

The Church, part 13

(Ephesians 4:1-16; Romans 12:1-8)

(preached Pine Grove 9/17/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Two weeks ago, we looked at the subject of Active Church Membership in regards to characteristics of effective churches..

And we talked about how most churches are filled with people who sit rather than serve..

How churches have more consumers than producers..

How churches have 100s of people of church membership rolls but less than 50% of them active in the church..

For instance, we learned that the average Southern Baptist Church has 400 members but only 150 who attend regularly..

Only 94 who go to Sunday School and only 33 who have official roles of service in the church..

And we began 2 weeks ago to ask some questions about why this is..

We offered that some of the people on church rolls probably aren't saved and therefore are really not motivated to serve the Lord or His church..

We offered that some people on church membership rolls are probably there due to insufficient methods of keeping up with who is going and who is leaving...

But then we also offered that some people on membership rolls are simply lazy and uninterested in doing anything for the church..

So how are churches to encourage members to be active and to serve the local church?

Well, we began to look at 4 strategies to encourage people to get and remain active in the local church...

The first is to be a church that preaches an accurate gospel...

In other words, Christians who hear and embrace the true gospel will be active in their local church...

Because they will understand what Christ has done for them, and that will fill them with a desire to do much for Christ's church...

Churches and pastors who preach a watered down gospel of just raising a hand and walking an aisle attract people

who have a wrong view of salvation, a wrong view of Christ and in the end a wrong view of the church..

These people don't see Jesus as the center of their love and affection; they see him as fire insurance...

And if you don't truly love Christ, you will never truly love his church and therefore you will have no interest in serving his church...

The better view you have of Christ, the better view you will have of the church...

Because the church is the bride of Christ...

Unfortunately, people with a low view of Christ have a low view of His church...

If you come to Christ as only see him for what he can do for you, you will only see Christ's church in what it can do for you...

And many people who are the victims of a watered down gospel that features a watered down Christ come to have a watered down view of the church..

So we must preach an accurate gospel that exalts Christ to the world....

When Christ is seen in the right light, His church is seen in the right light, and people desire to serve the church out of love for Christ...

The second way to encourage active membership from two weeks ago is to prioritize church membership...

We live in a culture that hates the idea of commitment..

People live together instead of getting married....

People will change jobs at the drop of a hat nowadays...

People are so afraid of commitment that they wont even buy green bananas any more...

So it makes sense that people today shy away from church membership, but the Bible is clear...

When people in the early church got saved, they joined the church...

There was no such thing of being a Christian but not being a part of the church...

And we looked at this last week in the book of Acts where the pattern was...

Hear the gospel preached...

Believe the gospel and get saved...

Obey the Lord and get baptized..

And then join yourself to the church..

So prioritizing church membership is important because people who commit to the church feel a sense of obligation to be active in the church...

Churches that don't stress church membership often and themselves begging for people to serve...

And the reason is clear...

People who stay on the outside of the church by refusing membership feel no sense of obligation to the church...

So churches need to prioritize church membership to encourage more active membership..

And then we finished two weeks ago by starting to look at a 3rd way to encourage active membership and that was...

Putting Expectations on Members...

And this is not in the sense of lording over members or burdening members with more to do...

Instead, it is laying out responsibilities of membership in the church...

And so we talked about the first expectation of church membership is to walk in obedience to the Lord...

Church members who are walking in obedience to the Lord are more likely to be active members...

Because people with a healthy and vibrant relationship with the Lord are interested in what He is interested in...

And the Lord is interested in the church because HE uses the church to accomplish His will in the world...

Here's the bottom line..

Christians who walk in disobedience to the Lord are less likely to be active in the church...

In fact, they are less likely to be at church...

And there is where the downward spiral of sin starts and grows...

I sin and I don't repent so I felt conviction and guilt and I don't want to go to church because the Word of God leads to more conviction...

And when I take the church out of my life, I take the word out of my life and sin becomes all the more easier and my life spirals out of control....

So expecting members to obey the Lord keeps them active because it helps them keep their relationship with the Lord and his church at the center of who they are...

A second expectation of church members that we discussed last week is that they come to church...

Now, how does coming to church make you more active in the church?

Well, first of all, you know what is going on and where the church needs help...

You can't be active if you don't know where you are needed...

Church attendance keeps you in the loop of what is going on at the church and therefore offers opportunities to be active...

Coming to church also increases your sense of belonging to the church..

It is hard to be active if you feel like an outsider to the church...

It is easier to be active when you feel like you belong...

It is amazing to me how people can not come to church but expect everyone else to treat them like they are there every week...

They want the calls about their health...

They want the visits when they have a death in the family...

They want the concern about their lives..

But they aren't consistent in their attendance...

I knew a man who ran a local gas station in Union..

He sold gas and tires to make a living for himself and his family...

Since he was local, he had a little higher price on his tires but he made up for it with service..

