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#### Core Seminar

#### Membership Matters

**Session 3: Why Join a Church?**

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***Teaching Suggestions from Jamie:***

*This teaching guide has two pieces: an outline of the class, and a word-for-word manuscript. Feel free to use either—after you’ve familiarized yourself with the manuscript.*

*You’ll see time markers through the outline and the manuscript—but you really shouldn’t have much trouble with time management so long as you don’t venture too far off the script.*

**Outline Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first and last name, where they live.

***9:50*** */ 0:00*

**Background**

I want you to think of four people and their attitudes toward church:

* John: follows Jesus but not into “organized religion.” He feels he worships best by going for a hike on Sunday.
* Leann: church hopper. Here for a while, there for a while. Somewhere pretty much every Sunday.
* Natasha: found a great singles group. Always there on Sunday night, and shows up at church in the morning when the sermon seems like it’ll be interesting.
* Jose: loves the preaching at this church, but tends to slip out right afterward. Never really thought about joining. What’s the point?

***Q: What do all these people have in common?*** They all see themselves as Christians; they all see the church as pretty unrelated to their faith. And they all share a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian.

**The Purpose of the Church in the Book of Ephesians**

* Going to answer “Why Join a Church?” by taking a tour of Ephesians.
* Chapter 1: beautiful description of our salvation.
* Chapter 2: how we’re saved (**read 2:4**)
* That’s theology—and then, end of chapter 2, application. Dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles is gone (2:14-15). **Read 3:6**
* Why did God do this? **Read 3:10**
  + Through *the church?* Yes. Local church is at the core of God’s plan to glorify himself.
  + Think back to what Jesus says in John 13:34:

“*A new command I give you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”*

* Love between Christians isn’t just “extra credit.” It’s essential.
  + Church is messy. It hurts. It’s not easy. But that’s the whole point. *“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?”*
  + That’s why a small group of people just like you doesn’t do this. That’s why a singles group isn’t a church. That’s why attending church but not investing in relationships misses the point.
  + One thing to live a holy life in isolation. But loving real people? That says a lot about the power within you.

**Any questions?**

***9:57*** */ 0:07*

**A Biblical Case for Church Membership**

* What does this look like? Let’s look at how the Bible says we’re to relate within a church. And what you’ll see is that, put together, they take the shape of what we call membership. We’ll take four categories of “one another” commands:

*Love One Another*

* 1 Peter 2:17: “*love the brotherhood of believers*;” Gal 6:10: “*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially those who are of the household of faith*.”
* Love that isn’t easy. Romans 15:1: “*We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*” Romans 12:13: “*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”* And two verses later, “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another*.”
* Love without commitment doesn’t say much about the gospel—just like in marriage.
* Note that all these passages are written to *all* Christians—not just an elite few. This isn’t something you only do once you’re “mature.”

*Encourage One Another*

* 1 Thess. 5:11: “*encourage one another and build each other up*;” Hebrews 10:24: “*consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*.”
* Encouraging to everyone generally? Hebrews 10:25 says that this happens specifically with other in your church. “*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*.”
* Maybe God’s plan is about more than your own individual holiness!
* Perhaps by your pouring your life into other people in a committed fashion, those who are weaker in the faith will be strengthened, and God will be glorified.

*Guard One Another*

* Hebrews 12:15: “*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy . . .”*
* 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”*

* I bet that the man in 1 Corinthian 5 thought of himself as a Christian
  + I bet he went to church regularly
  + I bet he did all the things a person would do in that community.
* But he wasn’t living like a Christian! So Paul writes and tells the church to take action.
* Somehow they had to make it clear to him, for his sake, that his life was that of a non-Christian.
* A loving thing to do. Not only for this man but for others around him:
  + For unbelievers in the church.
  + For unbelievers outside of the church.
* *All* Christians are to have this kind of relationship with a local church.
  + We’re prone to self-deception.
  + Church is like an “assurance of salvation” co-op.
  + That’s how we see whether or not we’re living out this Christianity that we profess.

