

# HEALTHY MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY

The background of the cover is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure is a male with long, curly hair, standing with arms and legs extended, inscribed within a square and a circle. The drawing is rendered in a golden-brown hue.

## Vital Signs of Healthy Church Members

by **Phil Awtry**

Based on  
*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever  
*What is a Healthy Church Member?* by Thabiti Anyabwile



### THINK & DISCUSS

- In this class we'll be examining the Biblical characteristics that make for healthy churches and healthy church members. What do you think of when you hear the word "healthy"?

---

### READ & STUDY

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "church"?
  - A building? A group of people? An institution? A movement?
- Definition of the Church
  - *The church is the community of all true believers for all time.* (Grudem)
  - The church, in Biblical terms, is composed of all people, in all history (past, present, future) who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- The Meaning of "Church"
  - Greek term usually translated as church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, lit. a called out gathering.
  - It is Jesus who builds His church, by calling His people out of sin and death and gathering them to Himself (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:47)
- The Church is pictured in the Scriptures as:
  - A family (1 Timothy 5:1-2)
  - A building (1 Corinthians 3:9)
  - A temple (1 Peter 2:4-8)
  - A priesthood (1 Peter 2:5)
  - The body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 1:22-23, etc)
- The Nature of the Church:
  - The Church is *Invisible*...
    - The invisible church is the church as God sees it.
    - Therefore, the invisible church is composed of true believers in Christ.
  - Yet *Visible*
    - The visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it.
    - Examples: Paul's epistles addressed to "the church at..." – 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Philemon 1-2.
    - The visible church will always include some unbelievers.
  - There is the *True Church*...
    - A true church is a community of believers founded on the true gospel of Christ and the apostles teachings.
  - And the *False Church*
    - A false church is one that is based on some other doctrines or teachings, and therefore not even a church by the Biblical definition.



- The Church is *Universal*...
  - The church is presented in Scripture as universal (catholic), a body of all true believers on the earth composing the true church.
- Yet *Local*
  - The church is also presented in Scripture as local, each individual local group of believers being the church.
  - Examples: Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:31
  - The local church, as an expression of the universal church in a given location or community, is the normative model in the New Testament.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- What do you think most people think of when they hear the term “church”? Why?
- Has this brief study of the nature of the church of Jesus Christ changed your understanding of what the church is? In what ways?
- Are you a member of the universal church, through faith in Jesus Christ? You cannot be a healthy church member without actually being a member of the universal church.

**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Some today say that they love Jesus, but they hate the church. What's wrong with this statement? What do you think they really mean?
- 

**READ & STUDY**

- Let's review the nature of the local church from the last lesson.
    - The church is presented in Scripture as local, each individual local group of believers being the church.
    - Everywhere the Apostles went, they preached the gospel, then gathered the believers into local assemblies with structure and leadership.
    - The local church, as an expression of the universal church in a given location or community, is the normative model in the New Testament.
  - Why is the local church so important?
    - The local church is where Christians are to receive teaching and preaching of the Scriptures to equip them for ministry.
    - The local church is where Christians are joined with other believers so they can carry out the many "one another" commands of the New Testament.
    - The local church is where Christians can receive spiritual care, shepherding, oversight and protection from sin and error by their appointed leaders.
    - The local church is the mobilizing body for the people of God to engage in the work of service and ministry.
    - The local church is where Christians can express their commitment to Jesus Christ, to His people, and to His work.
  - What then is the Biblical definition of a "church member"?
    - The word "member" is found repeatedly in the New Testament in reference to the church. Greek *melos*, a limb or other part of a body.
    - By definition, all believers are members of the universal church.
    - Formal, institutional membership is not directly found in Scriptures, but it's implied throughout the New Testament.
      - Many examples of listing counts of who was in a local group of believers, as a membership list (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 1 Timothy 5:9-11).
      - Jesus gives clear commands regarding church discipline and dealing with sin in the church, among members (Matthew 18).
      - Paul gives commands for removal of an unrepentant sinning brother from the membership of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5).
      - Christ writes in Revelation to the members of individual churches.
    - A member of a local church, then, is a believer in Christ who has expressed their commitment to a local church, and has been affirmed by the leadership and the other members in this commitment.
-



- Why is local Church Membership so important if it's not expressly taught in the Bible?
  - It's an expression of our commitment to Jesus Christ and to His body.
  - It puts us in a safe place for spiritual protection and accountability by church leaders, protecting us from straying into sin and error. (Hebrews 13:17)
  - It's a means by which the local church can be kept pure, by examining and accepting only true believers (members of the universal church) into the local congregation.
  - It provides stability in ministry and service, by members who are committed to their local church for the long haul.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- What do you think about someone who claims to be a Christian, but who says they have "church at home" while watching a television preacher?
- Given the importance placed on being a member of a local church body, what are some reasons some people might not want to do so? Are these valid reasons?
- Have you committed in membership to this local church body? If so, how are you following through on that commitment? If not, why not?



