Membership Matters
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Preface

Thank you for picking up Membership Matters. This series of Bible studies is designed to teach us some of the fundamental attitudes required to live out God-honouring relationships in the church. Why have we taken the approach of emphasizing the topics we have? Because church membership is primarily about relationships. In fact, this is true of all of salvation. Think about it, it is through our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that we become reconciled to God the Father - thus entering into a new relationship with Him. And, consider that since Christ has reconciled us to God the Father he has also reconciled all believers to one another – thus creating an entirely new spiritual family.

The unity of all believers in the family of God is a tremendous spiritual truth, but what does it look like practically? Jesus said in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Believers should have a supernatural love for one another. There is a problem however - we all continue to suffer under the temptation and influence of our own sin nature, and will continue to do so until we are glorified in Heaven. Our struggles with sin and pride can destroy the love and unity which God desires for His church.

In addition to this, God has chosen to build the church by calling out men and women from diverse ages, backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. The differences among God’s people are staggering.

The fact that the church body is comprised of diverse individuals who still struggle with sin, can make loving unity a hard thing to maintain. So how in the world are we to hold God-honouring relationships within the church?

The fact of the matter is, every church is simply a gathering of sinners who have been saved by the grace of God and who are faithfully working and waiting for his return. But by God’s grace He has given us everything we need to mature in the faith, live in unity and glorify Him through our relationships. His Holy Spirit enables us to live for His glory and his Spirit works primarily through illuminating and applying the scriptures in our lives. For this reason, in this book we have chosen to highlight clear, Biblical, spiritual attitudes which God requires of all of his children. Attitudes which are essential to a healthy church life.

Like all relationships, your relationships within the church will challenge you at times and God will use them to help build Christ-like character in your life. As you consider joining Calvary Baptist Church, pray that God would help you (by His Holy Spirit), to develop a love for your fellow believers. Then, set out to faithfully exercise the loving attitudes that you learn about in these studies.

Rick Cowan
Pastor-Teacher
Calvary Baptist Church
Introduction

We live in a day and age where anyone can access good Bible teaching from anywhere and at any time. Our favorite Bible teachers are only a mouse click or finger swipe away. We can access decades worth of expository sermons, seminary courses and Bible lessons and carry them with us wherever we go. We now have access to more teaching than we can ever hope to listen to in a lifetime. So, who needs the local church? Why not simply queue up your favorite teacher and listen at your own pace, on your own timetable, to sermons of your own choosing, in the comfort of your own home?

Why not? Because God has not designed the Christian life to be lived out in isolation, but in community. The church is not simply a place for individuals to download information. It is a corporate fellowship of believers who covenant with one another to live out the Christian life together. This is the amazing thing about the gospel — through it, God is calling out diverse individuals to be joined together as one spiritual community. Further, he has designed this community to display a supernatural love for, and unity with one another. This covenant community is to be so different from anything else that this world knows, that it should bar any conclusion other than the fact that it has been formed and maintained by Christ himself (John 13:35).

The Bible knows nothing of an isolated believer who worships God “in his own way” and on his own terms, because the Christian life is a community life. For this reason, all those new believers in the early chapters of Acts were “added to the church” and when they were dispersed due to persecution they sought out fellow believers and established new fellowships. Leaders were ordained in those fellowships and church life was lived out together.

This spiritual unity is what Jesus Christ petitioned the Father for, and eventually gave his life to achieve. Far be it from anyone who names the name of Christ to belittle or devalue the importance of corporate church life — because He died to establish it and forever works to maintain it.

So, we believe that the corporate gathering of believers into local churches is God’s plan for his people. He has made the local church an indispensable part of every Christian’s life by ensuring that individuals cannot be all that he as designed them to be without the community of believers. For this reason, the obedient Christian life must be lived out in union with other believers in the church.

Consider the following ways in which God has made the church an indispensable part of the Christian life thus making it essential that every believer join a church.

The church is a place of accountability. All believers are to submit to one another. That is, to join a church is to willingly and joyfully enter into a relationship of accountability with every other believer in...
the congregation. For the believer who desires to live a life to the glory of God, this culture of accountability is incredibly valuable. He knows that his fellow believers love him and care for his spiritual condition. He knows that they will encourage him when he’s struggling, support him when he’s suffering, and even rebuke him when he’s straying. In turn, he provides this every same accountability to others in the body.

In addition to the mutual accountability which exists among church members, God has given elders to the church who are to oversee the congregation. Their oversight includes, among other things, teaching, leading, protecting and even admonishment. These men are gifted by God to operate as a spiritual authority and accountability over the church.

