

### Why Be a Part of Church, Part 3: Correction and Protection

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on April 25, 2010

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Pastor Mark Dever recently shared his interactions with a lady in England who told him “I don’t have much use for organized religion.” When he asked her why, she said to him, “I think a church is just a pit of vipers ...” Mark: “Do you think the world outside is really any better?”

She said “I guess not, but at least they know they’re vipers”

Mark replied: “You might be surprised how much I agree with you. I know the church is a pit of vipers. Some churches don’t think they are, and I wouldn’t touch them with a ten foot pole, but I know our church is a pit of vipers and I know the world is, too. I guess where I disagree with you is I don’t think the world really knows they are [vipers] ... I think the church is full of people who know they’re vipers. That’s why we’re there. There’s really no other reason to have a church, it’s sinners who need a savior. We are a pit of vipers and there’s always room for one more to slither on in.”<sup>1</sup>

- The gospel sees us all as sinful vipers (Rom 3). Jesus saves, not because we’re such pretty snakes, but because of sovereign grace
- What’s amazing about grace is it saves *wretches* like me, *blind* who can’t see, even religious people Christ called *broods of vipers*
- What’s amazing about grace is not that it just takes someone who is bad and makes him good, it takes a dead person and makes alive
- What’s amazing about grace is it saves us while we were yet in our sin, and not only forgives our sin, but moves us to forsake sin
- What’s amazing about grace is God ‘takes in blatant, flagrant vagrants, breaks them, remakes them, and shapes them to hate sin’ (yes, I did just sneak in a Christian rap lyric from Shai Linne)
- What’s amazing about grace is that even though we all like sheep had gone astray, the Good Shepherd runs after us and rescues us, and turns us from being rebellious sheep to truly repenting sheep

James 5:19-20 (NASB95) <sup>19</sup>*My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,* <sup>20</sup>*let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

If you have not yet turned from the error of your ways, may this be the day your soul is saved from hell and the multitude of your sins covered by Christ. Turn, friend, from your sins, trust Him as Lord. Renounce all that you are and have done as ugly and wretched, and embrace all that Christ is and has done for you as beautiful, lovely.

What’s amazing about grace is not only that it changes our eternal destination, but it changes our earthly desires and loves to Jesus as our treasure and His church our love.

I love Thy church, O God. Her walls before Thee stand,  
Dear as the apple of Thine eye, And written on Thy hand.  
For her my tears shall fall For her my prayers ascend,  
To her my cares and toils be given Till toils and cares shall end.  
Beyond my highest joy I prize her heavenly ways,  
Her sweet communion, solemn vows, hymns of love and praise.

A fellow young pastor in Michigan, Kevin DeYoung, who wrote *Why We're Not Emergent* (best intro and response to emergent church), also co-authored a book with one of his church members: *Why We Love The Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*. The way he introduces his book introduces this well:

‘being part of a church – and learning to love it – is good for your soul, biblically responsible, and pleasing to God. And I don’t mean the “church” that consists of three guys drinking pumpkin spiced lattes at Starbucks talking about the spirituality of [their favorite band] and why [their favorite TV show on HBO] is really profound. I mean the local church that meets ... exults in the cross of Christ, sings songs [v. 13] to a holy and loving God [v. 11b], has church officers [v. 14]; good preaching, celebrates the [Lord’s supper and baptism], exercises discipline [v. 19]... and probably has [some organization like] bulletins and by-laws. The church we love is as flawed and messed up as we are, but she’s Christ’s bride nonetheless. And I might as well have a basement without a house or a head without a body as despise the wife my Savior loves.’<sup>2</sup>

The bride and the body are 2 NT descriptions of the church, and there are others in this text I want to draw your attention to. The first argument I would give as to why a local church should join together, and why individuals should commit to their church is the very language that Scripture uses to describe the church/believers.

## **Why We Need to Be Part of a Church:**

### **1. Consider how the NT describes us**

#### **BRETHREN** – (v. 19, 7, 9, 10, 12)

A family term: brothers and sisters *joined together* in a family, by blood or adoption or marriage. All 3 of those spiritually bind us as well; we can demonstrate those gospel pictures visibly to our world by binding ourselves together visibly in a gospel-living church.

Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above.  
Before our Father’s throne We pour our ardent prayers;  
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one Our comforts and our cares.  
We share each other’s woes, Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear.  
When we asunder part, It gives us inward pain;  
But we shall still be joined in heart, And hope to meet again.

