical Survey

### A. The Bible describes the church as those who belong to Christ

1. 1 Peter 2:9 describes those who belong to Christ<sup>3</sup>
  - a. Chosen Race – we are called by God
  - b. Royal Priesthood – we are part of his house. We belong to him and him alone. As priests, we have a role of worship, intercession, and ministry
  - c. A Holy Nation – Set apart for his use
  - d. A People for His possession – We belong to him
2. Paul describes those who belong to the church in 1 Cor 1:1-3

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Allison. *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin A. Blum, *1 & 2 Peter*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews Through Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 231.



- a. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus
  - b. Called as saints
  - c. Question: How would you understand the church based on how Paul addresses them?
  - d. Question: Should the church be composed of both believers and non-believers based on Paul's description?
3. The Bible speaks of both the universal church and the local church
- a. The local church (1 Cor 1:1-3, Philemon 1-2, Col 4:15)
  - b. The universal church (Eph 5:27)
- B. Question: Can the descriptions Paul uses for the church be applicable to non-believers?

### **Implications**

Question: Who is the church? – this question will be re-examined based on what has been studied.

Question: As we have examined the Scriptures to determine the answer to this question, how does our answer affect what we do as a church?

Question: How does knowing our identity affect what we do? – If we don't know who we are, we become misdirected on what we do?

Question: How has your view changed/remained the same based on what we have discussed in this lesson?

### **Application**

Question: What are some ways you can help make an impact on others in the church regarding their understanding of the identity of the church?

Brainstorm: Present two ways you can do this. This will be discussed through a discussion board throughout the week.

## **Subject: Week Two: What does a church do?**

Date: October 30, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Acts 2:37-47

Key Ideas: Week 2 will examine acts of the church through ministry, discipleship, prayer, evangelism, fellowship, and worship. A biblical study of Acts 2:37-47 will be completed. It will be understood that the church is to focus on these areas.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, the students will have a greater understanding of what the church does and how their church can carry out this calling. This will result in an evaluation of current ministry practices

### **Opening**

We start out each week with the definition given of the church from Gregg Allison

The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consists of two interrelated elements: the universal church and the local church. The universal church is visible through local bodies. These local bodies are a group of believers who have covenanted together to be centered on the Word and practice of the two ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his

Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.<sup>4</sup>

Question: What does a church do?

This is a question of great importance

Often, the church can be treated like a buffet church

- a. This mindset plays a part in church attendance today. What has happened is people treat church like something that is equivalent to simple questions you may ask on a weeknight: What do you feel like eating tonight? To get the full implications of this let us see what conclusions follow when we think of church this way.
- b. We let emotions and preference make our decisions
- c. Lack of trusts in God – we don't ask where He is leading
- d. Desire for comfort and entertainment
- e. Self-centered – what about me?
- f. Fear of commitment – not looking to serve or settle down too much

Transition: In this passage, we will take a brief look at six functions of the church to answer the question: What does a church do?

## **Content**

What are the acts of the church?

### I. Evangelism (Acts 2:37-41)

#### A. Notice the people's response to Peter's message

1. What should we do?
2. Peter faithfully shares with them the gospel message
3. Peter told them to do four things
  - a. Repent – change their heart and mind
  - b. Be baptized in the name of Jesus – because of forgiveness, placed in
  - c. Experience forgiveness
  - d. Receive the Holy Spirit
4. He was faithful to share the message and we should be as well
5. Understanding this is important

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<sup>4</sup> Greg Allison. *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29-30.

6. The gospel message is the primary message the church should be sharing
7. If we are not sharing the gospel, we are not carrying out the commission given by Christ to His church
8. Matt. 28:18-20
9. Question: What are some ways that you struggle with sharing the gospel?
10. Question: What are some steps you can take to be better about sharing the gospel?

