

Main Idea: One of the characteristics of a God-centered church is a joyful 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. We have resources to claim (19-21).
 - A. We have access.
 - B. We have a priest.
- II. 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. This involves thinking about each other.
 - 2. This involves motivating each other to Christlike action.
 - 3. This involves not neglecting church meetings.
 - 4. This involves encouraging each other.
 - 5. This involves living every day in light of the Day.
- III. We have implications to consider.
 - A. 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).
 - B. What does it mean to be a committed church member?
 - 1. It means we affirm a church’s doctrine (Acts 2:42).
 - 2. It means we embrace a church’s mission (Matt 28:19).
 - 3. It means we participate in a church’s services (Heb 10:25).
 - 4. It means we support a church’s ministries (1 Pet 4:10-11; Gal 6:6).
 - 5. It means we protect a church’s testimony (Eph 5:15; Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15-17).
 - 6. It means we submit to a church’s leaders (Heb 13:17).
 - 7. It means that should we move, we will unite with a like-minded church as soon as possible (Rom 16:1-2).

Missionary Greeting: Nate Bell (South Africa, serving with ABWE)

There is incredible *joy in being a God-Centered church*. That’s the title of our summer series on Sunday mornings, in which we’re pondering twelve joyful commitments that God has wired into our DNA. What we *do* flows out of who God *is*.

God is a revealing God. Therefore, we value the Scriptures, which produces a “*Joyful Commitment to Expository Preaching*,” and a “*Joyful Commitment to Preaching the Whole Counsel of God*.” That’s where we began in weeks one and two.

Our revealing God is also a redeeming God. Therefore, we value His work of redemption, which produces in us a “*Joyful Commitment to Sovereign Grace in the Conversion of a Sinner*,” and a “*Joyful Commitment to God-centered Evangelism*,” our messages the last two weeks.

But God doesn’t merely redeem. He’s also a reconciling God, who reconciles the people He redeems, to Himself and to each other. Therefore, we value the beautiful

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2011 in our series, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.”

demonstration of His reconciling work, which is the church. And we show this by three joyful commitments, which we'll consider one by one in the weeks to come. This begins today with *"Our Joyful Commitment to Church Membership."*

It's fitting that we'll be responding to today's message by coming together to the Lord's Table. Communion is a gift given to us by our Savior Himself that we might remember the union He has brought about with God and each other by means of His atoning sacrifice for us. Let's prepare ourselves for the Table by placing under His Word.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:19-25

What's your earliest memory associated with church? One of mine is a hand motion activity we learned in Sunday School when I was a little child. Our teachers taught us to put our hands together, link our fingers with our index fingers extended, and then say, "Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Open the doors, and see all the people!"

Then they taught us another version. This time we put our hands together without linking our 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. 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 mostly *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 with my friends. Because I didn't know God, gathering to worship Him wasn't high on the list of things I wanted to do.

But 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 my selfishness was displeasing to God, that it was an evidence of my sinfulness, which is a serious problem. "For the wages of sin is death," I heard. I didn't like what I was hearing, but I knew it was true.

But that's not all that I heard. 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 give us a new heart that wants to please Him, and more, take us to heaven to be with Him forever. He would do that for us, *for me*, if only I would admit my selfishness, repent, and accept His Son as my Savior and Lord.

I learned that in church. And in church one Sunday morning I knelt next to my 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? It's something that's never gone away. A love for His church.

It's true. As soon as Christ saved me, I started loving His church! I wanted to go to church, to sing songs with other people to the One who had saved us, and learn more 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.

It just made sense. How could I not love the very instrument that God had used to rescue me from eternal fire and give me a place in His forever family?

You say, "Good for you, but I've had a different experience with church, and it's been painful. And frankly, I don't see the need for it. Jesus, yes, I love Him. But church, no, not necessary, not based on my experience."

If that's how you feel (and sad to say, many do), I would say three things. First, I'm so sorry you've had a bad church experience. Two, you are not alone. Frankly, some of the greatest pain I've ever experienced in life (and it affected me and those I love most) happened in church. But three, whether good experience or bad, we still need the church.

Says who? Says the One who established the church in the first place.

Why? What is it about the church that makes it so important? What does God say about church? I'm convinced that one of the characteristics of a God-centered church is a joyful 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. We have resources to claim (19-21).

We spent a little time in this passage a couple of months ago in our Gospel Disconnect series, but today we'll take a deeper dive.

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).²

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).³

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).

But not just by ourselves, as we'll see in our text, Hebrews 10. In the first eighteen verses of the chapter, we're told about Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Then

² 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).

³ 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).

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.” Stop there. He’s talking to people who are in the family of God, *brothers*. If we’re in God’s family, we have two things.

“Therefore, brothers, **since we have confidence to enter the holy places** by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and **since we have a great priest** over the house of God...” Stop there. 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.”⁴ 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.

II. 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 (in the NIV). That indicates that if we’ve benefitted from the resources, then we’re in a position to fulfill some responsibilities, three to be precise. These 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 with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

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?”

⁴ Young’s Literal Translation.

It's not based on our own merit, that's for sure. We come, says verse 22, "with our hearts sprinkled clean" and "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 can draw near to God, and should be. 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 we fulfilling this responsibility? Are we seeking on a daily basis to come to God? If we'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 fast the confession of our hope without wavering ["Let us hold unswervingly" says the NIV], 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."

So, who in the world have we talked to about Christ in the past month? I say *in the world* because we're supposed to be professing our hope to the lost world.

Is that 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). Here's the ESV, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."⁵

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.

⁵ This is the NIV, "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."

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 outcomes.