A family is to stick together through thick and thin, good and bad.

Jesus taught earthly families will not always be united in the truth: “*man’s enemies will be members of his own household*” (Mt 10:36). But members of God’s household and family have an even-deeper seated unity because of the blessed tie that binds us together

#### **SHEEP**

The actual word “sheep” or “flock” is not used in v. 19, although one of the NT words for church shepherds was used in v. 14, and the language of v. 19-20 is frequently used of a flock of sheep. For a sheep to say, “I don’t have to be a part of a flock, because I can come and eat with a flock, and still enjoy some of its benefits,” I’ll argue later misses the point of this language in God’s Word.

**AMONG YOU** - (v. 19, 13, 14)

If you don't know who is "among you," how can you apply v. 19? This term is used of believers *among you* in a local church (v. 14). You have a responsibility to those who've identified themselves as sheep in the flock you're a part of, members of the same family you are in, to be involved in a search and rescue team for them when they go astray, and to try and help them before they go astray. But in our day, when people just attend a service and go home, never indicating commitment (on paper or by involvement), it becomes more difficult to know who really considers themselves a part of the church family among us, who truly seeks shepherding.

**CHURCH** – (v. 14)

About 90% of NT uses of "church" is of a local church, like here.

Some today argue that the early church didn't assemble publicly, a few just gathered in little houses instead of a formal-structured church. But in Jas 2:2 we read this in the earliest NT book written: <sup>2</sup> *For if a man comes **into your assembly** with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,* <sup>3</sup> *and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," ...*

In Acts we read sometimes converted Jews met in synagogues, and in Gentile territories, sometimes Paul taught in a lecture hall. The Acts 2 church met in the temple for awhile, but as persecution grew, their meetings had to be in the larger homes among them, as public Christianity was persecuted. It was a couple centuries later that the Roman government allowed Christians freedom to build places to gather as a church, but the word "church" in Bible times meant "public assembly / congregation" (not a private small group with no structure where we just sit around and share and dialogue). Heb. 10:25 commands Christians to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as some do, and we looked at that text last time.

**ONE ANOTHER** – (v. 16)

Refer to last week's message if not here

**OTHER N.T. IMAGES OF CHURCH (not an exhaustive list):****"Fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19 NKJV)**

NT calls says we're fellow heirs, joint citizens, joint-partakers, etc. The word "member" in the NT is used of households or families as well as religious groups (Mk 15:43, Lk 23:50, NIV of John 3:1 and Acts 5:7, 6:9, etc.). Most often it's used of members of a body, as we'll see below, either literally / physically, or spiritually, or both.

**"Living stones being built up to a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5)**

Christ is the cornerstone, the Apostles helped lay the foundation, but every one of us, Peter says, is a stone in the spiritual building. You can't just pull individual stones out of a wall or house without it having an effect on the structure, and on the whole, and when Jesus speaks of one stone not on another, it's destruction imagery.

**The church is "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15b)**

Like the pillars that held up temples in ancient times, there were many individual pillars (the temple in Ephesus had 127), but each was important (as we see in the story of Samson).

### **Soldiers fighting the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 2:3-4, 4:7)**

In NT times, soldiers in a nation's army had smaller divisions (legions, centurions) and the Lord's army also has local divisions. For a Christian to say, "I'm in the universal church, so it's ok if I don't belong to or commit to a local church," is like saying *since I enrolled in the US Army, that's what matters, not a local regiment*. But soldiers need each other, and have a duty to each other and to the whole. Soldier's good and safety depends on each other and on their putting themselves under leadership, protecting and serving. A soldier in battle getting separated from his regiment is not good.

### **The body of Christ with many members / body parts (Rom. 12:4-5, 1 Cor. 12:12-27, Eph. 4:25, 5:29-30)**

God has designed us as parts of a body, and body parts don't do well when cut off from the rest (biblical example of man with ear cut off). Most often the word "member" is used of a body (1 Cor. 12:27: "*So then we are one body and members of one another*"). Ephesians 4:25 says the reason we're not to lie but are to speak truth to one another is that "*we are members of one another*." 5:29 adds "*no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.*" [v. 24 says Christ is the head of the body, the church]

The church is the body of Christ in such a real way that when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the church of Christ, the Lord confronts him from heaven and says "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" To persecute Christ's church is to persecute Christ Himself, because the body and head are inseparably joined.