**Any questions?**

***10:08*** */ 0:18*

*Obey Your Leaders*

* Hebrews 13:17 tells us to *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*
* Implications for church members *and* church leaders.
  + Church members: who are you to obey? The leaders of your *own* church.
  + Church leaders: for whom do we give account? For our *particular* flock.
* What if everyone was just a church consumer and never committed to any one congregation?
* The only reason churches exist is that people realize, “OK, no church is perfect. But I’ll commit myself here.”

*Putting it all together*

* Look at the triangle diagram on your handout to see how it fits together (explain diagram).
* If you’re going to obey these commands, three things must be true of your relationship with a local church:
  1. *Committed* relationship.
  2. Committed to a *defined group of people*.
  3. Give these people *permission* to speak hard words into your life.
* What does all this give you? We use Paul’s analogy of the church as a body, with individuals as members—and call it membership.
* And it’s why we make such a big deal about membership in this church. Because next to your commitment to follow Jesus Christ and be baptized, becoming a church member is the most basic commitment that you will be called to make in your spiritual life.

***10:15*** */ 0:25*

**Breadth and Depth of Commitment**

*Depth*

* If you join but never invest in relationships, you’re not obeying these commands.
* That’s why we talk about *meaningful* membership. About being providers and not consumers.
  + Good question to keep in mind: What would CHBC be like if everyone acted like you do?
  + Much of *meaningful* membership will involve transparency in relationships.

*Breadth*

* Do you remember what we saw in that passage from Ephesians earlier? What glorifies the wisdom of God even to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms? It’s not just people living together in a local church—but Jews and Gentiles with *nothing in common but Christ* living together in a local church.
* Diversity of CHBC
* What’s going to be most natural is to clump with people just like you. And those friendships can be really good for you!
* BUT: if *all* your friendships are with people just like you, you’re really wasting your time here.
  + Part of being a church is loving people who are different from you—which isn’t easy.
  + So: take stock of your relationships periodically. Do all your friends all fit the same mold?
  + When you’re deciding who to talk to after church, make sure that at least half the time you’re walking up to someone who’s not just like you.

**Conclusion**

* Why is church membership important? (1) enables us to live out “one another” commands; (2) validates the power of the gospel. But (3): ultimately, it’s important because God loves the church.
* Acts 9: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”
  + Maybe where Paul got the image of the church as the body of Christ, us as members.
  + Acts 20: church is the body of Christ, which God bought with his own blood. (v. 28)
* Friends, this is what God is all about! He loves his church, and he has made the local church the centerpiece in his plan to make the gospel visible to all people under heaven. I pray that, be it this body or another, you will join yourself into a local church as the Bible instructs you and have the privilege of seeing God’s plans lived out.

**Manuscript Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
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**Background**

I want you to think of four people and their attitudes toward church:

* John: follows Jesus but not into “organized religion.” He feels he worships best by going for a hike on Sunday.
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* Jose: loves the preaching at this church, but tends to slip out right afterward. Never really thought about joining. What’s the point?

***Q: What do all these people have in common?*** They all see themselves as Christians; they all see the church as pretty unrelated to their faith. And they all share a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian.

**The Purpose of the Church in the Book of Ephesians**

We’re going to spend the rest of the class answering the question “Why Join a Church?” And we’ll start with a brief tour of the book of Ephesians. If you’ve got a Bible, go ahead and turn there now.

I’ll give you a brief summary of the book. Chapter 1 is a beautiful description of our salvation. And how is it that we’re saved from our sins, to the praise of God’s glory? Chapter 2, verse 4.