1. *This involves thinking about each other.* Verse 24 begins (NIV), "Let us *consider* how we may spur one another on." Consider. It means "to give careful thought to something." 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 Scott and Pam, and the other eighteen adults and their families who are members of this church and serving Christ at Scioto Hills Camp. I hope you're thinking about our widows, too, particularly our shut-ins like Bea and Jean. And about our missionaries Jade in the DR and Erin in Brazil. And about our brother Tapan over in India, and Rex traveling home from Scotland. 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 to stir up one another to love and good works."

This brings us to our second outcome. Being committed to the church involves...

2. *This involves motivating each other to Christlike action.* The verb "stir u" (NIV "spur") comes from the Greek *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," and there's a vital place for 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 having a heart to heart talk, saying, "Oh, friend! Are you sure the Lord wants you to take that job? Even if you make \$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 we involved in a ministry? That's great, but let's not just do a ministry. Look for ways to get others involved. And let's not just raise a godly family, as important as that is. Let's look for ways to help others do the same, particularly others who are struggling. Ask them to get together 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.

3. *This involves not neglecting church meetings.* That's what verse 25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing (NIV)." 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"⁶ Jesus used this word when He cried, "My God, my God, why

⁶Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament*

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 the writer of Hebrews. Not merely, "Don't miss the Sunday worship service at 10:30." He says, "Don't forsake the gathering of God's people," the implication is, *whenever* that gathering occurs. Every time the church assembles, we have an opportunity to meet with our forever family, and we ought to value that highly.

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, it's a habit into which many have fallen. Let's not do that, says this servant of God. 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."⁷

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 insists. Don't let it happen.

Sure, at times, we will all have our reasons for not liking church. So why come? Because Christ *loves* it, not because it's perfect, for He sees the warts far better than we do. He loves it because it is *His bride*.

Please realize that the fact that people stop coming to church is as old as the early church. 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."⁸

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, "We're just different. I just don't seem to fit here anymore."

Yes, we *are* all different, and by God's design. When He created 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."⁹

If we're committed to the church, we'll see a fourth outcome.

⁷ John Calvin, p. 143.

⁸ John Calvin, p. 144.

⁹ William Barclay, p. 122.

4. *This 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?”

John Wesley used to remind the early Methodist brothers, “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”¹⁰ 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. *This involves living every day in light of the Day.* Verse 25 ends, “And all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” 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 to come and sacrifice Himself for us, there will be no more opportunities to leave the comfort of our easy chairs, and spent time drawing near to God, confessing our hope to the world, and demonstrating our commitment to the church. So let’s do it now, all the more, as we see the Day approaching.

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

III. We have implications to consider.

Let’s address two relevant questions.

A. 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 this Tri-state region who say they believe in Christ yet view the church as sort of optional, like icing on the cake. “Why should I belong to a church?” they ask.

Here’s my answer. I believe there are five biblical reasons why, if I am a believer in Christ, I should be a member of a biblical local church.

1. *God exalted Christ for the sake of the church (Eph 1:22).* Listen to 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.*

We’re not going to take time now to develop that statement fully, but simply make this one observation. According to Paul, 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.* The order is odd, isn’t it? Why does Paul put “in the church” ahead of “in Christ Jesus”? Surely the church isn’t more important than Christ, is it? Yet the truth is, we 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 we believe that, we will embrace the church.

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

¹⁰ Taken from Raymond Brown, p. 187.

dating you and get married?¹¹ 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 see the need to be committed to a local church." Okay, then consider this.

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 first churches knew who belonged to them, and how many people belonged to them. We know this because of a statement we find repeated in the book of Acts.

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*."

This is what happened when a person became a follower of Christ. That person was "added to their number." The Christians in Jerusalem knew what *their number* was. So did the Christians in other cities, like Antioch, and Ephesus. They knew who belonged to them, and who didn't. And they hoped that those who *didn't*, one day would.

You say, "But having your name on a church roll doesn't make you a Christian, does it?" No. Faith in Christ alone does that. But the book of Acts shows us that if a someone was committed to *Christ*, he or she was also committed to a *local church*.

By design, the Lord intends for His people to be connected, not only to Himself, but to each other, 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 have problems with the church," just think how those words sound to Christ? It would be like me saying to you, "I love you, but I don't like your body. Can't you fix it?"

We can't separate the two, can we? Ephesians 4:4 says, "There is *one body* and one Spirit." So the church is Christ's Body. 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 keep this in mind. Christ knows about the problems far better than we do, yet He loves the church. Which means, one very practical way we can show we love Christ is by demonstrating devotion to His church no matter what, for His sake.

¹¹ I found this analogy in the title of Josh Harris's book, *Stop Dating the Church*. And the subtitle, *Fall in Love with the Family of God*.

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.

So my friend, if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, yet you don't yet belong to a local church, you're missing out. I encourage you to prayerfully take inventory of these five biblical reasons (and there are others). Then get connected!

B. 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 we 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*, things we believe because we're convinced the Bible teaches them, even though we recognize other churches may disagree. For instance, at WBC 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 must know what your church believes and affirm it. Our doctrine is the foundation of the house on which we all stand.

2. *It means we 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 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 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 we participate in a church's services (Heb 10:25).* I say *participate* because we're not spectators, but participants. And I say *services* because church involves more than just ninety minutes on Sunday morning. "Let us not give up meeting together," says our text.

We have four primary church services at WBC. Sunday School. Sunday morning worship. Our Sunday evening service/community groups. And our Wednesday evening ministry night. Think of these, not as a pick and choose smorgasbord, but rather, as a well-balanced meal.

4. *It means we 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 we 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 we 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 we move, we will 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."

And so we say, "To Him be the glory, in the church and in Christ Jesus!"

Closing Song: #185 "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (verses 1, 2, 3)

Communion

July Benediction: Isaiah 33:2 (NIV 1984) – have children come to front and sing