## II. Discipleship (Acts 2:42a)

### A. This is a picture of discipleship

1. God wants his Word proclaimed
2. **1 Timothy 4:13 (NASB)**  
<sup>13</sup> Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.
3. **2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NASB)**  
<sup>1</sup> I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:  
<sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
4. Notice what they did: They continually devoted – continue, persevere, not quit or fade away
5. Apostles teaching – Scripture
6. This is discipleship
7. Their purpose was to learn and grow
8. They would then be able to help others learn and grow
9. I want to give you a definition of discipleship which is my own:  
*Discipleship is the process by which one teaches individuals God's truth, guides them in the application of those truths to their lives, and sets an example for them to follow, with the goal being Christlikeness.*
10. However, many have never been truly discipled
11. Question: Why?
12. Question: What are some ways you can put yourself in a position to learn God's Word?
13. Question: How can you seek to reproduce what you have learned?  
 (disciples making disciples)

## III. Fellowship (Acts 2:42b)

### A. This is the most misunderstood term in the church today

1. This involves spiritual union through the Spirit of God
2. Believers become one in life and purpose
3. Joint life sharing blessings and needs and gifts together

4. This happens because we join with other Christians
5. It is maintained because we continue to do it
6. Believers have a spiritual duty to stimulate each other to holiness and faithfulness

B. ILL – Let’s say that I have a meeting with someone to discuss my retirement – we start out the meeting and quickly move to talking about football, sandwich meat, or cooking in general. What would be the purpose?

C. But we do this as a church

1. The joy of fellowship is lost when we neglect it
2. **Hebrews 10:19-25 (NASB)**
  - <sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,
  - <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,
  - <sup>21</sup> and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God,
  - <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
  - <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;
  - <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,
  - <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
3. Question: Could it be that we don’t do this because there is very little to talk about because we don’t think about this?
4. Question: How can you stimulate other believers to grow?

#### IV. Ministry (Acts 2:44-45)

A. The description given in this passage speaks of a church ministering to the needs of each other.

1. The Jews were often known for their sharing and mutual meeting of needs when there was a great feast
2. The Christians continued this but went further
3. They shared with one another
4. They were willing to sell property to take care of the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ
5. This was not required but was voluntarily
6. They understood that they should help their fellow believers

- 7.They were following the example of Christ
- 8.The key here is recognizing needs and meeting them
- 9.It calls the church and everyone in the church to pay attention to opportunities to serve
10. There are many types of needs in the church such as emotional, financial, spiritual, mental, and physical
11. As a church body, we must be willing to come along side others in the church to minister to them
12. Question: Do you currently seek to meet the needs of others in the church?
13. Question: What are some ways that you can improve in these areas?

V. Prayer (Acts 2:42c)

A. Prayer is also mentioned as an act of the church

1. There are numerous examples of the church praying together in Acts
2. Peter and John going to the temple for prayer (3:1)
3. The church praying for boldness (4:23-31)
4. Prayer over those chosen to serve (6:1-7)
5. These are just a few examples within the first 6 chapters of Acts
6. What is evident in this small survey is the church's commitment to prayer
7. How would you evaluate the prayer life of the contemporary church?
8. What are some ways we could be better committed to prayer in the church?

VI. Worship (Acts 2:46-47)

A. Notice the description of how the church acted in these verses

1. They met together daily in the temple
2. Broke bread from house to house
3. They were joyful
4. Praising God
5. This was a church that worshipped
6. They had much to be thankful for and to worship
7. What are the key components of worship found in this passage?
  - a. Joy
  - b. Sincerity
  - c. Gathering
8. Question: How do you think the church could do a better job of providing an atmosphere of worship?
9. Question: How can members of the church be better prepared to worship?

10. Question: How do you think your life is consistent (or inconsistent) with the components of worship mentioned?

**Implications**

Examination

A. The following scale should be used to help students evaluate themselves according to the acts of the church mentioned in this passage. The measurements will move from One to Ten with one being least functioning and ten being most functioning

Evangelism

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Discipleship

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Fellowship

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Ministry

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Prayer

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Worship

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

**Application**

Final Questions

1. What is one way you can improve in evangelism?
2. What is one way you can improve in discipleship?
3. What is one way you can improve in fellowship?
4. What is one way you can improve in ministry?

5. What is one way you can improve in prayer?
6. What is one way you can improve in worship?

These questions will be discussed in class and throughout the week in a discussion board



## **Subject: Week Three: What are the ordinances of the church?**

Date: November 6, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Matt 28:18-20, Matt 26:26-28, 1 Cor 11:17-30

Key Ideas: Week 3 will be a study of the ordinances of the church. Focus will be on Baptism and the Lord's Supper with emphasis on their meaning and purpose. A study of Matt 28:18-20, Matt 26:26-28, and 1 Cor 11:17-30 will be completed. It will be understood that Baptism is a public display of faith in Christ and a first step of obedience upon professing Christ as Lord and Savior. It will be understood that the Lord's Supper is a call to remember what Christ has accomplished.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will develop a greater understanding of the purpose of baptism and the Lord's Supper and will be able to share ideas on how the church can better emphasize their meaning and purpose through discussion at the end of the lesson.