At times, the congregation along with the elders are called upon to exercise church discipline. Church discipline, as taught by Jesus Christ Himself, is a crucial component of any healthy church. Not only this, but it is exclusive to the church. It is only within the context of the local church that Christ’s commands in Matthew 18 can be carried out. And so, God instructs all believers to join a church for the purpose of accountability – both to fellow believers and to the spiritual leadership that he has ordained in the church.

In addition to accountability, the church is a place of protection. The church is often compared to a flock of sheep. Apart from the flock, an isolated sheep is weak and vulnerable. The same is true for believers. When we are weak and tempted, the example and encouragement of others often serves as a protection against sin.

Furthermore, as the church teaches and defends Biblical doctrine, we are protected against the ever-present danger of false teachers. Also, the counsel of others and the leadership of our elders protects us from veering away from the apostle’s doctrine and into our own novel interpretations of scripture. This is a serious danger for those who attempt to live their Christian lives apart from the church, picking and choosing their Bible teachers online, cobbling together their own peculiar theology with no accountability or protection.

Not only is the church a place of accountability and protection, but it is also the context in which we exercise the one anothers of scripture. The Bible is replete with instruction regarding how we are to relate to one another in the church. These are what we call the “one anothers of scripture”. Consider for example: we are told to love, serve, forgive, comfort, edify, admonish, and prefer one another. We are also told to be kind, tender-hearted, compassionate, and hospitable toward one another. We are instructed to bear each other’s burdens, provoke one another to love and good works, confess our faults to one another and to pray for one another.

All of the above attitudes are to be lived out in the church. The very fact that so much of the New Testament is given to instruct us in how to live with one another is clear evidence that God’s design for believers is not isolation, but unity within the family of the church.
Closely connected to the previous point, God has made the church an indispensable part of the believer’s life by making it the chief arena in which we exercise our spiritual gifts. The Bible teaches that all spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the church at large. That is, no spiritual gift is given by God to be exercised privately.

We are all stewards of God’s grace through the spiritual gifts that he has given us and the only way to be a faithful steward of those gifts is to exercise them by serving one another in the church. Anything short of this is disobedience and unfaithfulness.

Lastly, the church is the only place where the ordinances can be properly administered. The Lord has left us with two ordinances – baptism and the Lord’s Table. Baptism is to be a public display of one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Table is, in part, a display of the unity that exists among all who have a part in the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection. The purpose and image of both of these ordinances is destroyed if not administered within the context of the community of the church.

Mutual accountability, spiritual protection, the one anothers of scripture, the exercise of spiritual gifts and the ordinances – these are essential to the Christian life and are designed by God to be found exclusively in the church. In other words, an obedient Christian life cannot be lived by one who refuses to join together with a local church body.

**The Church Covenant**

The church is a covenant community. Firstly, we are joined together by the New Covenant which Jesus Christ has brought us into by His substitutionary death upon the cross. But also, the church is a covenant community because it is made up of men and women who have covenanted together to live out their Christian lives together.

By joining Calvary Baptist Church you are committing to mutual accountability with its other members. You are welcoming the spiritual oversight and leadership of the elders. You are choosing to exercise the one another’s of scripture amongst this congregation. You are committing to exercise your spiritual gifts for the building up of this church. And you are committing to faithfully observe the ordinances which Christ has given to the church.

To this end, many churches, including Calvary Baptist Church have adopted what is known as a church covenant. A church covenant is simply a summary of the Biblical principles which are given by God to govern life in the local church. By deciding to join Calvary Baptist Church, you are assenting to this covenant and entering into a relationship of accountability to the scriptural principles represented in it.

See our church covenant on the following page.
Our Church Covenant

Having been led as we believe by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour; and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort, to promote its prosperity and spirituality, to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor and the spreading of the gospel throughout all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions, to biblically educate our children, to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world, to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from all substances, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.

And we moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.
How to get the most from these studies.

**Open the Bible.** This book is designed for Bible study. In order to fully benefit from the studies contained here, you must be willing to open your Bible and search the scriptures for answers. These studies are based upon the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you are accustomed to reading another version you may need to have both open in order to discover the right answers.

**Take your Time.** The purpose of any Bible study is not to race to the finish line. If your time spent studying scripture does not produce a better understanding of the word of God then it is in vain. Take your time going through these studies. Stop and think about what you've read and take the time to apply the truths to your life.

