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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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A Vision for Healthy Church Membership

Ephesians 6:21-24

I. Why Are You Here?

- A. Powerful Question... You probably want to know what I mean!
- B. Do you mean... Why did I get up out of bed this morning and come to this church?
 - 1. Why do I attend this specific church rather than any other?
 - 2. Or... Why do I attend any church at all?
 - 3. Or... What is my heart motivation for coming to church?
- C. Or... Do you mean something far more significant? Why do I exist at all? What is my reason for living?
- D. These questions are very searching... very probing... and there are a wide variety of answers that people give to each one
 - 1. Let's take the most rudimentary, basic way to understand this question... Why am I here in this building this particular morning? Why did I get out of bed and come here today? That took effort, forethought... you had to choose clothes, get your body ready... you could have slept in, relaxed, surfed the Web, gone for a walk... gone for breakfast to a restaurant that serves a variety of options, like broccoli and swiss cheese omelets or a stack of pancakes with syrup and butter... maybe you could have just sat in a coffee shop like Starbucks or Parker and Otis, surrounded by strangers you don't talk to, with your earbuds on, visiting your favorite sites on your iPad
 - 2. Some of you had no choice but to come today... you are teenagers and your parents made you come; you are in no real position to refuse... but you are having your heart searched right now... if your parents didn't MAKE you come, would you have come at all? In a few years, when you go away to college, you will have the chance to make your own decisions about what you'll do on Sunday mornings... but for now, you have no choice... except about your ATTITUDE... you get to choose whether or not you're HAPPY to be here

3. You college students made that very choice I mentioned a moment ago to the teens; you at some level WANT to be here; you usually stay up quite late every evening, and maybe even especially on Saturday evenings... but you gave up sleeping in and coordinated a ride, you were where you needed to be to get that ride and you're here... but WHY?? What do you want? What is your reason for being here?
4. Some of you are here as parents... members of FBC, wanting to set a good example for your kids... you come because of commitment, because of habit, because of friendships
5. Some of you have been members of this church for decades... maybe for fifty years! You come because this is YOUR CHURCH! You love this church and are committed to this church and want to see it flourish

There are ALL KINDS of reasons that people come to church on a Sunday morning

E. Another Way to Look at It: Why Do You Go to ANY CHURCH AT ALL

1. How do you evaluate churches? By what criteria do you assess whether a church is right for you

Illus. at the end of many airplane trips, as we are taxiing to the gate, the pre-recorded message from the air carrier comes on and it says, "We are aware that you have many options for air travel, so we are honored to have your business."

2. Many churches take that message to heart and look on church members and attenders somewhat like customers... "The customer is always right" and "Keep the customer satisfied" seem to dominate the mentality... such churches are extremely concerned to do everything they can to keep everyone happy, to meet needs, to be high in customer service
3. Some of you may have that attitude, and you have come this morning because, so far, FBC Durham has kept you satisfied... it has met your felt needs and you have good hopes that it will continue to... OR perhaps it's not perfect but its good points outweigh its bad and your needs are generally being met... and if there are any problems, you believe you can either put up with them or get them fixed... so you continue to come... LIKE THIS MORNING
4. Other churches see a deeper role for the church in the life and soul of its members... and so do mature Christians that attend them
5. Such Christians are looking for a church that will preach the Word, and worship God by the Spirit, and help them grow in Christ and help reach the lost with the gospel