### **Opening**

Reminder: Definition of the church: The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consist of two interrelated elements: the universal church and the local church. The universal church is visible through local bodies. These local bodies are a group of believers who have covenanted together to be centered on the Word and practice of the two ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Greg Allison. *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29-30.

Article 7 of our confessional statement *The Baptist Faith and Message*<sup>6</sup>, says

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

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

## **Content**

### I. Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20)

#### A. This is the first step of obedience to Christ

1. It is really a first step in our walk with Christ
2. If you don't get started right, you don't continue right
3. ILL – me running in the 5k and thinking I could do better than I did
4. For Baptist, it is a prerequisite for membership – we want obedient members
5. It is obedience after following Christ
6. We do not practice infant baptism – known as pedo-baptism – you don't find that in Scripture
7. It is not for salvation but because of salvation
8. Eph. 2:8-9

#### B. It is a symbol of what has happened in Christ

1. It symbolizes us dying to self, our burial into Christ, and our resurrection to walk in a new way of life
2. That is why we practice immersion
3. Romans 6:4

#### C. What do we do with this?

1. Know why baptism is so important
2. Know why we practice it the way we do
3. As a first step of obedience, it is something we can look back on to spur us onto continual obedience

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<sup>6</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Accessed October 3, 2022, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.

## II. Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28)

### A. For many, the Lord's Supper has lost some of its significance

1. Many churches do it every week
2. ILL – growing up in a Lutheran church we did it each week
3. It then becomes just another part of what is done in a service like shaking hands
4. How many of us just go through the routine when we have it?
5. The key is that Jesus said it was in remembrance of Him

### B. Broken body of Jesus

1. Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice like the Passover lamb
2. His body was broken and torn for us
3. Each time we take the bread we are to be reminded of how Christ substituted himself for us on the cross
4. Isaiah 53:5

### C. The blood of Christ

1. When Jesus died he instituted a new covenant
2. Hebrews 10
3. His blood was shed on the cross for our forgiveness of sin
4. When we take the cup we are reflecting on the sacrifice He made for us

### D. What do we do with this?

1. We reflect on why
2. We remember the sacrifice
3. We remember He is going to return

### E. Who can participate? 1 Cor 11:17-30

## **Implications**

Question: How can we celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper with a greater focus on their meaning and purpose?

## **Application**

Evaluate our current practice of receiving someone as a candidate for baptism. What are practices we can change to better display and guard the meaning of baptism?

Evaluate how we currently celebrate the Lord's Supper. What are some ways we can enhance this celebration to better display and guard the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

This will be discussed in class and also in a discussion board throughout the week.

## **Subject: Week 4: How does a church function?**

Date: November 13, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Matt 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-7, 1 Pet 5:2-4, and Eph 4:11-17

Key Ideas: Week 4 will be a study of church government. Emphasis will be on how a church makes decisions. A study of Matt 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-7, 1 Pet 5:2-4, and Eph 4:11-17 will be completed. It will be understood that the congregation should make the decisions within the body with the pastor as the leader who shepherds the congregation. Deacons are to be servants in the church

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of church government and the importance of the congregational approach to making decisions. This will be completed through discussion of ideas to better present a congregational approach to church government. A discussion of the leadership of the pastor and service of the deacons will take place as well.

### **Opening**

Reminder: The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consist of two interrelated elements: the universal church and the local church. The universal church is visible through local bodies. These local bodies are a group of believers who have covenanted together to be centered on the Word and practice of the two ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim

his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.<sup>7</sup>

Question: How should a church make decisions?

How a church makes decisions is debated among different denominations

There are many views of how Scripture portrays church government.

Baptists have taken the congregational approach. That is what will be emphasized in this lesson by examining two passages of Scripture: Matt 18:15-17 and Acts 6:1-7.

This lesson leans heavily on Thom Rainer and Daniel Akin's study, *Vibrant Church*<sup>8</sup> for the outline of these passages.