### THINK & DISCUSS

- There are many different styles of preaching and teaching. Does it matter how a pastor preaches as long as the Bible is opened?
- 

### READ & STUDY

- What do we mean when we use the term "expositional preaching"?
    - *"This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation."* – Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*
  - A Biblical example of expositional preaching: Nehemiah 8:7-8
    - The *content*: God's revelation, not their own ideas.
    - The *method*: explaining the meaning and significance of a portion of God's Word to God's people.
    - The *effect*: the people understand and obey.
  - A Biblical example of non-expositional preaching: Jeremiah 23:16,18, 21-22
    - The *content*: from their own imaginations.
    - The *method*: a refusal to stand in God's council to hear and obey His word.
    - The *effect*: fails to turn God's people back to God's ways, but rather leads them into futility.
  - What then is the definition of an "Expositional Listener"?
    - *"A church member who listens for the meaning of a passage of Scripture, and accepts that meaning as the main idea to be grasped for understanding and application."*
  - What are the health benefits of Expositional Listening?
    - Cultivates a hunger for God's Word.
      - As we listen to His Word, His voice becomes sweet to us (Psalm 119:103-4)
    - Helps us focus on God's will and to follow Him.
      - The only agenda we want to follow is His (John 10:27)
    - Protects the gospel and our lives from corruption.
      - When we're listening for God's voice, our ears don't itch for other voices (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
    - Encourages faithful pastors.
      - Faithful shepherds are honored by members who desire to receive God's Word (1 Timothy 5:17)
      - And unfaithful pastors are corrected and discouraged (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
-



- Unifies the gathered congregation.
  - When everyone is listening for God's voice in His Word, we aren't listening for our own agendas and are unified (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- How can church members cultivate the habit of Expositional Listening?
  - Meditate on the sermon / study passage during your study times.
    - Read and think through the passage before it's preached or taught.
    - Do your own outline to gain initial understanding, and bring it with you to worship / class.
  - Talk and pray with others about the sermon / lesson after worship/class.
    - Keep the message alive by talking with others about how God impacted them through it.
    - Pray with brothers and sisters for attentive ears to keep on hearing and not become dull to His voice (Isaiah 6:9-10)
  - Listen to and act on the sermon / lesson throughout the week.
    - Don't let the Word be forgotten and ignored immediately (James 1:22-25)
    - Get an audio copy of the sermon and re-listen to it, or re-read the lesson and your notes.
  - Address any questions you have about the text itself.
    - If there are points in the passage you are unclear on or have questions about, follow up with a pastor, elder, teacher, etc.
  - Cultivate humility.
    - Don't become arrogant as you gain understanding of God's Word, or become a "professional sermon listener" (1 Corinthians 1:8)
    - Expositional listening humbles us under the authority of God's Word (1 Peter 5:6)

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Have you experienced examples of non-expositional preaching and teaching? What effect did it have on you?
- How would you rate your ability to listen for the meaning of the Word during your personal study? During sermons? During Bible classes?
- How can you strengthen your listening ability to become a healthier expositional listener?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- The word “theology” often scares people or brings to mind boring academic discussions and books. What do we mean when we use this word?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- What is the definition of the term “Biblical theology”?
  - Exploring the main lines of the Bible's great story. Examples: *What is God like? Are people basically good or bad? What did Jesus do by dying on the cross?*
  - Biblical theology traces the developing themes of Scriptures in a historical manner, fitting them together into a story of God’s overall revelation.
  - Biblical theology vs. Systematic theology – “A line vs. a circle”
- How does a focus on Biblical theology protect the church from false doctrines, and ensure that unpopular Scriptural truths are taught?
- How does Biblical Theology promote health in a church member?
  - Helps us to grow in our reverence for God.
    - We see that God is, was and always will be the same creating, holy, faithful, loving and sovereign God. Example:
      - God’s promise the woman’s Seed would bruise the serpent (Genesis 3:15)
      - God opening barren wombs so the Seed would be preserved (Genesis 17:15-19, 21:1-2, 29:31, 30:22)
      - The birth of the Seed (Matthew 1:20-23)
  - Helps us to overcome our wrong ideas.
    - Biblical theology allows us to see how God has consistently spoken the same message to His people in various time and ways (Hebrews 1:1).
    - It won’t allow us to ignore or evade verses or passages that displease us.
  - Helps to inoculate the church against doctrinal controversies.
    - Biblical theology helps maintain the consistency and continuity of the Bible’s teachings.
    - It’s like having the picture of a completed puzzle, allowing us to separate pieces that don’t fit because they are wrong.
  - Necessary to fulfill the Great Commission.
    - Jesus commands His followers to observe *all* that He commands (Matthew 28:19-20). How can we do this if we are not clear on all He has commanded?
    - Biblical theology provides the full picture of Christ’s teachings and commands, in their proper context.