6. So, you have evaluated FBC Durham and it meets your criteria for a healthy, Spirit-filled, Christ-honoring church
- F. Perhaps, Pastor, You Meant the ULTIMATE Question: Why are you here = Why do you exist at all?
1. What is your purpose for living?
 2. Why do you take up space on the earth?
 3. Or more Christianly, why did God create you? What was HIS purpose for your life?
 4. Why did God make any human generally? And why did he make ME particularly?
 5. And then the question “Why are you here” could mean “How does coming to this church fit into my overall reason for existence? How does FBC Durham factor into to reason why I am alive?”
- G. This morning... as we conclude our study in Ephesians... I want us to do so with a clear evaluation of our commitment to FBC Durham as a local church... as a part of the universal Body of Christ
- H. I want to set FBC Durham as a local church in the context of what Ephesians says was God’s purpose in the world... and I want to lay out a vision for a healthy involvement of members in a local church
- I. I want to give you a list of SIX commitments, duties, responsibilities of members by which I would like you to evaluate your involvement in FBC Durham
- J. WHY?
1. A variety of reasons have combined to make this a good time to address this topic so plainly and directly... these were discussed openly at a recent elders’ meeting
 2. One: the elders have been reading a book about healthy community, and we are evaluating FBC by that book... do we have a GOOD COMMUNITY here? One of the themes the author presented was the problem of a “consumer mentality” on the part of many who attend church... asking “What can church GIVE me?” rather than “How can I serve Christ and his people?” We elders often hear accounts of people not satisfied with the level of pastoral care or care from the body they get, especially during TRIALS... the “no one called, no one cared, no one came” themes are powerfully uploaded in our minds... we want FBC to be a strong, loving community in which the elder AND the people “watch over one another in brotherly love”... but in some sad cases, that doesn’t happen the way it should

3. Second: long distances make FBC somewhat of a regional church... people drive long distances to come here; in recent years, some people have decided that this drive is the greatest single factor in making a change in church involvement... some key members have left the church with good memories and good assessments of FBC, but they're no longer here... this has led the elders to evaluate the church more generally
 4. Third: the giving is not keeping up with the church budget week after week; we are presently over 115 thousand dollars behind our budget... in evaluating giving patterns (we elders do not know any specific people or what they give... I have NEVER known that about any member, and I hope I never will!), we feel it's time to address responsibilities of members to give financially to the church... this is COMPOUNDED by the fact that our capital expenditure reserve is all but depleted... this is the money by which we fix the building or upgrade it... we have other reserves, and we can make it for a while... but it seemed beneficial to call people to evaluate their giving to the church... I have HARDLY EVER done that in a sermon... just whenever the text called for a direct teaching on money
 5. Fourth: the ending of Ephesians gives us a chance to see God's plan for building Christ church globally, and to evaluate FBC's involvement in evangelism and missions... we have grown more and more year by year in our giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering... but the IMB this year had to recall over a thousand missionaries from the field because of insufficient funds... and money is just the beginning of our evaluation on external journey themes... ARE WE REACHING DURHAM? ARE WE SEEING LOST PEOPLE CONVERTED? ARE WE SEEING LOTS OF BAPTISMS and NEW PEOPLE TO DISCIPLE? As the elders looked at these issues, we felt a sermon on membership responsibilities would be helpful
 6. Finally: we are at the very start of a Home Fellowship year; Home Fellowships are one of the most vital ministries of Christian Community in our church, and they are a great success... however, the elders have noted a tendency for people to be very excited about Home Fellowships in September, but that enthusiasm and commitment wanes over the year to the point where many people stop coming because of other family commitments... perhaps sports or music or weariness or other things... the elders also saw this pattern in terms of church attendance... and we've seen attendance at Bible for Life wane over the last few years as well
 7. SO... it seemed like a good time to speak openly about membership at FBC... WHY ARE WE HERE? What makes for a HEALTHY church membership
- K. Aware of the Dangers: Guilt manipulation and legalism

1. The last thing the elders want is for the members of FBC to be guilt manipulated or badgered with legalistic requirements that can never be satisfied
2. AND we are aware that this mixed assembly has lots of people in lots of different places in life
3. Old proverb about preaching: “Disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed”
4. Problem: how do we be sure that the right medicine gets to the right patient? This is such a big issue in hospitals that now the nursing staff scans the bar code on your wristband before administering the medicine, so you only get the proper medications in the proper amounts
5. I would love to scan the barcodes of your soul and find out what each of you needs to be HEALTHY in your church membership... some of you are doing exactly what you should be doing... attending consistently, giving sacrificially, using your spiritual gifts to serve the body, praying regularly for the members of the church, etc.... You are giving so much of yourselves that you really can't give any more... and to those I want to say a word of refreshing encouragement... but others, perhaps sitting right in the same pew, are not living out patterns of healthy church membership
6. All we can do is preach true things and trust that the Spirit will skillfully administer the spiritual medicine where it is needed the most

First: the final paragraph of Ephesians...