## **Content**

### A. Matt. 18:15-17

1. The emphasis in this passage is a brother who has sinned against someone in the church
2. Notice the progression that Jesus states
3. First, you are to go to your brother individually
4. Then, if he does not listen, you are to take one or two with you as you go
5. Finally, if he does not listen then, he is to be brought before the church
6. Who is the final authority?
7. It is the church – those gathered as believers in Christ

### B. Acts 6:1-7

1. This passage presents a problem
2. The number of people who became followers of Christ were increasing
3. This meant that some were being left out of the daily distribution
4. Notice how the disciples solved the problem
5. They called together the assembly and told them to choose seven men among them who can carry out the duty of caring for those in the church who were widows. They were to serve the church
6. Notice the apostles do not choose but the church chooses

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Allison. *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Daniel Akin, *Vibrant Church: Becoming a Healthy Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2008), 62.

7. “Notice the congregational involvement, initiated by the apostles, in seeking men who would serve. This strategy balances congregational participation with pastoral leadership.”<sup>9</sup>

C. What are the offices of the church?

1. Pastors: Eph 4:11-16, 1 Tim 3:1-7
2. Deacons: Acts 6:1-7, 1 Tim 3:8-13

D. Who does a church answer to?

1. Association?
2. KBC?
3. SBC?
4. What do we understand?
  - a. Each local body of believers does not answer and are not governed by any association or convention.
  - b. Each local body can choose to volunteer together with other churches to form an association and state or national convention
  - c. These associations and conventions are answerable to the local church
  - d. If a church’s beliefs do not line up with the association or convention, the convention can disfellowship with that church but cannot tell the church what to believe.
  - e. Conventions and associations are beneficial and needed because we can do far more together than we can separately
  - f. A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.  
Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-

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<sup>9</sup> Rainer and Akin, *Vibrant Church*, 62.

32; *Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.*<sup>10</sup>

### **Implications**

Question: How does the early church differ in their decision making compared to how you have experienced the decision made here at the church?

Question: How can this be neglected/abused?

Question: How can we do it better?

### **Application**

Question: Do you understand how decisions are made in the church here at Horse Creek Baptist Church?

Question: What are some ways we can improve/enhance this at Horse Creek?

These questions will be discussed in class and during the week through a discussion board

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<sup>10</sup> The Baptist Faith and Message, Accessed October 3, 2022, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.



## **Subject: Unity, Diversity, Equality, Importance, Care, and Concern in the Body**

Date: November 20, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: 1 Cor 12:12-27

Key Ideas: Week 5 will begin an examination of the body of Christ image in Scripture. The focus of the lesson will be on 1 Cor 12:12-27. Emphasis will be placed on the unity, diversity, equality, importance, care, and concern in a local body.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning unity, diversity, equality, importance, care, and concern for each other within the body.

### **Opening**

Question: Is the church the body of Christ?

Question: What does it mean to be the body of Christ?

Question: What implications does this understanding have for membership within the church?

Transition: The purpose of this lesson is to begin discussion of this image from 1 Cor 12:12-27. We will focus in three areas

## Content

### I. Unity and Diversity (12-14)

#### A. The body is made up of many members

1. Paul's use of words demonstrates the makeup of the body
2. "One" indicates the unity in the body
3. "members" and "many" indicates diversity in the body
4. Both are emphasized
5. This is not a contradiction
6. There can be no body without the many members and the many members are not separate but make up one body
7. There must be diversity for the body to be the body
8. Unity is found in diversity as each one does its part in the body

#### B. The reason for this unity is "for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

1. Water baptism is a point of reference that each member of the church can look to as a picture of their new identity in Christ
2. It is the mark by which they can look at as the beginning of their incorporation into the body
3. Baptists have historically understood this
4. Present various statements of faith from Baptist tradition
5. When someone comes to know Christ, he receives the Spirit, which incorporates him into the body of Christ. That incorporation is pictured when he takes that first step of obedience by following through with water baptism. That baptism does not provide him the Spirit, but only displays what has taken place in his life through Christ. Thus, his baptism is a reference point, shared by all believers, that marks his new identity as part of the body of Christ

### II. Equality and Importance (15-20)

#### A. Paul now presents the equality and importance of each member of the body using an illustration of different body parts speaking about themselves

##### A. Every member of the body is equal

- a. The failure of one part can cause the body to shut down or fail
- b. The body does not function as it should

##### B. Every part of the body has a function to perform within the body

- a. If the body only had one part, there would be no other function of the body
- b. Every part has a role to play

