

Main Idea: One of the marks of a healthy church is a firm commitment to church membership. We're going to see the biblical basis for this in Hebrews 10:19-25, and then discuss some practical implications.

- I. Because of Christ, we have resources to claim (19-21).
 - A. We have access.
 - B. We have a priest.
- II. Because of Christ, we have responsibilities to fulfill (22-25).
 - A. We should be coming to God (22).
 - B. We should be confessing our hope to the world (23).
 - C. We should be committed to the church (24-25).
 1. That involves thinking about each other.
 2. That involves motivating each other to Christlike action.
 3. That involves not missing church meetings.
 4. That involves encouraging each other.
 5. That involves living every day in light of The Day.

Implications: Let's address two relevant questions.

Question #1: Why should I belong to a local church?

1. God exalted Christ for the sake of the church (Eph 1:22).
2. God intends to glorify Himself in the church (Eph 3:21).
3. In the New Testament, when someone came to know Christ he was added to a local church (Acts 2:41, 46-47; 5:14).
4. We can't see Christ, but we can see His Body (Eph 4:4, 11-13).
5. We have all we need in Christ and we experience the fullness of Christ in the church (Eph 4:15-16).

Question #2: What does it mean to be a committed church member?

1. It means you affirm a church's doctrine (Acts 2:42).
2. It means you embrace a church's mission (Matt 28:19).
3. It means you participate in a church's services (Heb 10:25).
4. It means you support a church's ministries (1 Pet 4:10-11; Gal 6:6).
5. It means you protect a church's testimony (Eph 5:15; Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15-17).
6. It means you submit to a church's leaders (Heb 13:17).
7. It means that should you move, you'll unite with a like-minded church as soon as possible (Rom 16:1-2).

One of my earliest memories of Sunday School as a little child was a hand motion activity we learned that went like this. You put your two hands together, linking your fingers with your index fingers extended, then said, "Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Open the doors, and see all the people!"

Then they taught us another version. This time you put your hands together without linking your fingers, with index fingers extended, and said, "Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Open the doors, but where are the people?"

A simple activity, but memorable. And even as a four or five year old I learned something from it. It's not a good thing when a church assembles and people are missing.

I needed that lesson too, because, quite frankly, I didn't want to go to church. Not "big church," for sure. Oh, I didn't mind Sunday School because they did things there that I liked, like playing games and telling stories with pictures and eating snacks. But in "big church" I had to sing songs I didn't know and listen to big words I didn't understand.

I've learned since that the problem wasn't really the songs nor the big words. The problem was *me*. I wanted to do things that I wanted to do. That's why I didn't want to go to church. I had other things on my mind, like playing games and being with my

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friends. Because I didn't know God, gathering to worship Him wasn't high on the list of things I wanted to do.

And then, at the age of eleven, something happened that changed the way I look at church. I went to church and heard the pastor tell me something. It's the same thing my Sunday School teacher was telling me, too. I heard from the Bible that God was offended by my selfishness and that I deserved to spend eternity in hell because of the way I had treated Him. I didn't like what I was hearing, but I knew it was true.

What's more, I learned that in spite of what I deserved, God loved selfish people like me so much that He sent His only Son into the world to take their punishment and die in their place. Then I found out that God raised His Son from the dead and said that He would forgive self-focused people like me, and not send us to hell but take us to heaven to be with Him. He would do that for us, for me, if only I would admit my selfishness and accept His Son as my Savior and Lord.

I learned that in church. And in church one Sunday morning I knelt next to a loving pastor, cried out to God, put my faith in His Son, and asked God to save me for Jesus' sake. And that's what He did! He saved me.

And He did something else that day. He put something in my heart. You know what it was? A love for the church! It's true. As soon as Christ saved me, I started loving His church! I wanted to go to church, to sing songs to the One who saved me and learn about Him from His Word. I wanted to be a part of that local church. I wanted to get baptized and join it, and get involved in it, and devote my life to it. How could I do less? How can I not love the very instrument through which God rescued me from eternal fire and gave me a place in His forever family?

I hope you love the church. I hope you value it highly. I hope you look forward to coming to church gatherings, and I hope you invite people to join you.

But why? What is it about the church that makes it so important? And if you don't have a church, how do you choose one? And if you're part of a church, how do you show that it's important to you?