Paul concludes his astonishing epistle with some closing personal greetings...

It shows his human side, and how personal church ministry is... it's all about people in relationships with each other:

Ephesians 6:21-24 Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. ²³ ¶ Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

We start with Tychicus... He is mentioned five times in the New Testament, always as one of Paul's entourage or a messenger from Paul whom he sends various places to greet this or that church. His commendation from Paul are wonderful... Paul calls him a “dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord.” In

Colossians 4:7 he calls him also a “fellow servant in the Lord” ... we don’t know much about him, but the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ has used UNSUNG SERVANTS like him to build his church for almost two thousand years. He is enjoying his full reward for his faithful service now in heaven.

Paul sends him to the church at Ephesus to give a fuller report about Paul, how he’s doing IN PRISON, since Paul himself is unable to go. He knows that Tychicus will also be a great encouragement to the church at Ephesus as well.

He then closes with a sweet benediction:

Ephesians 6:23-24 Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Similar words like this close all of Paul’s epistles... the sense of supernatural unity we have with brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world... of the invisible church of Christ rising step by step in spiritual oneness with Christ and each other... the repeated phrase “grace to you” in all of Paul’s epistles gives us a sense of the need we all have for ONGOING GRACE from God to keep us in Christ, to keep us growing. But here, he closes with something sweeter... grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ **WITH AN UNDYING LOVE**

What a beautiful image... the love we have for Christ can never die... not only his love for us but our love for Him!!! He kindled that love in us and will keep it growing in us even beyond our own death!!

Song of Solomon 8:6 love is as strong as death

Not even death will kill our love for Jesus... not only is it true that his love for us will never die, our love for him will never die either:

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

So also none of those things will kill our love for Jesus!!

We love him with an UNDYING (immortal) love!

That is the end of the epistle.

Now I want to turn and discuss in an overview sense Christ’s purpose for his universal church, and his purpose in this local church... FBC Durham

II. Christ's Purpose: The Glory of God in the Perfection of the Church

A. Why are We Here? The GLORY OF GOD... specifically in the final perfection of the Church

1. The epistle begins with PRAISE to God

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The reason for the praise... the spiritual blessings in Christ... began before the creation of the world, and will extend beyond the end of the world:

Ephesians 1:4-5 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Again, all of this was done for the PRAISE of God's glory

Ephesians 1:4-6 In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

For the sake of His glory and our joy, he sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins... to redeem us by His blood:

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

This gospel message is proclaimed verbally to lost people, they hear its message and believe... in this way, new Christians are formed:

Ephesians 1:11-14 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

So... bottom life, WHY ARE YOU HERE? Meaning, why did God created me, redeem me, and bring me to this point in my life: FOR THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE, saving a sinner like me through Christ

B. Beyond that: We are Here to Do Good Works:

Though we are not saved by works, we are saved to do good works:

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

But what do these GOOD WORKS do? Paul's answer seems to be: they BUILD THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

C. Image #1: A Spiritual Temple that GROWS

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

D. Image #2: A Living Body that IS BUILT

Ephesians 4:12-13 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:16 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.