*4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even while we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

That’s the theology. And now the application: the first implication of the gospel we come to as we finish chapter 2 is that the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles is gone. Destroyed: verses 14-15. This unity is so profound that Paul even calls it a mystery in 3:3—hidden for generations but now made known. Chapter 3, verse 6:

*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members together of one body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

Now. Why did God do this? Why create unity between redeemed Jews and Gentiles who have nothing in common but Christ? Look ahead to verse 10 in chapter 3:

*So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places..*

Through *the church?* God intends to do these amazing things through *the church*? This seems an odd place to introduce that most institutional aspect of the Christian religion. But yes. God’s plan to glorify himself centers on the local church. The church isn’t fundamentally about instruction, or about singing songs. It’s about a community of people who are different from each other in the world’s eyes—and yet who live together in unity and love because they share Christ in common. Instruction fuels this community. Praise is the response. But at its core, the church is community, for the praise of God.

Think back to what Jesus says in John 13:34, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Love between Christians isn’t just an “extra credit” part of the Christian life. It’s essential.

Church is messy. It hurts. It’s not easy to love people who’re different from you. But that’s the whole point. That love is different in kind from the world’s love. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?”

That’s why a small group of people just like you doesn’t accomplish the goal God’s set out for the church. That’s why a singles group isn’t a church. That’s why attending church but not investing in messy, difficult, God-glorifying relationships isn’t living up to God’s plans for the church. It’s one thing to live a holy life in isolation from everyone else. But the world won’t be perplexed by that. What’s different, though—revolutionary in fact—is Christians who love *each other*. Who are committed to each other. Who have difficult conversations and share in each other’s joys and burdens as our church covenant says. That’s the church. And that’s why, if you consider yourself a Christian, you need to be a meaningful member of a local church.

**Any questions?**

***9:57*** */ 0:07*

**A Biblical Case for Church Membership**

So what exactly does this congregational life look like? For the next few minutes, let’s walk through some of the so-called “one-another” commands in Scripture of how we’re to relate within the local church. And what you’ll see is that, put together, they take the shape of what we call membership.

*Love One Another*

First, much of this body life involves commands to “*love* one another.” So 1 Peter 2:17 tells us to “love the brotherhood of believers.” Or Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” And this isn’t just a fuzzy feeling inside; this is love with staying power. Romans 15:1, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” Or earlier, in Romans 12:13, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” And two verses later, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.”

Just like a marriage doesn’t image Christ’ love for the church if the husband or wife gets up and walks off the first time sacrifice becomes real, love in a church doesn’t say much about the power of the gospel if it’s got no commitment, no staying power. What I think is important about these passages I just mentioned—and there are dozens more like them—is that they are given to *all* Christians, not just to an elite few. This kind of deep, committed love for other Christians isn’t something that we just grow into over time. It’s expected of all Christians. And it’s something you can only do with Christians you rub shoulders with on a regular basis.

So if you’re a Christian, you need to put yourself in a place where you can love in this kind of way—and where you give others the opportunity to love you like this.

*Encourage One Another*

The second group of one another commands I want to look at has to do with encouraging each other’s faith. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, telling them to “encourage one another and build each other up.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) And Hebrews 10:24 tells us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” Now, it’s good to be a generally encouraging person. But is that what these two authors have in mind? No: author of Hebrews goes on in the very next verse to tell us explicitly what he means. “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.” Obedience to this New Testament command to encourage each other is to be done quite specifically with others in your own local church.

I wonder if you’ve ever thought about you encouraging others in your church as part of God’s big plan. Maybe God’s plan isn’t all about you in an individualistic sense, about how you can be sure to witness to 7.2 more people on average each month, and get your quiet times 7 minutes longer over the year, and your individual holiness in some measure developed. Although these things are good, maybe God is about something larger and grander than that! Maybe even more than he cares about you, he cares about your giving of yourself to build up the local church. And perhaps by your pouring your life into other people in a committed fashion, those who are weaker in the faith will be strengthened, and God will be glorified.