We're going to talk about the church this morning. One of the marks of a healthy church is a firm commitment to church membership. Some churches don't have a membership. We do. Why? We're going to see the biblical basis for this commitment in Hebrews 10:19-25, and then discuss some practical implications of it.

I. Because of Christ, we have resources to claim (19-21).

Let's set the stage for our text. In the book of Hebrews the author is trying to help professing Jewish Christians who are facing persecution and thinking about chucking their faith in Christ and going back to Judaism. He makes three main points in the letter—one, about the superior **identity** of Christ (chs 1-7), two, about the superior **accomplishments** of Christ (chs 8-10), and three, about the appropriate **response** to Christ (chs 11-13). To elaborate...

First, Hebrews teaches us about the superior **identity** of Christ (chs 1-7). He's superior to angels (1:4ff.), superior to Moses (3:3), and superior to human priests (4:14-7:28).¹

¹ We see Christ's superiority in the titles. He is the Son (1:2), the Heir of all things (1:2), the King (1:8), the Lord (2:3), the Author of salvation (2:10), the High Priest (2:17; 4:14; 5:10), the Apostle (3:1), the Christ (3:14), and the Son of God (4:14).

Second, Hebrews teaches us about the superior **accomplishments** of Christ (chs 8-10). He established a better covenant (ch 8). He entered a better sanctuary (ch 9). He offered a better sacrifice (ch 10).²

Third, Hebrews teaches us about the appropriate **response** to Christ (chs 11-13). Simply put, we must believe in Him (ch 11), fix our eyes on Him (ch 12), and keep living in a way that pleases Him (ch 13).

Now take a look at our text, Hebrews 10. In the first eighteen verses of the chapter, we're told about Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Then beginning in verse 19 we learn about the significance of the sacrifice for us. Because of what Christ did for us, we have some resources which are now ours to claim. Notice verses 19-21...

"Therefore, brothers." He's talking to people who know Christ, people who are in the family of God, *brothers*. If we're in God's family, we have two things.

"Since *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place* by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since *we have a great priest* over the house of God." Did you see the two resources?

A. We have access. Access to what? We can enter the Most Holy Place, and do it confidently. Literally, "boldness for the entrance into the holy places."³ It's plural. We can enter holy places. We can call on the Lord now in prayer, and on the day we die we can enter His holy presence in heaven, and when He makes a new heaven and new earth, we can enter His presence there too.

On what basis? "By the blood of Jesus," says verse 19. But not just His blood. His body too, says verse 20, "by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." His blood was the emphasis in chapter 9, His body in chapter 10. He sacrificed both for us on the cross, and because He did, we who know Him can now enter holy places. We have access, direct access to God. But that's not all.

B. We have a priest. That's verse 21, "a great priest over the house of God." Literally a *mega* priest. There's none greater than priest Jesus. By virtue of the perfect life He lived and the substitutionary death He died and the empty tomb He left behind, He stands alone as a mega-priest over God's house. There are not many priests that can take you to God. There's just one, and His name is Jesus.

Friends, talk about amazing resources! Because of Christ's sacrifice for us, we who believe in Him now have access to holy places because we have a mega priest over God's house! That means we have a standing invitation into God's presence. Though we are sinners, we can come boldly to a holy God through His holy Son.

But God didn't give us these resources simply to talk about. They're supposed to produce some action in our lives.

II. Because of Christ, we have responsibilities to fulfill (22-25).

If you look at your Bible you'll see the words "let us" at the beginning of verse 22, verse 23, verse 24, and verse 25. That indicates that if we've benefitted from the resources, then we're in a position to fulfill some responsibilities, three to be precise. The responsibilities go in three directions, to God, to the world, and to each other.

A. We should be coming to God (22). "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

² It's better because He took away sins (10:12), He made sinners holy (10:10, 14), and opened the way for us to enter the presence of God (10:19-22).

³ *Young's Literal Translation*.

Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can come to God. But not just to some back room in His house. We're encouraged to *draw near* to God. But not just any old way, but with a sincere heart, and with full assurance of faith.

"But," you say, "my heart isn't sincere. It's still filled with mixed motives, so how can I draw near to God?" Not on the basis of your own merit, that's for sure. We come, says verse 22, "having our hearts sprinkled" and "having our bodies washed." In other words, we come on the basis of what Christ did for us on the cross.