So... are each part does its WORKS, the whole body of Christ is BUILT, and the spiritual temple GROWS... living building, a constructed body

This is the UNIVERSAL CHURCH of Jesus Christ worldwide

E. This Growth is of Two Types

1. Numerical growth, through EVANGELISM and MISSIONS as more and more LOST PEOPLE hear the gospel message and are rescued from Satan's dark kingdom
2. Growth in maturity... as each individual member becomes MORE and MORE holy, more and more Christlike, more and more SANCTIFIED

Ephesians 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

3. These are the TWO JOURNEYS we talk so much about... the INTERNAL JOURNEY of sanctification, of growth into Christlike maturity; and the EXTERNAL JOURNEY of evangelism and missions

F. WHY ARE YOU HERE? Friend, this is what God is doing in the world... he is building the universal church of Jesus Christ living stone by living stone... and he uses Christians who do good works of preaching, teaching, evangelizing, hospitality, financial giving, praying, serving, administration, etc. to do it

G. FOR GOD'S GLORY in the final perfection of the church of Jesus Christ

III. Local Church Membership: A Means to that End

A. Universal vs. Local Church

1. The universal church is the mystical union of all true believers around the world... everyone who has genuine faith in Christ (along with departed saints who are already in heaven)
2. The UNIVERSAL CHURCH is what Paul was writing about in Ephesians 2 (the spiritual temple rising to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit) and in Ephesians 4 (the Body of Christ which is being built)
3. The LOCAL CHURCH is who Paul was writing to in Ephesus... also the churches he wrote to in Corinth, Galatia, Colosse, and Rome... it lives in a specific place at a specific time; it is made up of people you know, who have names, who have spiritual gifts, who have indwelling sin natures ALONG WITH the indwelling Spirit of God
4. The LOCAL CHURCH is the best and clearest way you can regularly interact with the universal church; the LOCAL CHURCH is a FEEDER SYSTEM for the eternal, perfect, heavenly church!!

B. First Baptist Church, Durham North Carolina is a LOCAL CHURCH

C. Covenant Membership in a Healthy Local Church is God's Way for Individual Christians to Grow and Help Others Grow

D. All Local Churches are Temporary

1. This size of any local church is not so important... its membership numbers, its budget, the size of its building, its programs and fame and footprint in the community

2. Those factors may come and go... what really matters for any local church is this: ARE WE BEING FAITHFUL to what God has called us to do??
3. Pastors get so uptight about the SIZE of their churches... they learn how to do the "HUMBLE BRAG" about church growth or ministry activities or achievements... but every local church is TEMPORARY and subservient to the glory of Christ in the building of the ETERNAL and HEAVENLY church
4. So if Christ calls some faithful servants to leave one healthy church and serve at another healthy church for his purposes, that's his prerogative...
5. Seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea... each of them were real local churches in the first century
6. ALL OF THEM became obsolete at some point in church history
7. BUT the saints they prepared for heaven will be eternally there... the godly elders in Ephesus during Paul's era legitimately prepared elect people for heaven and got them ready for glory!!
8. All we can do is be OBEDIENT to the commands of God and FAITHFUL to the opportunities he sets before us:

To the church at Philadelphia: *Revelation 3:8* See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

To the church at Smyrna: *Revelation 2:10* Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

IV. Healthy Membership Responsibilities Listed for Self-Evaluation

A. First: A Loving Appeal to the Unconverted

1. Before you can be a covenant member this church, you have to be a spiritual member of Christ's universal church... you MUST BE BORN AGAIN
2. The most important thing you can get out of this sermon is this... COME TO CHRIST BY FAITH
3. This is the gospel:
 - a. GOD: God created the universe, including the world and everything in it; he specially created the human race in his image and gave us LAWS by which we should live
 - b. MAN: we have broken God's laws; we have lied, stolen, lusted, sinned sexually, been sinfully angry and hostile, selfish and arrogant... the law's

penalty is DEATH... we deserve not merely physical death, but eternal death in hell

- c. CHRIST: God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, to become a human being; he lived a sinless life, did great signs and miracles to prove he was God in the flesh; he died on the cross as a SUBSTITUTE for sinners like you and me; God raised him from the dead and he was seen by many witnesses
- d. RESPONSE: if you repent of your sins and trust in Christ, all your sins will be forgiven; you will be born again, and adopted into God's family; then you can and should be water baptized and become a covenant member of a healthy church