**Pay Attention to the Sidebar.** On the sidebar to the right you will find helpful information including definitions, insightful quotes, related Bible passages, room for notes and more.

**Think and Apply.** Throughout these studies you will see sections entitled “Think and Apply”. There may not be any room to write an answer. That’s because these are designed for meditation. Take a minute and think about how the question applies practically to your life. Apply the study and be willing to change where God prompts you.

**Ask Questions.** Almost every page contains a section entitled “My Notes”. Use it to record your thoughts and also any questions the lesson may have brought up in your own mind. This way you can contribute to group discussion when we review these lessons together.

**Do the Review.** At the end of each study are some review questions. Take the time to answer these questions thoughtfully. They will help you to solidified what you’ve learned and will serve as a measure of how much you have retained.

**Pray.** Bible truths are only imparted by the Holy Spirit of God. While you study, pray that God would help you to understand and apply His word to your life.
It is wonderful that you are considering joining Calvary Baptist Church. It is our hope that through this study and the ones that follow, you will develop a Biblical understanding of what becoming a church member is all about.

**What is a Church?**

Sometimes you hear people make statements like “I believe in God, but I reject organized religion”, or “I’m a Christian but I worship God in my own way at home”. What these people have really done is attempt to separate Christ from his church. Their profession of a belief in God may soothe their conscience but it certainly does not impress God (James 2:19-20). God’s plan for his children is that each and every one of them join a local church.

It would be helpful at this point to define just what a church is. A simple definition of “a church” could be a local gathering of baptized believers joined together to carry out Christ’s will on earth.

Notice that in that definition, nothing is said of a building. It is unfortunate that we have come to refer to the building in which believers meet as “the church”. In reality, it is the believers themselves which make up the church (see Matt 18:17, Acts 14:27, 15:3, 5:11; Rom 16:5).

A church is both a visible and local gathering of believers. The very first believers met in the Temple (Acts 2:46). They then began to meet in homes (Phm 1:2; Col 4:15; 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5). It is not hard to imagine that after these churches outgrew the homes that they then sought out larger buildings to meet in.

When it comes to defining a church, buildings are inconsequential. It is the assembly of believers within the buildings who actually make up “the church”.  

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John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
The First Church

In Acts 2 we find Peter’s great evangelistic sermon on the Day of Pentecost. He was filled with the Spirit of God (Acts 2:4) and preached the gospel to thousands of Jews.

Look up Acts 2:41.

Q. Who was it that was baptized?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Q. What does this verse indicate happened “that day”?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Look up Acts 2:42.

Q. After these people received the word of God by faith, were baptized and added to the number of disciples, what four things did they do continually?

1. ____________________________________ 2. ____________________________________

3. ____________________________________ 4. ____________________________________

Immediately after these people received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and were baptized, they joined themselves to other believers and faithfully continued in learning, in fellowship, and in prayer. These were not isolated believers who sought to “worship God in their own way”, nor were they people who used a rejection of “organized religion” as an excuse to not join with other believers. Their affection for Christ immediately translated into a love for Christ’s church (fellow believers). This has been the pattern of true Christianity ever since. A love for Jesus Christ always results in a love for Christ’s church.

Look up 1 John 3:14.
Q. What is an evidence that we are saved (or have “passed out of death into life”)?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Think and Apply

Considering the verse above, what could we conclude about someone who claims to be a believer in Jesus Christ but has no desire to join together with other believers in a local church?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Initially there was only one church in Jerusalem but on the Day of Pentecost thousands of foreign Jews travelled to Jerusalem for a festival (Acts 2). There they heard the Apostle Peter preach a sermon about Jesus Christ. Thousands of Jews became believers that day and many returned to their various hometowns and (having received Christ as their Lord and Saviour in Jerusalem) would have founded local churches in their home communities. No matter where these believers met, they brought the church with them, because they were the church.

Churches began to pop up in numerous cities. This was not due to doctrinal or denominational differences but simply due to geography. Wherever there were a gathering of believers who were not near an established church, a church could be formed (see Acts 13:1, 14:23, 15:41, 16:4-5, 18:22, 20:17; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 7:17). These believers would ordain elders (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23) and would then seek to carry out Christ’s commands in their community and among their own gathering (Matt 18:18-20; John 15:12; 13:35).

Loving the Church

It is not possible to love Jesus Christ and not love the church. In fact, if you find yourself feeling this way it is an indication that either you are not truly a Christian or that you have deep spiritual issues that need to be confessed to God (if you are a new Christian it may just be a matter of learning!).