- Deepens our understanding of and ability with the gospel.
  - Biblical theology shows us the whole story of redemption that culminates in the gospel of Christ.
  - It was pointed to and partially revealed in the Old Testament, and accomplished and fully revealed in the New Testament (Luke 24:27, 44-45).
- How can we grow in being a Biblical Theologian?
  - Study the Scriptures thematically.
    - Supplement your study of the Bible with exploring major themes, such as the revealed character of God, the kingdom of God in the OT and NT, the unity of God's covenant with His people, etc.
  - Look Back - Adopt the New Testament's attitude toward the Old Testament.
    - When studying the New Testament, ask questions like:
      - *How is this passage a fulfillment of a promise in the Old Testament? How is this New Testament idea similar to or different from an Old Testament teaching? How does this passage clarify, unveil or amplify something from the Old Testament?*
  - Look Forward - Study the Old Testament with Jesus and the New Testament in view.
    - When studying the Old Testament, ask questions like:
      - *Where does this passage fit in the timeline of redemptive history? How does this passage point to Jesus? How is this passage foundational for understanding NT Christianity? What NT passages help me answer questions about this passage?*
  - Study the books of prophecy in the Old Testament.
    - Remember that many of the prophecies in the OT can be fulfilled:
      - In the prophet's own day,
      - As well as "Christologically",
      - As well as in the future, "eschatologically".
  - Seek doctrinal unity and avoid needless disputes.
    - Understanding the difference between beliefs that are essential, and beliefs that are non-essential to the integrity of the faith.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- How familiar are you with Biblical theology? Could you explain to a new Christian or a non-Christian how the entire Bible fits together as one book?
- What specific actions can you take to strengthen your knowledge of Biblical theology?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Is the gospel of Jesus Christ mainly a message for unbelievers, or for the church? Why?
- 

**READ & STUDY**

- What is the greatest need in the world today? In the church today?
  - The gospel of Jesus Christ. Without it, men and women are perishing eternally apart from a saving knowledge of God through Christ.
  - The gospel of Jesus Christ. It alone is the message that forms, sustains and energizes the church.
- What must we do as church members to be “saturated” in the gospel of Jesus Christ?
  - We must *know* the gospel.
    - We must know that the gospel is *not* that: we are okay, God is love, Jesus wants to be our friend, we should live right, all our problems will be fixed by following Jesus, God wants us to be healthy and wealthy, etc.
    - We must recognize that the gospel is “good news”.
      - It is *news*, containing facts and truths.
      - It is *good*, providing hope based on God’s promises.
    - A brief summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ:
      - God the Father, who is completely righteous and holy, is righteously angry with sinners and will punish sin.
      - Man, who disobeys the rule of God, is alienated from God and in danger of eternal punishment for that sin at the hands of God.
      - But God, being rich in mercy, sent His eternal Son to die as a ransom and a substitute for the sin of rebellious people.
      - Through the perfect obedience of the Son and his death on the cross, all who believe in Him and repent of their sin will:
        - Be saved from the wrath to come
        - Be declared righteous before God
        - Have eternal life
        - Receive the Spirit of God as a foretaste of heavenly glory.
  - We must desire to hear the gospel, and preach the gospel to ourselves.
    - The gospel is God’s power for all stages of salvation (Romans 1:16)
    - We must listen actively for the gospel and gospel implications in sermons and lessons.
    - When we find ourselves dissatisfied, anxious, etc – preach the gospel to ourselves. Read and study it in the Scriptures, memorize its truths, review it in our minds, pray the gospel, sing the gospel.