B. Health, Not Perfection... There's Room for Growth

- 1. All these areas describe a HEALTHY pattern of church membership
- 2. We know we are not ever going to attain perfection in any of these
- 3. We will not be perfect, nor will any church made up of sinners like us be perfect
- 4. BUT someone can be HEALTHY without being PERFECT
- 5. We should aim for perfection... but we do not expect to attain it on any single day of our lives

C. Refuting Legalism, Preaching Grace...while still teaching healthy patterns

- 1. The elders are not seeking to be legalistic... by that I mean we know that we are not ever going to be made right with God by our good works...
- 2. Neither do we want to be part of a legalistic community... one that keep bashing people over the heads with standards, so you cannot be loved and welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ until you meet these standards
- 3. BUT for us to teach biblical patterns of healthy Christian life is not legalistic
- 4. And if you find that your actual patterns of behavior are coming short, please know how much we yearn for you to know the lavish grace of God in Christ... God works in us continually BY GRACE, forgiving our sins, loving us, welcoming us back as we return in confession to him

- D. This list is NOT exhaustive, and it does not seek to replace the church covenant... these are just some key expectations we should have for each other, patterns of behavior that will, for the most part ensure a healthy church life

Now... SIX PATTERNS of healthy church membership:

- Healthy Church Members Grow Toward Christlikeness
- Healthy Church Members Pray Consistently
- Healthy Church Members Attend Regularly
- Healthy Church Members Give Sacrificially
- Healthy Church Members Serve the Body
- Healthy Church Members Evangelize

A. Healthy Church Members Grow Toward Christlikeness

1. We expect every member of the church to be GROWING toward Christlikeness
2. This is the INTERNAL JOURNEY of sanctification
3. We want to see every member making steady progress in Christ, “growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ”
4. This means some positive things and some negative things
 - a. Positively: we expect every member of the church to have daily quiet times... times of bible intake and prayer; times of personal worship and confession of sin
 - b. Negatively: we expect every member of the church to be putting sin to death by the Spirit, not allowing sin patterns to roost in your heart and lifestyle;
5. We expect members to press on toward Christ, to grow in knowledge of the Word, to be seeking new experiences of grace, to build their faith up more and more by drinking in the word; to have their hearts conformed more and more to Christ’s—loving what he loves and hating what he hates... growing more and more in him...
6. Conversely, we do not expect members to become lazy in sanctification, to plateau and become stagnant... we want to foster a network of accountability relationships—men with men, and women with women—by which people are growing more and more in Christ
7. We must be relentless in the INTERNAL JOURNEY

Philippians 3:12-14 *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Healthy church members are PRESSING ON TOWARD CHRISTLIKE PERFECTION

B. Healthy Church Members Pray Consistently

1. We expect church members to be praying for FBC in the pattern I've given over the last few weeks:

Ephesians 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

2. This means we want you to become more and more intentional and organized in praying for FBC—for its elders and deacons; for your Home Fellowship members, for friends and other people you know in the church
3. Pray through the membership directory... get to know people in the church and ask how you can pray for them
4. Keep a prayer notebook or journal or something... text or IM or Facebook FBC members telling them you're praying for them
5. Make fervent, organized prayer part of your private life, and part of your corporate lives as well... don't skimp on Home Fellowship prayer times; seek out opportunities to pray with the church
6. NOTE: there is a prayer meeting every Sunday morning from 8:30-9:00 in the parlor... we pray for the church's ministries that day—for BFL and Worship and the Sermon and all the people that will come
7. Look for other corporate prayer times throughout the year
8. Organize prayer groups yourselves

C. Healthy Church Members Attend Regularly

^{NAS} ***Hebrews 10:25*** *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*