Friends, if we've put our trust in Christ's atoning work, we should be drawing near to God. We should be praying to Him. We should be looking for ways to get close to Him, and that includes carving out time to study His Word and to meditate on it.

Are you fulfilling this responsibility? Are you seeking on a daily basis to come to God? If you're in Christ, that's what we can do, and must be choosing to do.

B. We should be confessing our hope to the world (23). "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

According to Romans 10:9, if a person makes a heartfelt, verbal profession of faith in Christ Jesus as Lord, that person is saved. But that verbal profession certainly isn't supposed to be the person's final verbal profession. Jesus made it clear in Acts 1:8 that we are to be His witnesses, to proclaim Him to the world. Here the writer of Hebrews tells us we're to hold on to this profession and to hold it unswervingly.

Brothers and sisters, do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord? Is He your Lord? Do your classmates know that? Do the people you work with? Do your neighbors? They will if we are *holding to the hope we profess*.

It starts with our lifestyle. Are we living in a way that shows that we truly believe that Jesus is Lord? Do we have marriages that reflect His Lordship? Do we raise our kids in ways that reflect His Lordship? Do we work our jobs in ways that reflect His Lordship? Do we choose entertainment that reflects His Lordship?

And then, of course, it involves our words. Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Answer this. Who in the world have you talked to about Christ in the past month? I say *in the world*. Not just Christians, but those *in the world*, those who don't know Christ. We're supposed to be professing our hope to the world with our lives and words.

Is this hard to do? Sure it is. The first readers of this epistle were wavering in fear. I can relate. That's why the promise at the end of the verse is so encouraging. "For he who promised is faithful." We can fulfill this assignment because we have a faithful, promise-keeping God.

So let's keep coming near to Him. And let's keep confessing our hope to the world. And one more responsibility. Because of our resources in Christ...

C. We should be committed to the church (24-25). "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Notice those words "one another" in verse 24. Because of Christ's sacrifices, yes, we have responsibility with God, and with the world, but also with each other. That's talking about our brothers and sisters in Christ, with the church.

This text lays before us a strong charge to be committed to the local church. If we have experienced the power of Christ's sacrifice, it's supposed to show up in the way we

treat His church. We're committed to the church. What does that mean in practical terms? We're told right here. It involves five things.

1. *That involves thinking about each other.* Verse 24 begins, "Let us *consider* how we may spur one another on." How often do you think about your church? Just on Sundays? Notice this. We're supposed to be considering how we can spur one another on. To do that, we must think about each other.

Do you think about your church family during the week? We should. I hope you're thinking about Savilla and her battle with cancer, and Ed as he cares for her. About our widows, particularly our shut-ins like Lacy, Edith, Lucille, Alverna, and others. About our kids at school. About Gary and Nancy as they're continuing their ministry in Slovakia. About John as he starts his new job. About Joey and Elaine as they foster parent Julie and Moriah. It's our privilege to think about each other.

But what are we supposed to be thinking? Sentimental thoughts about the good times we've had in the past? That's fine, but actually, we're told what to think in verse 24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Let me put it this way. Being committed to the church involves...

2. *That involves motivating each other to Christlike action.* The word "spur" is in reality a noun in the Greek text, *paroxysmos*, which usually has a negative connotation, meaning "irritation" or "exasperation." The fact that the writer uses it in a positive sense is meant to grab our attention. He's telling us to *provoke* or *stir up*. But we're not to stir up trouble. We're to do things that stir up our brothers and sisters so that they'll show Christlike love and good works in their lives.

Years ago when I worked with teens we called it "positive peer pressure." There ought to be a lot of it in the church. When we hear that our brother is about to make a decision that will harm his testimony for Christ, we look for ways to turn the tide. We ought to be taking that brother to lunch, and then having a heart to heart talk, "Oh, friend! Are you sure the Lord wants you to do that? Even if that job offer gives you \$10,000 more a year, is it worth it if it takes you away from your family and your church? Let's pray about it right now."

Brothers and sisters, we're supposed to be looking for ways to spur each other on to Christ-like deeds. Are you involved in a ministry? That's great, but don't just do ministry. Look for ways to get others involved. And don't just raise a godly family, as important as that is. Look for ways to help others do the same, particularly others who are struggling. Ask them to get together with you for prayer. Send an encouraging note.