If you bought tires from him, he would rotate them for free, repair any flat for no charge, check your air pressure every time you bought gas, etc..

He told me that he had a few customers who went to Wal Mart to get their tires but still bought gas from him...

So when they filled up, they expected him to check their air pressure...

And they would bring their flats in for service with him...

Ask him to rotate their tires...

He started refusing to do it...

He would tell them, "You don't come here to buy your tires but you want me to care for them like you did.."

Many people in the church don't come and aren't invested in being active but they want you to be active in their lives when they have the least little need...

That is so backward...

Part of the obligation of membership is coming to church, so that the church is aware of what you need but also that you are aware of what we need..

Jesus Himself said that he didn't come into the world to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many...

Coming to church proves that you want to serve and demonstrates your desire not to be served...

So 2 expectations of church membership that lead to more active church members are walking in obedience to the Lord and church attendance...

A third expectation of members that leads to more active church members is this...

Church members are expected to give to the work of the church in the world...

So much is misunderstood about giving to the church, and I don't have time to teach about that tonight...

We are going to talk about giving in a few weeks in this series on the church...

But let me tell you why giving to the church keeps you active...

One is this...

Some people are not physically able to serve the church...

They can't do what they were once able to do, but their financial support makes it possible for others who are physically able to serve to have the money to serve..

Giving to the church also enables anyone to have a direct impact on the work of the church....

Some ministries don't need people necessarily but simply need funds...

Giving allows you to be active in the church even though your labor is not required...

When you give to our missionaries and various missions in the church, you are actively involved in what the Lord is doing not only here but around the world...

When you close up your wallets and pocketbooks to the church, you cut off your activity in the church...

Active members give...

Inactive members keep...

A fourth expectation of church members is that they are praying for the church...

Some people can't serve and some can't give as much but all can be active in the church through their prayer lives...

Active church members are those who are praying regularly for the pastor, for the church leaders, for the ministries in the church...

If you want to feel tied to a church and active in a church, pray for that church regularly and watch the Lord answer those prayers of the saints..

Inactive members don't pray for the church because they don't come enough and don't know enough to pray for...

Active members pray for the church and therefore feel part of the church...

Let's now move to the final way to increase the number of active members in a church...

WE PREACH AN ACCURATE GOSPEL...

WE PRIORITIZE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP...

WE PUT EXPECTATIONS ON MEMBERS...

And finally we..

IV. Provide Opportunities

Let me take us to a couple passages in the New Testament tonight...

The first one is in Ephesians 4:11-12...

Find your way there and let's read these verses which speak of the purpose of the church and how the church operates in the world...

Let me begin in verse 1 of chapter 4...

4 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

In these opening verses of Ephesians 4, Paul calls the church to walk in unity in the Lord who has saved them...

He also calls the church one body under one Lord...

But the question now becomes, well how does the church go about doing the work of the Lord in the world...

Skip down to 11...

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the [d]saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the [e]knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature [f]which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 [g]As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness [h]in deceitful scheming; 15 but [i]speaking the truth in love, [j]we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together [k]by what every joint supplies, according to the [l]proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

The point of this passage is to show that the one body is made of many parts...

And God has given each believer a part in the church...

In verse 11, Paul points out a very important truth about how the church is put together...

God has given us certain parts of the church...

Pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc..

In other words, church leaders like pastors and elders and deacons...

And their role is clear...

Look at verse 12..

They equip the saints for the work of service that builds up the body of Christ...

In other words, church leaders are tasked with equipping the saint to serve in the church...

For instance, it is necessary for me to teach you the need to serve the church...

It is also necessary for me and the other leaders here to make you aware of needs within the church...

To alert you to a need in the nursery for more more workers..

To let you know that there is a death in a family and we need to cook for them...

To tell you that such and such is in the hospital and we need to be praying for them...

To alert you to the need of a person who is a shut-in but would love a visit from her church family..

To notify you of a financial need in a family in our church...

Church leaders teach people in the church how to serve and we also make you aware of opportunities for service in the church...

You see, the pastor and the other church leaders can't do all the ministry in a church...

We can't do all the counseling, all the visits, meet all the financial needs,...

And furthermore, we shouldn't hog all this ministry for ourselves...

Look, it is a great blessing to me to help people, but I must also realize the need to share that blessing with others...

So, there is certainly a responsibility on church leaders to equip church members to work and then provide opportunities for service...

Unfortunately, churches have laid all the ministry work on the shoulders of just a few in the church...

Instead of responding to the call to serve, they assume that someone else will do it for them...

They assume that since the pastor and staff get paid, it is their responsibility to do the work...

Yet, they are wrong....

While there is a clear command on me to do ministry as a pastor...

And while there is a clear command on church leaders to do ministry in their roles...

There is also a clear command in Eph 4:12 that all the saints do the work of service in the church..

Verse 16 even says that each individual part of the body works to make sure the entire body functions properly...