1. Attend WHAT?? This is a big question!

2. Three tiers of church activity

a. Top level: corporate worship service... every Sunday, at 10:30... it is not healthy to willingly FORSAKE this meeting, or to make it a HABIT of not attending

b. Second level:

i) Home Fellowships... this is a very big part of our ministry; this is how we best can “know and be known”... to develop deeper relationships with church members... we know not everyone can be involved... but the elders feel there must be some good reason not to come; there is nothing else like Home Fellowships in the ministry of the church

ii) Member’s meetings: these are vital for the health of our church; this is the best way for us to discuss the kinds of nuts and bolts issues in the life of the church; these are usually Wednesday evenings and usually are very poorly attended

iii) Concerts of Prayer: these don’t happen often, but they are huge for the unity of the church

c. Third Level:

i) Bible for Life, Wednesday night ACTS, other ministry meetings, etc.
NOTE: Bible for Life has become increasingly poorly attended over the last five years; the elders are seeking to improve the various selections, and how these classes are taught

ii) Church picnic and other group fellowship times

3. What does it mean to “regularly attend”?

a. The elders don’t want to give some legalistic standard, like X %/year or something...

b. Look instead at the key passage:

^{NAS} Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

i) The key words are “FORSAKING” and “HABIT”

ii) To forsake is to make a willful choice not to come, to turn your back on the worship and life of the church

iii) The word HABIT means a regular pattern

The elders are very aware of this as the marker of the beginning of problems in the life of a church member... if someone is ABLE-BODIED and is REGULARLY NOT ATTENDING corporate worship, we are very interested in the reasons why... if they are caring for a sick or dying family member, we understand, but we want to help that person attend more frequently

But if the person is just becoming increasingly disconnect from the Body, that is going to bring nothing but temptation and sin and trouble...

Always ask yourself if you do not go to church on a Sunday, "What is my reason for missing?" Beware of how sin can encroach and gradually harden your heart

D. Healthy Church Members Give Sacrificially

1. This comes to the FINANCIAL life of the church
2. Jesus taught on money more than any other PRACTICAL TOPIC in the Christian life
3. Why? Because how you spend your money is a clear indicator of the state of your soul
4. To repeat: Our church is right now about 10% behind on our budget... over 115 thousand dollars behind
 - a. Software shows the spread of age demographics... how many givers, in what category, and how much...
 - b. We have 215 givers in this church... the average gift is XXXXXXXX
 - c. We also have (we are told) significant donors... particularly wealthy people that SKEW the averages UPWARD for everybody... if they were to die or leave the church, the budget would immediately suffer a huge blow
 - d. BUT just taking the average gift by those of professional age (25 and over), and reversing it to find out what they would be making if they were TITHING, we find that the average salary for professional aged people in our church is XXXXXX
 - e. It becomes pretty clear that many people in the church either are barely making a living wage or don't believe in TITHING...
 - f. TITHING is the giving of 1/10th of your income to the Lord... it is an Old Testament principle, a benchmark... Randy Alcorn in *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* says the tithe is the "training wheels of Christian giving." In other words, it's a place to START, not to finish. His logic is that every spiritual pattern in the Old Covenant is INCREASED and

ENHANCED and INTENSIFIED in the New Covenant... greater sacrifices, greater gifts, a better life, higher calling, a better covenant, etc. How could the giving alone be REDUCED??

- g. New Testament principles: we give SACRIFICIALLY, CHEERFULLY, BY FAITH, REGULARLY, ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE

2 Corinthians 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- h. We give first and foremost to the needs of the local church, then to other ministries beyond it
- i. That is the phrase generally known as “tithes and offerings”... so, missions giving, giving to the poor and needy (benevolence), other Christian projects are “offerings”... the tithes go to the church

5. NOTE: as we said, our building needs significant ongoing repairs... HVAC, roof, carpets, walls, ceiling of sanctuary, parking lot... not to mention upgrading the AV equipment in the sanctuary, and updating the appearance of the South Building... which was untouched in the 1995 renovation called “Forward in Faith”... that special offering was 1.8 million dollars... we need at least half of that, probably more to address all the needs of the church.

