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one to lead and the other to follow, both in a way that supports the other and honors the Lord. But a particular group of elders, of leaders, is being referred to. It has to be. How else would you know who to call? How else would you know who to yield your obedience and submission? Church membership gets at this.

Wayne Mack in his book, Life in the Father's House, notes that such leaders need to have such a list before them. They need to have some sense, however imperfect, distinguishing who in their midst has and has not accepted the gospel – who has once and for all acknowledged their need of the Lord's forgiveness and His Spirit's work and given themselves to following Him. It affects the care they can give, the approach they can take and the assumptions they can operate under. Or, another thing – perhaps crass but certainly practical – such a list is helpful towards an orderly administration of the church. In assessing ministry efforts, in setting future goals, you need to know what your resources are – relying upon the Lord but also responsibly gauging what you have in terms of manpower and finances. At that point you then know what to pray for.

Again, we need to be thinking, “How can we put feet on these commands to yield obedience and submission to ‘your leaders’ and make their labors a joy and not a burden?” Church membership or something like it – while not expressly commanded in the Scriptures has to be at least assumed because of the other commands. And, as such, has to be a good thing for all concerned – for the shepherds, for the sheep, for us all.

CONCLUSION:

To regularly meet with one another, to closely associate with one another and to speak of the need to do those things – is not to add to God's commands. If it was, it would be completely wrong and horribly destructive. But it's not adding to God's commands. It's applying them. It's finding ways to obey them. We speak of these things not to put manmade ideas on the same level as God's Word but because His Word is so sweet and so worth our hearing and heeding that we long to pursue them with utmost faithfulness.



Let me challenge you to think these things through. And then to act on them. To go to the Lord, to ask Him to search your heart, to show you His ways. Some of you are already members. Good. These passages show us our need to grow in the depth of our commitments. Some of you are contemplating joining. Good. Take this into consideration as you do and make that step. Others of you are hearing much of this for the first time. Good. Take it, weigh it, wrestle it through, and consider in the community God has created among us the love He has for us. Such is His grace. Such is the church.



This brochure is one in a series of publications intended to encourage God's people towards a deeper love and commitment to Him and one another. If you have any questions, please contact us at (931)906-6650 or on the web at www.clarksvillepca.org.



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Living Together



Why Join a Church



by Richard Schwartz

The young pastor was briefed beforehand as to

his role at the upcoming missions conference and the need to be sensitive to guests from other cultures. During the dinner, he found himself seated next to an African gentleman hungrily devouring his meal. Trying to think of something to say, the pastor leaned over and said, “Chomp, chomp, good?” The other man looked at him and replied, “Mmm, good.” A little while later, as the African man was enjoying his coffee, the pastor then leaned over again and said, “Glug, glug, good?” And the other man glanced over and replied, “Mmm, good.” Right after that, when the speaker for the evening was introduced, to the pastor's surprise, the man beside him stood up. He delivered a stirring message in Oxford-accented English. After he was finished and sat down, he turned to the pastor and said, “Blab, blab, good?”

Assumptions can be a dangerous thing – often needing to be challenged – especially assumptions that have a shaping effect upon our lives. Discernment and humility are needed. What are ours? Think carefully. Ours is a culture that prizes the individual – our freedoms, our rights. The cowboy on the range is the archetypal hero. What effect does that have? Too often something like this. We assume we don't need

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other people in our lives or we fear what they'll find if we let them in. We assume we'll be happier the less we sacrifice or give of ourselves or our time. What effect does such a mindset have on the church? We assume it's okay to keep the church at arm's length.

But is it? Is it really okay? Not according to what we see in the Scriptures. Think of the "one-another-ness," the community implied in being a priesthood, a chosen race, a nation, a flock, a family. Or the wonder of what the Lord sees when He sees His Church. The chief object of His affections – His bride. The chief means by which He works to reach the world – His building, the temple. The chief means through which He works to refine His people – His body. The ways He sees the Church are a direct challenge to our assumptions towards her. We need to consider that.

"Can't I just be a Christian? Why do I need to 'be in church?' Why do I need to 'be in a church,' a member of a church?" Because the church is the Lord's chief object of His affections, the chief means through which He works – the institution He has ordained with purposes beyond our fathoming – that's why we must then be "with her."

We must be with her. For He is with her. Now what do I mean by that?

I. REGULARLY MEETING

First, that we should be regularly meeting together. Certainly, we have an encouraging model to follow here. "*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on that Sabbath day*" (Luke 4:16). **Now think with me. Who is this? Is this not the One of whom the speaker was speaking, to whom the singers were singing, for whom the people had gathered – God Himself? And yet you can imagine the sermon lagging, the singing off key, the thoughts of the people wandering. But there He was! And this was His habit.**

The early church – it was their practice to do this very thing (See 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:9-10). **Now the contexts of these passages are clearly quite distinct. But equally clear is the impulse we see from the very beginning for followers of Christ to gather together for a weekly celebration of His resurrection. An encouraging model.**

And a clear command as well. "*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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*" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Being not only fully God but fully man, Jesus Himself needed others. He gathered disciples, He took them along with Him, not only to train them – that they could be with Him – but that He could be with them. Remember, He is the God-Man. Surely it was part of the suffering He endured the night of His betrayal when even after His pleadings with them, His disciples could not stay awake and watch with Him. All of which is to say, if He needed such companionship, so do we.

So do we. What's "out there" is too much for what's "in here." The challenges before us – taking this beautiful message of forgiveness from guilt, freedom from sin, hope for the present and the future – is too much for any one of us alone. We need to go together as an army mobilized – together as one. What's out there is too much for what's in here. For that "reaching work" but that "refining work" as well. Remember, God delights to work through us in the lives of each other. That takes the Church. It takes regularly coming together – being renewed, reminded, rekindled, recalibrated. It takes us all together. And frankly, it takes commitment as well – one to another and to all.



II. CLOSELY ASSOCIATING

Which brings me to the second point – not just the need to regularly meet but to closely associate with one another as well. We need to – again, because of what the church is and the role she plays – find a local church we can call home and then join her, become a member. For, in candor, there are certain passages of Scripture that can hardly be put into practice without something like local church membership.

First, commands to leaders of the church. "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28; See also 1 Peter 5:1-3). Whose flock is this? God's – bought at the highest price, held with the highest regard. And as the owner of this flock, He gives commands to His shepherds as to how they are to care for His flock – what they are to do and how. But who are the sheep? Which particular sheep make up this particular flock? Apply this in our context. Who are these shepherds to shepherd? Every visitor? Every Christian in Clarksville? Every Christian everywhere? Parameters are needed. And it is – "*the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*"

All this is to say that church membership – having a listing of those closely associated with a church and under her care – is a feasible means for shepherds to effectively identify the particular sheep under their oversight and the focus of their care.

Again, this stems from the commands given to church leaders. Then there are the commands given to the rest – of those over whom these leaders are to exercise their care. "*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls*" (Hebrews 13:17; see also James 5:14). What do we see reflected and implied here? A reciprocal commitment between the shepherds and the sheep –