To want the Head (Jesus) without a body (church) is what some seem to want today, but in Scripture the only NT precedent of that is Herod and John the Baptist on a platter.

### **The bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-32, Rev. 19:7, 21:2, 9, 22:17)**

Is Jesus impressed if we say with our lips "I love you," but our life and choices say we don't like to be around His bride/church? Am I flattered if someone says to me "I love you, Phil. I know I don't come to your house like I used to, but I love you, and hope you don't mind that I don't want to be around your wife. Don't take it personal that I don't like your wife, but just know I do love you." I would take that personal! A husband-and-wife are an inseparable one, and what God has joined together let no man put asunder. If you want Jesus, His bride is inseparably joined with Him, for better or worse (good news is the worst of us He's making better).

### **A flock in need of under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:1-4, Acts 20:28, Heb. 13:7, 17-20)**

The word to the Elders / Shepherds of a church:

1 Peter 5 <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you ...* <sup>2</sup> *shepherd the flock of God among you*  
 Acts 20:28 *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

The word to the flock / local church congregation:

Hebrews 13:7 *Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you ...* <sup>17</sup> *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief ...*

It wasn't a grievous burdensome thing to NT Christians to put themselves submissively under the leaders of their church, it was a joy when this took place for the shepherds and profit to sheep who desire their souls to be looked after. This is normal NT Christianity

- The church is not a building, it is a body/community of believers.
- It's not built by corporate executives, it's built by Christ Jesus.
- It's not a business, it's the bride of Christ, chosen by the Father.
- It's not a corporation, it's a congregation of Christ-followers.
- It's not a financial institution, it's a family, it's a flock.
- Not led by marketing strategists, but men called Elders/shepherds

*So we've considered how the NT describes us ...*

## **2. Consider how we need correction and protection**

James 5:19 *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back ...*

We are our brother's keeper spiritually in a church. The straying or wandering is defined in the next verse as a way of error, a pattern or path of danger. We are all prone to wander, and we're all in need of this type of correction and protection in the body of Christ, and when we formally identify with and publicly say to others this is our family and flock and church, we are inviting this in our lives.

I was encouraged last week when one of our members called upon the counsel and help of us Elders in an important life decision. So 3 of us Elders met with them, and they talked much about their need of correction and protection they desire in the shepherds of this church that they have put themselves under, as they recognize they're fallible and may be missing some biblical truth. We prayed with them, gave our input, and it was a mutually encouraging time.

It's great when someone struggling calls for help from shepherds (v. 14). In most cases, typical struggles in the body of Christ don't need involvement by a church leader, but are handled in v. 16 with one another, praying for each other, confessing sins to one another. You should be seeking spiritual relationships, discipleship, being accountable to others, quick to humbly confess when you have sinned against others in your family or church family. And when others fail you, rather than talk behind their back, you take it in prayer before the face of God. And you pray for each other in the body of Christ (like v. 16 says) rather than complain about the body of Christ. You commit to do your part where others may lack.

But not every member or regular attender of a church is doing what v. 14 and 16 says. Some of them are in v. 19 instead. They have taken a turn for the worse spiritually and are in need of someone to turn him or her back. Many believe the language is of someone in serious danger spiritually, perhaps even on the path of apostasy. It was known to the original Jewish readers of James that they had a duty to their brethren in God's Law. Deut. 22 says it this way:

<sup>1</sup> *"You shall not see your countryman's ... **sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back ...*** <sup>2</sup> *... **you shall restore it to him.*** <sup>3</sup> *"Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with **anything lost ... You are not allowed to neglect them.*** <sup>4</sup> *... fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; **you shall certainly help him to raise them up.***

If that was true of literal sheep or animals or clothing, how much more our human brethren in our flock should we spiritually help?