*Guard One Another*

The third group of commands has to do with guarding one another. In Hebrews 12, the author writes to Christians about their responsibility for each other: “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy . . .” Or there's that famous passage in 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul writes to the Corinthian church:

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among the pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”*

I bet that the man in 1 Corinthian 5 thought of himself as a Christian.

* I bet he went to church regularly.
* I bet he did all the things a person would do in that community.

And that is precisely the reason why Paul had to write and tell them to take action. Somehow they had to make it clear to him, for his sake, that his life was that of a non-Christian.

That’s a loving thing to do. Not only for this man, but for others around him. Because it makes the gospel clear to unbelievers. Unbelievers inside the church, for one. Who can say: “Oh—I’m calling myself a Christian, but I guess I'm not really living like one. Perhaps I’m not a Christian after all!” And unbelievers outside the church as well. If we are careful to hold each other accountable, they’ll able to see “Ah… this is what Christians are like. Not like that.”

Again, commands like Hebrews 12 or 1 Corinthians 5 aren’t just for super Christians. *All* Christians are to have this kind of relationship with a local church. As fallen people, we’re prone to self-deception. And the main thing that God has set up for us to deal with self-deception is the local church. The church is kind of like an assurance of salvation co-op. It is being in a community of people where we get to know them and we allow them to get to know us. That’s how we see whether or not we’re living out this Christianity that we profess.

**Any questions?**

***10:08*** */ 0:18*

*Obey Your Leaders*

And then there’s a fourth category of commands made to every Christian about their life in a local church. Hebrews 13:17 tells us to *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”* Now, this verse has implications for both church members and church leaders.

For church members: are you to obey every Christian leader who comes along? No; you’re to obey the leaders of *your own* church. The ones who you’ve signed up to submit to.

And for church leaders: will we give account for every Christian? No; we’ll give account for a *particular* flock. Which flock? This one.

Now, how would this work if everyone was just a church consumer, hopping around from one place to another? Which leaders are they to obey? And pity those poor church leaders! How are they to know which souls they’ll give account for someday? Members of this church have had one of the elders hear their testimonies. Elders have asked them questions about their understanding of the Gospel and have committed to pray for them regularly. We know who has committed themselves to this church and we’ve committed ourselves to them.

The only reason why churches exist is because people realize, “OK, no church is perfect. But I’m going to settle in this place and try to prosper here spiritually. I agree with what they teach—their statement of faith—and how they’re trying to live together—their church covenant. So I’ll live life together with them, committed to them.”

That’s the kind of commitment that allows us to live out Hebrews 13:17.

*Putting it all together*

Now, if you look at your handout, you’ll see how all this fits together. The triangle diagram there has you at one corner, church leaders at the top, and the rest of the congregation on the right. There’s some Biblical commands about your relationship with church leaders along one side of the triangle. You are to submit to them; they in turn will one day give account for you. And there’s some Biblical commands about your relationship with the congregation at large. If you’re a Christian, you need to love other Christians in your church—in ways that are sometimes messy and difficult. You’re to see encouraging them as an important part of your following Jesus. And you’re to let them into your life to hold you to account. And vice versa. That’s all along the bottom of the triangle.

Now, if you’re going to do this some things need to be true of your relationship with some church.

* It’s gotta be a *committed* relationship. This kind of love and encouragement can’t happen without real commitment.
* It’s a relationship with a *defined group of people*. Church leaders need to know who they’re giving account for, for example.
* And it’s a voluntary association but one in which you’re giving these people permission to do things for you that you may not necessarily like at the time—as we saw in the 1 Corinthians 5 example of church discipline.

Now, what do you call these kind of committed relationships with a defined body of believers where you give them this kind of permission to speak hard truths into your life? We’ve decided to use the term the apostle Paul uses in his letters as he describes Christians as *members* of the body of Christ. There’s no place in Scripture where you’ll explicitly see a command to sign a piece of paper and become a member of a local church. But when you piece all these “one another” commands together, what it adds up to is what Christians through the centuries have referred to as . . . membership. And it’s why we make such a big deal about membership in this church. Because next to your commitment to follow Jesus Christ and be baptized, becoming a church member is the most basic commitment that you will be called to make in your spiritual life.