C. This is God's design

- a. God has placed members in the body the way He desired
- b. To see some as more important than others is to ignore God's design

III. Care and Concern (21-27)

A. Paul again uses an illustration to present his point

1. Each member needs the other members of the body
  - a. Paul's illustration presents a hierarchy where one member views himself as superior to the others to the point where he believes he does not need the other
  - b. This often happens when ego, power, or status is involved
2. Those who seem weaker are necessary and honored
  - a. This seems to point to the internal organs
  - b. They seem weaker and more vulnerable, but they are necessary for life
  - c. Without the functioning of these organs, life cannot continue.
  - d. This is a reminder that all members are needed
  - e. This points us to understand the care and concern we are to have to one another
3. Each member of the body is connected
  - a. There can be no division
  - b. Care must be given to each member because of their connection to the body
  - c. Every part of the body is part of the body
  - d. What affects one member affects all members
  - e. If care and concern are not provided for one member of the body, then the whole body suffers because that one member is part of the body
  - f. If care and concern are provided for that one member, then the whole body benefits because that one member is part of the body

**Implications**

Question: What are the ways the church best presents this unity and diversity to the world?

Question: How does the church's unity and diversity give a picture of all other distinctions and barriers becoming secondary?

Question: In what ways do we neglect the function of each member within the body?

Question: In what ways have you witnessed the care and concern within this body?

Question: In what ways are we neglecting the care and concern within the body?

### **Application**

Brainstorm: What are some ways we can display this unity and diversity better to the world?

Brainstorm: What are some ways we can display this unity and diversity better within our church?

Brainstorm: How can you better understand your function within the body?

Brainstorm: How can we grow in our care and concern for members in the body?

These will be discussed in class and on a discussion forum throughout the week

## **Subject: Pride, Judgment, and Function in the Body**

Date: November 27, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Rom 12:3-8

Key Ideas: Week 6 will continue the examination of the body of Christ image. The focus of the lesson will be on Rom 12:3-8. Emphasis will be placed on pride, judgment, and function in a local body.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning pride, judgment, and function within the body.

### **Opening**

Question: How do you view yourself within the body?

Transition: In this passage, Paul presents two themes concerning the body: pride and judgment and function.

### **Content**

- I. Pride and Judgment (3)
  - A. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we should
    1. God has given each one a “measure of faith.”
    2. This is part of this renewal that is to take place in the believer’s life
    3. This renewal is directed to how one views himself within the body of Christ
    4. One will display this renewal of mind by how one views himself within the body

- B. The measure speaks of the gifting each one possesses
  - 1. Each member is to view himself by the standard of faith (gifting) God has given him
  - 2. This keeps one from thinking of himself higher than he should
  - 3. This affects how each member is to relate to the other
  - 4. We are to understand our gifting as part of the whole

II. Function (4-5)

- A. There is design and purpose for the body
  - 1. A human body requires the proper working of each part
  - 2. The church body requires the proper working of each part
  - 3. When a member does their part, it provides for the body which in turn provides for the member
  - 4. Every member has a function
  - 5. To function in a way that against design is to not function properly
- B. A member functions properly by using their gifts
  - 1. Gifts were given for the benefit of the body
  - 2. When each gift is used it strengthens the body's unity and the body functions properly

**Implications**

Question: In what ways do we often think of ourselves as more important than others in the body?

Question: Do you know your spiritual gifts?

Question: How are you using your spiritual gifts within the body?

**Application**

For those who do not know your spiritual gifts: A spiritual gifts inventory will be provided<sup>11</sup>

For those who do know: What are your spiritual gifts? How can you better use your spiritual gifts in the function of the body here at Horse Creek Baptist Church?

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<sup>11</sup> The specific spiritual gifts inventory use will be the following: Michael D. Miller, *Ministry Gifts Inventory* (Nashville: Lifeway, 1995).

This will be discussed in class and throughout the week in a discussion board

More will be discussed concerning gifting in the next lesson

## **Subject: Gifting, Roles, and Growth in the Body**

Date: December 4, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Eph 4:1-16

Key Ideas: Week 7 will continue the examination of the body of Christ image. The focus of the lesson will be on Eph 4:1-16. Emphasis will be placed on gifting, roles, and growth in a local body.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning gifting, roles, and growth for each member of the body.