One writer said it this way: ‘They need to be turned back to the Lord. And James urges their fellow-Christians to get in their way, head them off and turn them back. Many of us must admit that we have not thought much about this. When we see a [professing] Christian straying, we have a tendency to excuse ourselves from responsibility by saying, ‘It’s not my business.’ Or we think that our responsibility begins and ends with praying ... James would certainly have us to pray for them. But he wants us also to confront them lovingly with their straying and tenderly call them back to the Lord [as v. 19-20 says]... let us not stand idly by when we see a straying brother or sister!’<sup>3</sup>

Galatians 6:1–2 <sup>1</sup> **Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.** <sup>2</sup> **Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.** [in context it’s the law of love, this is truly loving]

The same word James uses for a stray sheep is used by Jesus, and not only is there gentleness in this restoration, there is joy in such restoration:

Matthew 18 <sup>12</sup> *“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and **one of them has gone astray**, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and **go and search for the one that is straying?**”* <sup>13</sup> *“If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.”* <sup>14</sup> *“So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”* <sup>15</sup> *“If your brother sins, **go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**”* <sup>16</sup> *“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”* <sup>17</sup> *“If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**”*

Don’t tell it to the church by gossiping or airing someone’s dirty laundry when you haven’t had enough love to do v. 15 first! One-on-one privately lovingly show your straying brother / sister from Scripture why you believe his/her actions are sin and concerning to you, and you’d like to help restore them in a spirit of gentleness from this ensnaring entangling pattern of sin. If he / she listens (v. 15b) and turns back as James says, PTL you’ve won a brother.

If you do that and this person in your church family rejects a clear teaching of Scripture and the person is unwilling to turn from clear sin, then it says you can ask one or two more from your church family (Gal. 6 indicates the more mature Christians, the better). The 2 or 3 can verify the facts of the case first-hand, testify as to whether the follow-up restoration attempt was handled biblically, see whether the person is unrepentant about sin when shown it to be sin from Scripture. If as v. 17 says, the person is clearly in sin and clearly set on continuing despite your loving pleading, then it says *“tell it to the church”* – which would start with church leaders. Don’t go talk to others about a sinful tendency or path you see in a brother/sister if you have not talked to the brother/sister. If you come to the Elders and have not done this process (of if someone says this to you), if they have not obeyed v. 15, they really have no business talking to you about it. Verse 15 says *“go **to him** and show him his fault in private,”* not **gossip in public!**

If you won't go talk to him/her, talk to God, but not others about it. Now if you follow Christ's commands in v. 15-16, and the person won't listen to you and the 2 with you who tried lovingly to turn him/her back from clear sin, then v. 17 says you can bring it to the Elders who are shepherds of the flock as protectors, guardians. The Elders of the church will get involved in the process, raising the stakes in this search and rescue operation ministry. If research confirms there is sin and the professing Christian refuses Scriptural input and these efforts to restore them, then the Elders would be the appropriate ones to carry out the command in v. 17 to "*tell it to the church,*" so that as a drastic measure, the body and family can be informed to pray for and lovingly plead with him/her to repent.

But v. 17 says "*if he refuses to listen even to the church ...*" which tells us that now his/her very church is involved pleading with him. One part of the body affects the rest, leaven affects the whole. If the individual still won't listen to the entire church and determines to continue in his/her sin no matter what the church says or what Scripture says, it says the church is to treat the person like a pagan because that's how they're acting. The individual is to be to us as an outsider, not as a sheep. Christ's flock must be pure. If the person is a church member, the final step would be removing him / her from church membership until repentance / restoration.

It's not unloving for Christ to keep His pure bride. It shows our lack of love for Christ and others if we won't pursue holiness.

1 Corinthians 5 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> *It is actually reported that there is immorality among you ...* <sup>4</sup> *In the name of our Lord Jesus, **when you are assembled** ...* <sup>5</sup> *... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. [i.e., give him over to the world and he may still be saved but you can't assume he is saved if he keeps living that way]* <sup>6</sup> *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?* <sup>7</sup> *Clean out the old leaven ... [evil]* <sup>9</sup> *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people ...* <sup>11</sup> *... I wrote to you not to associate with **any so-called brother** if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler [unrepentant sinners, not struggling ones asking for help]—not even to eat with such a one ...* <sup>13</sup> *... **Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.***

Read 1 Corinthians 5 some time after you read 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter just a few chapters later) and let God's Word define what love looks like, not sentimental subjective opinions. I've been reading a book someone just gave me this week that just came out this year by Jonathan Leeman called *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*, which says in its introduction:

'Western Christians have a weak and anemic conception of the local church and its role in their Christian faith. Evangelical pollster George Barna has testified to that fact:

While nearly half of the adult population attends religious services during a typical week [by their profession]...fewer than one out of every five adults firmly believes that a congregational church is a critical element in their spiritual growth and ...that participation in some type of community of faith is required for them to achieve their full potential ...