We must cease to think of the church as a gathering of institutions and organizations, and we must get back to the notion that we are the people of God.

Martin Lloyd Jones

Think About It

Considering all of the above, it is not really accurate to say that we are “going to church” nor is it accurate to refer to the building in which we meet as “the church”. Try to begin thinking of your fellow believers as your church!
A life committed to Jesus Christ will also be a life devoted to a local gathering of fellow believers. God has designed it this way. He, by his Holy Spirit, develops a spiritual unity and love among believers in Jesus Christ. This love is a sure sign that we are truly his disciples.

Look up John 13:35.

Q. What is one obvious way to tell if someone is truly a disciple of Jesus Christ?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Considering the verse above, what kind of relationship does Jesus Christ want you to have with other believers? How has your view of Christians changed since you were saved?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

The Holy Spirit works in every believer to produce a supernatural affection for the church. He does this through the word of God. In His word, He has laid out some clear reasons why we should love the church. As we mature as Christians these will each become more and more meaningful to us. Consider the following reasons why a love for Christ should naturally lead us to love the church.

The Church is Loved by Christ

Look up Eph 5:25.
Q. What example of perfect love should husbands follow in loving their wives?

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

Q. How did Christ express his love for the church? (see also Acts 20:28)

_____________________________________________________________

Look up Eph 5:28-29.

Q. How else does Christ express his love for the church?

_____________________________________________________________

The Church is valuable and precious. Not because we as individuals are inherently valuable but because Christ has purchased us with his precious blood on the cross. Before He saved us, we were sinful, unworthy sinners who were fit for Hell and unable to save ourselves, yet the shedding of His precious blood has made us church precious.

Every lost sinner, saved by the gracious offering of God’s perfect Son, should recognize the tremendous price that has been paid for his salvation. A price paid, not for his own soul only, but also for the souls of every other believer. This should cause us to see others in the church as incredibly valuable to Christ and consequently, precious to us.

Think and Apply

In your own words, why can’t someone simultaneously love Christ while not also loving his fellow believers in the church?

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

But then, we do not have to prove the church’s worth. The Lord Jesus has already done that by telling us that the church is His body, that He loved the church and gave Himself for her, that she is His bride, that He is head over all things for the church, and that He will not permit the gates of hell to prevail against her.

Robert Rayburn

We Should Love The Church Because...

1. The Church is Loved by Christ
2. The Church is Being Built by Christ
The Church is Being Built by Christ

We should also love the church because Jesus Christ is building the church.

Look up Matt 16:18.

Q. What did Jesus tell Peter he would do? What would the results be?

Contrary to the expectations of many Jews during Jesus’ day, Christ did not come to bring about social change, or political revolution. He came to accomplish one thing - the building of his church on earth. He began this work by calling sinners to repent and follow him. He died for their sins on the cross and then sent his Holy Spirit to dwell inside of them. The Spirit now works to make believers more and more like Christ. This is how He is building his church.

If we love Christ, we will not only love what Christ loves but we will love what Christ does. The church is the centre and circumference of Christ’s entire work on earth. It is through the church that he reaches the lost world by the preaching of the gospel. It is within the church that he continues his work of making saved men and women more and more like himself.

A lack of love for the church will undoubtedly manifest itself in a lack of attendance and participation in the church. When we fail to contribute to the church in these ways we undermine the very work that Christ seeks to do on earth. How can we confess a love for Christ, yet sabotage the very work that he gave his life to accomplish? We can’t. A genuine love for Christ should always carry over to a love for what he is doing on earth through the church.

Think and Apply

What are some ways that we can undermine the work that Christ is doing to build the church?

How do you contribute to the work that Christ is doing on earth through your church? Does your participation properly reflect your love for Christ?
The Church is Christ Made Visible

We have seen above that we should love the church because Christ shed his precious blood to purchase it (thereby placing immeasurable value upon it). We have also seen that we should love the church because it is the centrepiece of Christ’s work on earth. In addition to these two things, we should love the church because the church is Christ-made-visible.

Unlike the world in Christ’s day, we cannot touch or see Him (1 John 1:1; 1 Pet 1:8). But this does not mean that we can’t experience Christ on earth. How so? God has designed the church so that it would be the visible display of the invisible Christ.

Look up Col 1:27.

Q. What is the “mystery” that Paul speaks of here?

Look up Rom 8:9.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit referred to here?