6. Evaluate your giving patterns

- a. Are you giving a tithe of your income? Or less? Look at what is really happening?
- b. Are you in credit card debt? Are your spending patterns making it difficult for you to give to the Lord
- c. Do you have eyes of faith to see money as a tool for the spread of the gospel and the relief of the poor and the work of the church?
- d. Do you struggle with covetousness, which is idolatry? Have you bought into the American dream that more possessions means more happiness?
- e. Or perhaps you are just IGNORANT of what you are actually doing with your money and of what the BIBLE TEACHES?

E. Healthy Church Members Serve the Body

1. We have seen plainly in Ephesians that every Christian has spiritual gifts by which they are to build up the Body of Christ
2. These spiritual gifts are to translate into a REGULAR PATTERN OF SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY
3. There are three depletable commodities that we use every day to do things in this world: TIME, ENERGY, MONEY
4. God calls on us to sacrifice time, energy and money to the ministry of the local church... are you doing that? Is there a pattern, a habit, a recognizable ministry in your life? Are you doing something to pour into others in the life of this church?
 - a. Perhaps you have the gift of hospitality... are you opening your home regularly to others? Perhaps hosting a Home Fellowship, or having internationals over to your home, or having a mother/daughter bible study, or a regular senior adult ministry
 - b. Perhaps you have the gift of FAITH, and you show it by prayer with others, praying for God to give a clear vision to the church of what he's calling on us to be and do... how are you exercising this gift
 - c. Perhaps you have the gift of ADMINISTRATION and you organize a "Meals Baby" ministry for new parents to have a week of hot meals after the baby comes home from the hospital
 - d. Perhaps you have the gift of GIVING and seek out college students to support them on the short term mission trip they are organizing
 - e. Years ago, the elders spoke of "EVERY MEMBER MINISTRY"... if someone were to ask you "What's your ministry to the members of FBC?" what would you say? And how many hours per month on average do you give to that ministry?

F. Healthy Church Members Evangelize

1. Finally, we MUST embrace the EXTERNAL JOURNEY of worldwide gospel advance
2. We have broken that into two categories... EVANGELISM and MISSIONS
 - a. Evangelism is sharing the gospel with a lost person in your heart language and in your same culture
 - b. Missions is the spread of the gospel to lost people in another language and another culture

3. What are you doing in each category? The elders believe it is absolutely healthy for EACH MEMBER at FBC to be actively GROWING in these areas... no we're not looking for perfection, just growth
4. We do not believe it is acceptable to wave the white flag over either one of these and do nothing...we cannot keep growing in the INTERNAL JOURNEY without embracing BOLDNESS and FAITHFULNESS in the EXTERNAL JOURNEY
5. So evaluate yourself in each
 - a. In evangelism:
 - i) when was the last time your shared GOD –MAN-CHRIST-RESPONSE with a lost person?
 - ii) Do you have the names of some lost people you are praying for, for opportunities to share the gospel with them?
 - iii) Do you regularly invite lost people to church?
 - iv) Have you gone to any of the training times the elders have done in evangelism? Sunday morning during BFL? Wednesday nights during ACTS?
 - v) Have you gone on any of the outreaches we do in the community?
 - vi) Do you have a vision for a long-term ministry in the community that will make friends with lost people so you can lead them to Christ?
 - b. In missions:
 - i) Do you pray regularly for the missionaries FBC has sent out?
 - ii) Do you pray regularly for the IMB?
 - iii) Do you pray regularly for unreached people groups? (we talked about all this last week!)
 - iv) Are you planning and preparing to give lavishly and sacrificially to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering?
 - v) Do you give regularly to the Global Priority Fund?
 - vi) Would you like to be involved in the International Connections or refugee ministry many are doing here?
 - vii) Would you like to go on a short-term missions trip?

How did your evaluation go? Are you a healthy church member? If there are some areas of sin, confess them to the Lord! Ask him to help you grow in those areas!

God has blessed us with a wonderful church! We are surrounded by healthy, mature, growing Christians! Let's be a healthy church to the glory of God!

Ephesians 6:23-24 Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.