Even the most devoted church-going groups – such as [self-described] evangelicals and born again Christians – generally dismissed that notion [a local church as vital, or even necessary]; only one-third of all evangelicals and [20% of other professing] born again adults endorsed the concept. Only one out of every four adults who possesses a biblical worldview (25%) agreed with the centrality of a local church in a person’s spiritual growth. Just as few adults (18%) firmly embraced the idea that spiritual maturity requires involvement in a community of faith [4/18/2006 Update: “Americans Have Commitment Issues”]

In my experience as well, asking the average Christian how important committed church membership is to his or her Christianity will yield an answer somewhere between “Not at all” and “Sort of.” Many Christians are happy to attend a particular church indefinitely without formally joining [for years, more than a decade] ... Still others don’t attend church at all and try to sustain their spiritual life through a self-directed use of Christian books, fellowship groups, radio stations, or other forms of Christian media. Should you attempt to explain the importance, even necessity, of joining a church to someone with such a mindset, you will probably meet with, at best, a shrug of the shoulders or more likely the charge “That’s legalism” or “That’s dogmatic” ... Mention the words *church discipline* and you can be pretty confident that charges will follow [“unloving”!]. ... Why does it feel unloving to draw clear boundaries around a church? Is it? What do we take “love” to be? Are our notions of love in fact biblical?

[Leeman continues perceptively] Christians in the West are overly (1) individualistic. And along with such individualism ... comes (2) consumerism, (3) a reluctance to make commitments generally ... the worry of buyer’s remorse hinders the ability to make commitments in everything from jobs, to spouses, to restaurants, to houses. Commitments bind us, and in a culture where the maximization of short-term pleasure has a premium, binding commitments are threatening. Binding commitments by their nature, are made in order to prevent individuals from living by caprice and fancy. They are freedom curtailing.

...  
Whenever a relationship becomes inconvenient or demands too much, it’s left behind ... churches become places where personal sacrifices are seldom made, so the gospel is seldom pictured ... [Many] don’t feel the weight of their responsibility to others ... They just [leave and church-shop elsewhere if the product doesn’t deliver the desired satisfaction]. They take their purchase back to the checkout counter. It’s nothing personal. All in all, they ask little of others and give little in return ...

[Authors like William P. Young, who wrote *The Shack*, have come right out and said they don’t identify with organized church, and encourage others not to, and George Barna in his 2005 book *Revolution* says whether you’re] “immersed in [a church], minimally involved in, or completely disassociated from a local church is irrelevant to me (and, within boundaries, to God). What matters is not whom you associate with (i.e., a local church), but who you are ... how Americans experience and express their faith” has been dramatically shifting [that’s one point I can agree on!]

That means local churches are actually getting in the way of the “dedicated” Christians who “are serious about their faith” [or so they say]. The solution, for some Christians, is to get local churches out of the way. Take control of your own spiritual journey. For others, the solution is to find one of the new “boutique churches” that offer the “customized experiences” Americans are looking for.

Either way, Christians can grow in maturity without all the hassles, bureaucracies, and redundancies of life in the traditional local church. The bottom line for Barna? You can take or leave church depending on what's good for you. You are your own spiritual portfolio manager, your own captain, your own shepherd.<sup>4</sup>

And I'm here to stand up against an anti-institution, anti-authority, anti-everything-I'm-about-to-say-today world and say NO!! With all my heart I'm persuaded all that grieves the heart of Christ who loved the church and gave Himself up for her, His beloved bride!

I question someone's love for Christ if he doesn't love what Christ loves. If that sounds judgmental, I can give you some much stronger statements from the Apostle John and Paul and Peter and Jesus. Because I love you and I love the truth and I love Christ more than your opinion of me, I have no choice but to lay it out and plead with you, challenge you, and offend you if you think like our world rather than this Word, because God's truth is so valuable and error is so devastating and sin is so deadly to your soul and wandering sheep are in so much danger if not joined or connected to a flock.

If a sheep (professing sheep among us) is wandering toward a cliff and we do not do all drastic measures to get its attention, we don't truly love. We can't judge one's heart infallibly but we are to judge clear and dangerous sin by God's Word, and as James says, if we turn one back, we may save from death. Even believers can die as a result of sin, and if the person is not in fact a true believer, and we can turn him to the gospel, the soul is saved from eternal death!