### **Opening**

Question: How would you rate the overall function of the body here at Horse Creek?

Question: Why do you feel this way?

Transition: In this passage, Paul's use of the image of the body of Christ is most detailed. He presents three themes: gifting, roles, and growth.

### **Content**

I. Gifting (4-7)

A. Paul presents a trinitarian basis for unity in the body in these verses



1. Components of the Christian faith which are mentioned in these verses are centered around the three persons of the Trinity.
  2. This does not speak of different modes within the Godhead
  3. Paul is not presenting different works of the three persons of the Godhead as separate works
  4. He is emphasizing unity within the Godhead, which then becomes the basis for unity of the body
  5. He uses these verses to set up his discussion of diversity in the body in verses 7-16
  6. This is the theological basis for this discussion
- B. Oneness is expressed in the body through various gifts given to members within that body
1. Each gift is distinct and performs a service within the body
  2. The gifts are given according to Christ's plan
  3. Paul's use of "each one" reveals that each member of the body has a gift
  4. Each has a purpose because they are given for the benefit of the body
  5. If the body is going to mature, each part must work as it has been gifted to work
  6. Each part, using their gift, contributes to the whole
  7. As the body grows, it grows in unity
  8. Christ is the source of this growth

## II. Roles (11)

- A. Paul speaks of those who have been gifted as given to the church
1. This is not a list of gifts given, but of gifted individuals given to the church
  2. These are gifted leaders given to the church for the equipping of each member to grow in their use of their spiritual gift
  3. These leaders are to equip the church in the work of ministry
  4. This results in the body of Christ being built up
  5. There is mutuality of service being completed
- B. Each member has a role to play within the body
1. The reason it is important for each member to fulfill their role is so the body is built
  2. Notice this is not individual growth but the growth of the body
  3. Leaders are responsible to equip, and members are responsible for the work of ministry
  4. Both contribute to the body in different but equally important roles
  5. When these roles are fulfilled, there is growth

6. When these roles are neglected, growth is hindered

### III. Growth (13-16)

#### A. Paul mentions three aspects of one goal in the body

1. The goal is the maturity of the body
2. The first aspect of that goal is the unity of the faith
3. The second aspect of that goal is growing in the knowledge of Christ
4. The third aspect of that goal is that the body measures to the stature of Christ

#### B. Unity of the faith

1. This is faith in Christ and all it entails
2. Faith in Christ is that which binds the church to one another
3. All of what Christ has accomplished has been imparted to the believer
4. This includes spiritual gifts and their use within the body
5. Unity of the faith would entail the body moving toward being like Christ
6. The church is to continue to pursue being like Christ
7. The use of spiritual gifts in service to the body helps in that pursuit

#### C. Growing in the knowledge of Christ

1. This knowledge is for the church
2. This is knowledge of Christ
3. This growth happens corporately
4. Certain individuals within the body will grow at different levels and speeds
5. As each one grows, he helps the other in the body grow as well
6. The church grows in this knowledge as it understands more and more of Christ and rejects the false teachings that continually threaten the body

#### D. The body is to measure up to Christ's stature

1. Christ is the standard by which the church is to grow
2. This happens when everyone uses their spiritual gifts
3. The church gives a full picture of Christ to the world

4. “The glorified provides the standard at which his people are to aim: the corporate Christ cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ.”<sup>12</sup>
5. This growth is a corporate growth and not an individual growth
6. Individuals cannot be separated from the body and still grow
7. Growth is a shared experience
8. Individuals grows and then use that growth toward the growth of the body as a whole

**Implications**

Question: How would you measure Horse Creek Baptist in the three aspects of maturity?

Question: In what ways can you better contribute to the goal of being like Christ?

**Application**

Brainstorm: What are three ways you can contribute to the church’s goal of being like Christ?

Unity of the faith \_\_\_\_\_

Growing in the knowledge of Christ \_\_\_\_\_

Measuring up to Christ’s stature \_\_\_\_\_

These will be discussed in class and throughout the week in a discussion board

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 339-40.

## **Subject: Source and Vulnerability in the Body**

Date: December 11, 2022

Location: Horse Creek Baptist Church

Target Group: Students are primarily college students who will soon begin taking leadership roles in the church.