We're talking about what it means to be committed to church. According to our text, it involves thinking about each other, and motivating each other to Christlike action. Thirdly...

3. *That involves not missing church meetings.* That's what verse 25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." It's actually a participle, and a strong one, as the KJV indicates, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." The term means "to cease from an activity which has gone on for some time"⁴ Jesus used it when He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Matt. 27:46)?" It's what Demas did in 2 Timothy 4:10, "For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica."

Don't do that, says Hebrews. He doesn't merely say, "Don't miss the Sunday worship service at 10:30." He says, "Don't forsake the gathering of God's people," the

⁴Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament*

implication is, *whenever* that gathering occurs. You see, every time the church assembles we have an opportunity to meet as Christ's body, and we ought to value that highly.

And notice the word "habit." Our text indicates that not coming to church services is a habit that we're prone to develop, one we must resist, and sadly, one that far too many have fallen into. Let's not do that, he says. Let's not forsake church meetings, as some are in the habit of doing.

In his commentary, John Calvin says the writer here has in mind Jewish believers who didn't like the fact that Gentiles "were a new and unaccustomed addition to the Church." He explains, "The Jews thought that this was an insult to them, with the result that many seceded from the Church thinking that they had a just pretext as a result of this mixture."⁵

Friends, when a person stops coming to church, he nearly always convinces himself that he has "a just pretext." The preaching doesn't meet my needs. The music doesn't help me worship. The people aren't friendly enough. But the writer of Hebrews will accept no such reasons. *Let us not give up meeting together*, he says. You may have your reasons for not liking your church at times, but remember this. Christ *loves* it, not because it's perfect (He sees the warts far better than we do), but because it is *His bride*.

Why do people stop coming to church? Please realize that the fact that they do is as old as the early church. But why? Pastor John Calvin faced the problem nearly five hundred years ago and offered this pastoral insight: "There is so much peevishness in almost everyone that individuals, if they could, would gladly make their own churches for themselves, because it is difficult to accommodate oneself to the ways of other people."⁶

Let's face it. We like what we like, and we want other people to like what we like. And when they don't, our tendency is either to fight or leave. And if we choose to leave, we often justify our actions with statements like, "I'm different. I just don't fit there any more."

But we're all different, and by God's design. When He designed His church, He deliberately chose to mix Jews and Gentiles, old and young, male and female, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, people who love organs and others who love guitars, etc.

Beloved, when we attend church services, we are making a statement. By our actions we are saying that we believe in Jesus Christ who formed this church. Barclay elaborates, "It would be well if we remembered that, apart from anything else, to go to church is to demonstrate where our loyalty lies. Even if the sermon be poor and the worship tawdry, the church service still gives us the chance to show men what side we are on."⁷

If we're committed to the church, we'll do something else...

4. *That involves encouraging each other.* The text says, "Let us encourage one another." It's another participle, *parakaleo*, meaning, "call to one's side." It's what happens when we pick up the phone and say, "Bill, I didn't see you this morning in Sunday School and I sure missed you. Everything okay?"

⁵ John Calvin, p. 143.

⁶ John Calvin, p. 144.

⁷ William Barclay, p. 122.

John Wesley used to remind the early Methodist brothers, “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”⁸ Beloved, we need each other, and a very practical way we can show that we’re committed to our church is by encouraging each other.

5. *That involves living every day in light of The Day.* Verse 25 ends, “And all the more as you see the Day approaching.” The Day is coming, my friend, the Day when Christ returns. And on that Day, when we look into the eyes of the One who left His home in heaven in order to come and sacrifice Himself for us, we’ll wish we would have done more. We’ll wish we would have left the comfort of our easy chairs more often and spent time drawing near to God, confessing our hope to the world, and demonstrating our commitment to the church.

Resources, yes, we have them, and responsibilities, too, all because of Christ.

Implications: Let’s address two relevant questions.

Question #1: Why should I belong to a local church?

Here’s where the rubber begins to meet the road. There are a lot of people in southern Ohio who say they believe in Christ yet treat the church as if it’s sort of optional, like icing on the cake. I want to give you five biblical reasons why, if you are a believer in Christ, you should be a member of a biblical local church.