When Christ ascended to Heaven following his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in all believers. The Holy Spirit is called “Christ in you” and “the Spirit of Christ” because it is the Spirit that produces the character of Christ within us. It is through the obedience of the members of a local church that Christ manifests his love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal 5:22). As every believer grows in the faith, he becomes more like Jesus Christ, thus making Christ visible to the world.
There is another way that we make Christ visible on earth. When we pray the model prayer we ask “your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”. In the present age, this prayer is answered in one place – the church. It is through the Spirit of God that we exercise Christ’s authority on earth (Matt 16:19, 18:18) and carry out his will (Matt 6:10). For this reason, the obedient church, operating in the power of the spirit, producing the character qualities of Christ, exercising his authority and performing his will, will be the closest thing to Christ physically appearing and working on earth that this world will ever see.

We should love the church because it is through the church (and only through the church) that the invisible Christ is made visible to the world.

The Church is the Source of Spiritual Unity

Have you ever noticed how your interactions with acquaintances is very different from your interactions with close friends? With an acquaintance you may talk about the weather, about sports and other topics of general interest, but nothing of any real consequence. While your close friends are those with whom you have the most in common. You can talk about meaningless things in life and you can talk about the deep things of life. You can share your thoughts, opinions, and your dreams. It is your close friends with whom you often share a common worldview and “take on life”.

Now take it one step further and think about your spouse or a close family member. Here there exists an even more intimate relationship. You’ve known each other your entire lives. You know each other’s strengths, habits, faults and failures. With family, you let your guard down. You shed pretenses that you may hold with others. With your family you not only share life experiences but you even share a common genetic makeup!

There is a good reason that scripture refers to the church as the household of God (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). Above all other relationships in life, it is with fellow believers within the church that we have the most in common (2 Cor 6:14-18). Above that of acquaintances and even above that of physical family members. Within the church, you have the most important aspects of life in common (Eph 2:11-22). We share a love for Christ (John 14:15, 23). We share a calling. We share a Father (Eph 4:4-7). We share a common acceptance of the word of God as authority (2 Tim 3:16). We share a worldview. We share an intimacy that allows for confessing and forgiving faults (James 5:16). More than this, we share a common spiritual nature which is making each of us into the same image of Christ (1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29).
One of the glorious aspects of how Jesus Christ is building his church is the fact that he is producing this special unity among men and women of diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and social statuses. The unity that Christ produces in these otherwise diverse peoples is a stunning testament to the supernatural quality of the church.

Think and Apply

Does the above describe your experience in the church? If not, why not? What can you do to help your relationship with others in the church grow toward this type of closeness?

Finally, we should love the church because the church is the repository of divine truth.

**The Church is the Repository of Divine Truth**

- Look up 1 Tim 3:14-15.

Q. How is the church (the household of God) described here?

As the church we are the proclaimers, preservers and practitioners of the word of God. We are stewards of the truth of God’s word. We teach it faithfully and accurately and we seek to live it out practically. There are plenty of teachers of the Bible (some good, some terrible), but it is only within the obedient church that we can find Christ’s words being taught and lived out just as he commanded.

Why should we love the church? We should love it because Christ placed an immeasurable value upon it by purchasing it with his sacrificial blood. We should love the church because it is the one place where Christ is actively at work in this world. We should love the church because it is through the obedient church that Christ’s character and his power are made known to this world. Finally, we should love the church because it is the steward of the truth of Christ’s word.

We Should Love The Church Because...

1. **The Church is Loved by Christ**
2. **The Church is Being Built by Christ**
3. **The Church is Christ Made Visible.**
4. **The Church is the Source of Spiritual Unity**
5. **The Church is the Repository of Divine Truth**
Do you fall short in your love for the church? Which of the reasons for loving the church stated above have you failed to value? How could you increase in your love for the church?

If you are a follower of Christ, you should be a member of a local church body – this is God’s design. Through membership you are covenanting with the church to fulfill God’s will together. With your fellow believers, you are committing to love, value and contribute to the church for the glory of God and towards the fulfillment of His purposes on earth.

1. What is “the church”? What are some false ideas about what the church is?

2. If someone is a genuine follower of Christ, how should they feel about fellow believers?

3. How should the fact that Christ gave his life for the church affect the value we place upon the church?
4. How would you answer someone who justifies their lack of commitment to a church by claiming that they worship God “in their own way” or are opposed to “organized religion”?

5. In what ways does the church make Christ visible to the world?

6. If we say we love the church and believe the statements above, how will it affect the way we interact with the church in areas of attendance, devotion, affection and giving?