Passage: Col 1:18a, 2:19

Key Ideas: Week 8 will finish the examination of the body of Christ image. The focus of the lesson will be on Col 1:18a, 2:19. Emphasis will be placed on source and vulnerability in a local body.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the session, students will have a greater understanding of how this image relates to membership in the church concerning source and vulnerability of each member of the body.

### **Opening**

Question: What happens when a believer does not stay connected to a local body?

Transition: Paul will present two more themes in this passage that will help us answer this question.

### **Content**

- I. Source (Col 1:18a)
  - A. Paul speaks of Christ as the head of the body

1. This means that He is the source of life for the body
2. Christ is the source, and the body is not complete without the head
3. If the church is to understand its identity as the body of Christ, then it must understand its source as Christ Himself.
4. The church is to be the body, but it is to act and work in line with the head
5. This means the church does not exist for itself, but for Christ
6. This also means the church cannot seek to be self-sufficient but must continually stay connected to the head

## II. Vulnerability (Col 2:19)

### A. Paul now provides a different angle to be considered when it comes to connection to the church

1. Paul presents false teaching in verses 16-18
2. When Paul mentions this false teaching, he contrasts it with the teaching that is connected to the body
3. This indication is that some are following teachings which are not the truth
4. One is vulnerable to these teachings when one is not connected to the body

### B. What does this have to do with the theme of vulnerability?

1. It is precisely because one has disconnected himself from that body that a selfish mindset emerges.
2. When one disconnects himself from the body, individual identity becomes more prominent than corporate identity
3. This leaves one vulnerable to attacks and deception.
4. The local church provides a place where the Word of God is taught and preached, and the work of the corporate body is most visible
5. It is in the protection of staying connected with the local body that one can recognize the need for connection to the body

## **Implications**

Question: Why should a church practice meaningful membership (only those who are believers can be a part of the church) based on what has been discussed so far?

1. Meaningful membership guards the practice of church government – if the congregation is to govern themselves in a way that glorifies Christ, it must be made up of believers

2. Meaningful membership guards the witness of the church – The witness of the church is hurt when unbelievers are allowed to join. Also, if believers do not take membership seriously, thus not taking the church seriously, those outside the church will not as well
3. Meaningful membership provides an atmosphere of effective church discipline – if each member is responsible for each other, the practice of church discipline holds both the church and individual accountable. This is best practiced when members are believers.
4. Meaningful membership provides a greater atmosphere for obedience to Christ – if Christ is the standard and the church is to grow in Christ, then the only way this can be accomplished is if members are believers
5. Meaningful membership helps one be accountable – believers are vulnerable when they seek to grow in isolation. The church is to grow as a body. Being a member of a church helps one to grow.
6. Meaningful membership provides the best atmosphere to learn and use one’s spiritual gifts in service – Each believer is to use their spiritual gifts in service to one another. The use of these spiritual gifts enables the body to grow as it should. Being a member of a local church gives one an opportunity to use those gifts in the capacity they were designed.
7. Meaningful membership provides an opportunity to experience the care of the body – Members are to care for one another. Being a member of a church provides an opportunity to care for others and receive the care of the body.
8. Meaningful membership provides an opportunity to grow – It has been mentioned that growth takes place on a corporate level. If we are to grow, we must stay connected to the body. Being an active member of a local body helps one stay connected.

### **Application**

Question: What are your next steps?

Question: How can you take what you have learned in these sessions and apply them?

Question: How can you take what you have learned in these sessions and teach them to others?

These questions will be discussed in class and throughout the week in a discussion board

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## ABSTRACT

### INCREASING BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE YOUNG ADULT CLASS AT HORSE CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH IN MANCHESTER, KENTUCKY

Dustin Lee Sims, DEdMin  
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Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John D. Morrison

This project seeks to increase biblical understanding of church identity and membership within the Young Adult Class at Horse Creek Baptist Church. Chapter 1 identifies the ministry context of Horse Creek and presents the goals for this project. Chapter 2 seeks to present the biblical basis for church identity and membership. It provides an exegesis of five passages of Scripture (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 5:22-32, 1 Corinthians 3:9-16, and 1 Peter 2:9-10) to present images of the church as a way of understanding church identity and membership. Chapter 3 presents the historical understanding of the church from a Baptist's perspective as well as practical implications of church identity and membership to demonstrate the importance of their understanding. Chapter 4 describes the project, focusing on the content and teaching of the curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the completion of the goals set forth in the project.

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