***10:15*** */ 0:25*

**Breadth and Depth of Commitment**

Before we leave the topic of membership, though, let me make two last observations about what it means to fulfill all the commands that we’ve just looked at.

*Depth of Commitment*

The first is that this commitment of membership has some depth to it. If you decide to join this church, show up every week for the Sunday service, but never invest in any relationships beyond that—you’ve not obeyed these commands in Scripture. That’s why at this church we talk not just about membership but *meaningful* membership. And we talk not about people being spiritual consumers, but spiritual providers. Our whole society is geared toward raising up consumers—but it isn’t to be that way in the church. Whether it’s showing up a few minutes early on Sunday morning or deciding whether or not to talk to a particularly awkward person, you need to think about what this church would be like if everyone treated it as you do. And then build into it. Much of that will involve ensuring that at least a few people at CHBC know your life inside and out—and you need to return the favor. What are your ambitions? What’s your testimony? What are you afraid of? Where is God using you? How are you growing? How are you struggling? That kind of transparency in relationship is critical to building church community envisioned in Scripture. Because churches are built out of a commitment that’s deep.

*Breadth of Commitment*

But beyond depth, Scripture calls us to a commitment with breadth. Do you remember what we saw in that passage from Ephesians earlier? What glorifies the wisdom of God even to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms? It’s not just people living together in a local church—but Jews and Gentiles with *nothing in common but Christ* living together in a local church.

Our congregation is made of people who are young and old, crazy over-educated and not very educated at all, people from many different ethnicities and political affiliations and nationalities and personality types. What’s going to be most natural for you is to clump together with people who are just like you. And there’s nothing wrong with those friendships—it’s part of human nature. If you’re of Chinese descent from Southern California, you’ll feel right at home with other people of Chinese descent from Southern California. If you’re a single, professional woman in your 40s, you’ll feel right at home with single, professional women in their 40s. If you’re a journalist, you’ll feel at home with other journalists. And those friendships will be really good for you.

But if *all* your friendships are with people just like you, I’ll be so bold as to say that wasting your time here. Part of what it means to be a church is loving people who are different from us—where getting to know them is a bit more work and feels less comfortable. Where relationships require more charity and more patience. Where the world takes notice when it sees you investing in people you have so little to gain from. So take stock of your relationships periodically. Do all your friends fit the same mold? Then make a concerted effort to break that mold. When you’re trying to decide who to talk to after a service on a Sunday night, make a decision at least half the time to walk up to the person you’re less comfortable with rather than just clumping to the crowd where you fit in best. Seek to draw people into your life from all sorts of backgrounds.

**Conclusion**

So, in conclusion, why is church membership important? Because it enables us to live out the “one another” commands of Scripture—and in so doing it validates the power of the gospel. But ultimately, it’s important because *God* loves the church.

In Acts chapter 9, the apostle Paul—or Saul at the time—has a fascinating run-in with the risen Christ that tells us volumes about this. Jesus appears to him and Saul falls to the ground. Do you remember what Jesus says to him? He doesn’t say “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting those Christians?” He doesn’t even say “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting the church?” He says, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Jesus so clearly and closely identifies with the local church that he refers to the congregation of Christians in Damascus as “me.” That’s why I think Paul got his image of the church as the body of Christ, and us as its members. His first Christian conversation, I think, had that at its core. In Acts 20, it says that the church is the body of Christ, and that God bought the church with his own blood. (v. 28)

Friends, this is what God is all about! He loves his church, and he has made the local church the centerpiece in his plan to make his glory visible to all people under heaven. I pray that, be it this body or another, you will join yourself into a local church as the Bible instructs you and have the privilege of seeing God’s plans lived out.