1. *God exalted Christ for the sake of the church (Eph 1:22).* That’s what we’re told in Ephesians 1:22, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.” Those last three words are astounding. *For the church.* Why did God raise Christ from the dead and exalt Him over everything? He did it *for the church.*

I’m not going to take time now to develop that statement fully, but simply make this one observation. The church is the reason that God sent His Son into the world. He sent Him to the cross, raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him over all, *for the sake of the church.*

If the church is that important to God, then it ought to be equally so to us.

2. *God intends to glorify Himself in the church (Eph 3:21).* Listen to Ephesians 3:21, “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” Where does God intend to glorify Himself? *In the church and in Christ Jesus.* That’s odd. Why does Paul put “in the church” ahead of “in Christ Jesus”? Surely the church isn’t more important than Christ, is it? The truth is, you can’t separate the two. The church is Christ’s body. It’s in the church that God is bringing glory to His beloved Son. If you believe that, you will embrace the church.

I like the title of Josh Harris’s book, *Stop Dating the Church.* And the subtitle, *Fall in Love with the Family of God.* Ladies, what would you think of a man who said he loved you, who said he was committed to you, who even put an engagement ring on your finger, but refused to stop dating you and get married? You’d have reason to question his love, wouldn’t you? If that man isn’t willing to make a public commitment to you before witnesses, then his words aren’t going to mean very much to you, are they?

What does God think about people who say they love Him yet refuse to make a public commitment to Him as He intended in the church? He wants them to stop dating the church and make a public vow to the Body of His Son.

Some will say, “Well, I’m committed to the universal church, but I don’t need to be committed to a local church.” Okay, consider this.

⁸ Taken from Raymond Brown, p. 187.

3. *In the New Testament, when someone came to know Christ he was added to a local church (Acts 2:41, 46-47; 5:14).*

Sometimes people say, “I don’t see church membership in the NT.” I do. When I read the New Testament I see indications that the New Testament churches knew who belonged to them, and they apparently knew how many people belonged to them. We know that because of a statement we find in the book of Acts where we’re told that when a person became a follower of Christ, he or she was “added to their number.”

Acts 2:41 “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were *added to their number* that day.”

Acts 2:46-47 “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord *added to their number* daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 5:14 “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were *added to their number*.”

You say, “But having your name on a church roll doesn’t make you a Christian, does it?” No. But Acts indicates that if a first century person was committed to *Christ* he or she was also committed to a *local church*. The Lord never intended for His people to be islands. He wants them connected to others who belong to Him, for their good and His glory.

4. *We can’t see Christ, but we can see His Body (Eph 4:4, 11-13).* When a person says, “Well, I love Christ, but I’ve got problems with the church,” just think what he’s saying. It would be like me saying to you, “I love you, but I don’t like your body.” I can’t separate the two, can I?

Friends, the church is Christ’s Body. Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is *one body* and one Spirit.” And Christ loves His body so much that He gave gifts to it, according to Ephesians 4:11–13, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that *the body of Christ* may be built up...”

You say, “But churches have problems.” Yes they do. But think of it this way. Christ knows about the problems, yet He loves the church. And one very practical way we can show we love Christ is by demonstrating devotion to the church no matter what, for Christ’s sake.

5. *We have all we need in Christ and we experience the fullness of Christ in the church (Eph 4:15-16).* That’s what Ephesians 4:15–16 indicates when it says, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

God intends for His people to experience Christ in community. We have all we need in Christ, but we experience what we have in Christ in community, in the church.

My friend, if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior yet you don’t belong to a local church, I urge you to prayerfully take inventory of these five biblical reasons (and there are others). And then take the necessary steps to pursue membership. We’ll be having our next new members’ class soon, and you can sign up on the bulletin board.

Question #2: What does it mean to be a committed church member?

It certainly means far more than just having your name on a roll. I’ve searched the Scriptures and I want to give you seven actions of a committed church member.

1. *It means you affirm a church's doctrine (Acts 2:42).* Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [KJV 'doctrine'] and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

As a church we have a doctrinal statement. To become part of WBC a person must affirm that he or she believes it. In our statement there are both **biblical absolutes** and **biblical convictions**. Biblical absolutes? The inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, etc. We're not alone as a church in affirming these truths. They are biblical *absolutes*, and any true church will affirm them.