In other words, as we said last week, inactive members keep the body handicapped and prevent all the work of the church from going forward...

Inactive members aren't just sitting on their hands, they are keeping the hands of Christ from working in the world..

Now in terms of Pine Grove, let me just take a minute before we look at our final verse to offer some service opportunities to you...

How can you be more active in the body of Christ at this church?

Let me just give you a little list of ministry opportunities..

Sunday School Ministry

First of all, go to a Sunday School, but then within that Sunday School have a place of service...

There is probably already a teacher in place, but then ask that teacher how you can help them each week..

Whether that is keeping attendance...

Making coffee...

Bringing a snack...

Writing cards of encouragement to other members....

Taking care of the classroom appearance...

Planning a fellowship for the class...

Lots of ways to get involved in Sunday School at Pine Grove...

Discipleship Ministry

What I mean by discipleship ministry is finding someone who you can disciple in the Lord...

Taking an specific interest in a person's life and then helping them to grow in the Lord...

Two notes here...

One, -disciple someone of your own gender...

Two, -dont disciple more than two people at a time...

Jesus had 12 men around him, but he was closest to 3 of those 12...

Don't try to do more than Jesus could do..

You don't need to be an expert in the Bible to disciple another person...

You simply need to love them and care for them and desire to see them grow in their walk with the Lord..

Visitation Ministry

It is a shame that churches leave visitation to pastor and deacons..

And the greatest loss is that visiting people is such a blessing, not to them but to you....

There are plenty of folks to visit and care for in our church...

WE have our fair share of widows and other people who just want company...

And look this doesn't have to take the form of going to their house without notice...

Invite people to your house and cook for them and serve them and get to know them...

Church Service Ministry

Sunday mornings are a big deal around here...

But Sunday morning worship doesn't happen without the service of a lot of people...

WE have the choir that I am sure always welcomes folks who want to serve with their voices...

WE have the greeters who meet people at the door with a handshake or hug...

We have the men who work the sound and slides on the big screen...

We have the musicians who bless us with their talent....

We have Lord's Supper preparation and clean up that happen every so often...

WE have a security team that patrols the outside at each service...

You even get a silver bullet and permission to shoot someone at church...

We have the nursery ministry that serves our parents by taking care of their kids so they can pay attention in church...

Fellowship Ministry

Fellowship within the church is a very important ministry...

We will see and talk more about that next week, but churches need to fellowship in their membership....

Planning, cooking, cleaning, setting up tables are all necessary parts of fellowships that we do here....

And they don't happen unless people are serving the church...

Church Maintenance Ministry

Smaller churches are forced to do much of the upkeep themselves in order to save money...

Again, maintenance within even a small church is impossible for one or even two people....

There are carpets to clean, floors to be waxed, bushes to be trimmed, walls to be painted, light bulbs to be changed and on and on and on....

Plenty of opportunity for service here at Pine Grove...

And those are just a short list of ministry opportunities at Pine Grove...

There are others that I have mentioned or even overlooked...

Bottom line....

See one of our deacons or me if you have interest in any of these service opportunities...

OR see the deacons or me if you know of other areas of service needed here...

As we end this call to more active church membership, let me take you to one final passage tonight...

Because I want you to understand that I or the deacons are not calling anyone to being active....

I am not griping about inactive members or begging for help...

Instead as I call all Christians to be active members of a church, I am simply calling you to be obedient to the Lord in your service...

So, let's go to Romans 12 to end our time together tonight....

When we get to Romans 12, Paul has just finished 11 chapters explaining what God has done for the Christian...

Called them to salvation...

Saved them by his grace...

Sanctifying them in his mercy...

So in chapter 12, Paul simply turns to the Christian and tells them who to properly respond to the goodness of God in their lives...

So, let's look at verse 1...

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, [a]acceptable to God, which is your [b]spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this [c]world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may [d]prove what the will of God is, that which is good and [e]acceptable and perfect.

The first two responses of the believer to the goodness of God in saving them is to...

#1 - Offer their bodies to the Lord as an act of worship...

#2 - Stop acting like the world..

Verse 3...

3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound

judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Response #3 to God's goodness in salvation is humility and sound thinking...

And then we get to response #4 in verses 4-8....

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, [f]according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if [g]service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with [h]liberality; he who [i]leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Response #4 to the goodness of God in your life in saving you is to use your gifts to serve the church...

You see, being active in the church isn't optional for the Christian...

Conclusion

In fact as I end, let me get back to something I said two weeks ago...

Having a church membership roll for inactive members isn't even biblical...

To be inactive in the church is to be disobedient to the Lord...

To be ungrateful for your salvation...

And to hinder the work of Christ in the world...

To be inactive in the Lord's church is be inactive in your love of Christ...

To love Christ is not just a matter of words...

To love Christ is to be a part of his church and to be engaged in serving it and helping it to accomplish its mission in the world...

Let us pray..