Hebrews 3:12 <sup>12</sup> *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.* <sup>13</sup> *But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* [note the urgency, as well as the remedy]

John Piper in an article in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, calls this:

“God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people.” ... affection must be restored to reflection ... delight in God must be restored to doctrines about God. Savoring Christ must be restored to seeing Christ. Tender contrition must be restored to tough conviction. Communion with God must be restored to contending for God ... This is a life-and-death matter. You can hear the urgency in Hebrews 3:12-13: “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,” that you won't have “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” ...

Open your mouths and become fountains of life to each other [as Proverbs says] ... **Perseverance is a community project** ... Daily [speaking and exhorting by God's truth] sustains faith, inspires joy, enables perseverance, and spurs love ... souls hang on your message ... I want people to use their God-centered, Christ-exalting, God-besotted, Bible-saturated mouths to draw people to Christ and joy, and to warn people about the creeping sins in their lives. We must spot, name, and rescue people from lack of delight in God, indifference to the Scriptures, and lack of love to minister to others. James 5 says, “If you bring somebody back, you save their soul from death” (paraphrase of v. 20).

That's urgent. Most churches on Sunday morning don't act like very much is at stake...

No wonder we hardly talk with each other about important things ... There are not many voices in my people's lives waving the banner of delight in God above all things, saying, "Everything is refuse compared to the surpassing value of Jesus Christ. You will not gain Him if other things are more important to you." People in our congregations are not usually joyous in Christ. They love their new computer programs, what's for lunch, and what's on TV more than they love Christ. This indicates a defective heart. What am I going to do? I am not going to massage them and tell them everything is okay ... Raise the stakes in friendship ... exhort one another every day ... To rest in the all-satisfying glory of God through His love is the fight ... Love, delight in, be satisfied by, enjoy, treasure, and value Jesus above all things ... We will fight for people's souls by getting at the truth. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). That is not just for unbelievers. That is for the person in adultery, the person in addiction, in discouragement, in worry, or in bitterness. Faith comes by hearing a Spirit-anointed word ... "through" Bible verses to Christ, to the person, the living person, to know Him, cherish Him, treasure Him, enjoy Him, trust Him, be at home with Him ... to count Him more to be desired than all other things—wife, husband, children, success in career, leisure, vacations, health, food, sex, money. He's more precious. ... continually exhort others every day lest there be in them an evil heart of unbelief. Unbelief is lack of satisfaction in Christ, loving the comforts and securities of this world more than we love people ... You will make that move (it's called love) if you don't have an evil heart of unbelief that enamors you with the praises of men, the pleasures of family, and the lures of success. Instead, if you are ravished by the glory of God and show it by laying down your life for others, guess who gets the glory? [only Jesus!] ... If you are satisfied in Him, you are released to do what pleases God. What pleases God is to get involved in people's lives. Then Jesus will get the glory.'<sup>5</sup>

Ephesians 3:21 says: *to Him be the glory in the church*

If you want that in your life, if you see your need for correction and protection and want that accountability in your life, if you desire the discipline and discipleship of a church family to help you in your spiritual life, why not join yourself to the church? Why not make a public statement to others that you're not ashamed to count yourself among us, you're not afraid to serve in some way?

The book *Why We Love the Church* closes this way: 'this is my final advice: Find a good local church, get involved, become a member, stay there for the long haul ... Go to church [next] Sunday and worship there in spirit and truth, be patient with your leaders, rejoice when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, bear with those who hurt you, and give people the benefit of the doubt. While you are there, sing like you mean it, say hi to the teenager no one notices, welcome the blue hairs and the nose-ringed, volunteer for the nursery once in a while. And yes, bring your fried chicken to the potluck ... invite a friend to church, take the new couple out for coffee, give to the ... offering, be thankful someone vacuumed the carpet, enjoy the Sundays that click for you, pray extra hard on the Sundays that don't, and do not despise "the day of small things" (Zechariah 4:10).'

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, “The Church is the Gospel Made Visible,” Together for the Gospel 2010, Session 1. [www.t4g.org](http://www.t4g.org)

<sup>2</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening Up James* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), p 166–167.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*, IX Marks, 2010, Crossway, p. 32-33, 42, 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, “God’s Glory is the Goal of Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling Volume 20*.

<sup>6</sup> DeYoung, 226-27.