But we also have biblical *convictions* at WBC, things we believe because we're convinced the Bible teaches them, even though we recognize other churches may disagree. For instance, we believe that baptism should be for believers only, not for infants, as our Presbyterian and Lutheran brothers would say, and by immersion and not by sprinkling, as our Methodist friends would allow. That's a biblical conviction for us. We are a *Baptist* church. That doesn't mean we're saying those who differ with us aren't in God's family, for they certainly are if they affirm the fundamental truths of the gospel.

Here's another. We believe that a person is sanctified the moment he is born again. We do not believe that sanctification is a second work of grace, as our Nazarene brethren would suggest. That's a conviction we hold based on our study of the Bible.

The point is, to be a committed church member, you need to know what your church believes and affirm it. Our doctrine is the foundation of the house on which we all stand.

2. *It means you embrace a church's mission (Matt 28:19).* Just before returning to heaven Jesus gave His followers these marching orders, "Go into all the world and make disciples." That's our assignment as Christ's followers. As a local church, we have crafted a mission statement to help us fulfill this assignment.

We are Wheelersburg Baptist Church, a church that cares because of Christ. We are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the responsibility He has given us: to make disciples of Christ locally and worldwide. In dependence upon His sovereign grace, we commit ourselves to the proclamation of the whole counsel of His Word, by which lost people will be evangelized and saved people edified, until Jesus comes again.

That's our mission. To be a committed member of WBC, you must embrace that mission. We're not about political action. That's not our mission. Nor preserving the culture, nor advancing the American Dream. That's not our mission. Our mission is to reach out to little children, and single moms, and married couples, and empty-nesters, and the elderly, and everyone in between, so they come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then teach them how to follow Him. That's our mission. It's *your* mission if you belong to this church.

3. *It means you participate in a church's services (Heb 10:25).* I say *participate* because we're not spectators, but participants. And I say *services* because this involves more than just an hour on Sunday morning. "Let us not give up meeting together," says our text. A committed church member takes that seriously, not to earn God's favor but because of it.

Our four primary church services aren't designed to be a pick and choose smorgasbord, but rather, a well-balanced meal. On Sunday mornings at 9:30 we meet in small groups to get to know God's Word and each other together. That's what Sunday School is, a learning center and a caring center. On Sunday mornings at 10:30 we gather in this room for corporate worship. It's a *worship* service, and the focus is vertical. The focus Sunday evening at 6:00 is horizontal. It's a church family service, meaning we take time to learn about and celebrate what God is doing in the lives and ministries of the

church family. Wednesday evening is our ministry night, with special opportunities for children and teens and adults to learn the Scriptures and spend extending time praying.

What does it mean to be a committed church member? It means you see the value of participating in the services of your church, and you prioritize them on your schedule.

4. *It means you support a church's ministries (1 Pet 4:10-11; Gal 6:6).* Though we receive much from church, church isn't just about receiving. It's about giving too. 1 Peter 4:10 says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others." If we have received Christ, then we have also received a spiritual gift from Christ, and He wants us to use that gift to serve others in the context of our church. Are you experiencing the joy that comes from supporting your church with your spiritual gift?

And here's another way God wants us to support His church, through our financial gifts. Galatians 6:6 says, "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor." If we're receiving, then we're supposed to be giving, too.

5. *It means you protect a church's testimony (Eph 5:15; Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15-17).* "Be very careful, then, how you live," we're told in Ephesians 5:15, "not as unwise but as wise." What happens when we're not careful how we live? It harms the testimony of Christ, doesn't it? And the testimony of His church.

That's why when we see a brother sinning, we're supposed to go after him and restore him (see Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18). Not because we're busybodies, but because we love that brother, and we love the testimony of our church, and most of all, we love our Savior whose reputation is affected by what happens in His church.

6. *It means you submit to a church's leaders (Heb 13:17).* We're told in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." Notice that last line, "That would be no advantage to you." What's no advantage to a church member? When their church leaders' work becomes a burden. When does that happen? When the members disobey the biblical instruction they give. Turn that around. What brings advantage to you as a church member? When you submit to the men God ordained to watch over and care for your soul. And there's one more action of a committed church member...

7. *It means that should you move, you'll unite with a like-minded church as soon as possible (Rom 16:1-2).* Like Phoebe did in Romans 16:1-2, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me."

Friends, what a privilege we have to be the church!