- Take the gospel to its conclusions.
  - Reflect on the events and promises of the gospel, and look forward to the conclusion of the gospel.
    - “[The gospel] has come for one great reason: that you might behold forever the glory of God in Christ, and by beholding become the kind of person who delights in God above all things, and by delighting display His supreme beauty and worth with ever-increasing brightness and bliss forever.” – John Piper in *God is the Gospel*.
  - Consider not just what God has done through the gospel, but what He is doing *now*, and what He *will do*. All as a result of the gospel of Christ.
- Order your life around the gospel.
  - The gospel should impact every area of our lives.
  - It should affect our communication with others, how we encourage and correct others, be central to life decisions like career and relationships, etc.
  - Consider how to organize your life to allow the most impact of the gospel on yourself and others.
- Share the gospel with others.
  - Sharing your testimony or living a good Christian life are good, but they are not sharing the gospel.
  - We must lovingly and urgently tell those around us the truth, that they must believe in Christ and repent of their sin.
- Guard the gospel.
  - The responsibility for protecting the integrity of the gospel is placed not just on church leaders, but primarily on church members. (Galatians 1:8-9, Jude 3)
  - We are to be careful what kind of teaching and preaching we consider. (2 John 10-11)

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Why do you think that many Christians feel the gospel of Christ is only for sharing with unbelievers, and not continual preaching to the church?
- Do you have a good understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in all of its depth and implications? What steps will you take to increase this understanding?
- What strategies can you put in place in your life to enable you to preach the gospel to yourself?



### THINK & DISCUSS

- What do you think about people who claim to be Christians but have no evidence of it in their lives? Are they really believers in Christ?

---

### READ & STUDY

- What does the Bible mean by the term “conversion”?
  - Example: Matthew 18:3. Converted, Greek *strephe* – to turn, to change.
  - Biblical conversion includes both trust and belief in Christ (a change of belief), and a turning from sin to spiritual fruitfulness (a change of behavior).
- How are some of today’s popular views of Christian conversion inconsistent with the Biblical definition of conversion given by Jesus and the apostles?
  - Modern evangelism often focuses on making a ‘decision’ or a ‘commitment’ to Christ or ‘accepting Christ’ without communicating the extent of what following Christ truly means.
  - Walking an aisle, signing a card, praying a prayer, etc. are often accepted as signs of true belief, with no mention of repentance.
  - This view of conversion is found nowhere in the Scriptures, and tends to produce superficial church members who are not genuinely converted to Christ.
- Why is being genuinely converted essential to being a healthy church member?
  - Apart from being truly converted as a believer in Jesus Christ, a person cannot be a member of the universal, invisible church. And therefore, cannot truly be a member of a local church.
  - An unconverted person is not a Christian, and therefore can have no spiritual health, growth, fruit or life.
- Let’s explore the Biblical understanding of conversion a bit deeper.
  - All men are by nature fallen and sinful. We commit sin because it is our nature. (Ephesians 2:1-3). As such we are naturally alienated from and hostile towards God. (Romans 8:5-8)
  - In this state of spiritual deadness, we are unable to please God, or to respond to Him. We must be radically changed by God’s Spirit. (Ephesians 2:4-7)
  - This radical change is *conversion*. It is the *turn* from an enslaved life of pursuing sin to a free life of pursuing and worshipping God. (Acts 26:18)
  - True conversion cannot be accomplished by human will, but only by the power of God, through His gospel, enabled by His Spirit, resulting in faith in His Son and obedience to His word. (John 3:3-8)
  - Conversion then involves God granting to the sinner *repentance* (conviction of sin that leads to turning around) and *faith* (relying on Jesus Christ alone for salvation).



- Is it Biblical to look at ourselves to make sure we are truly converted?
  - Yes. The apostles repeatedly exhort us to do so. Consider:
    - 2 Corinthians 13:5
    - Philippians 2:12
    - 2 Peter 1:5-11
  - These are not calls to *doubting* our salvation, but rather establishing the *certainty* of it. We are commanded to know our own soul and the condition of it.
  
- What are some questions we should ask to Biblically examine ourselves to ensure we are truly converted?
  - Are we trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ and Him alone for our salvation?
    - If we're trusting in anything or anyone else (including ourselves) for our eternal destiny, we are not truly converted.
  
  - Are we growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ? (2 Peter 3:18)
    - Is the fruit of His Spirit evident in our lives? (Galatians 5:22-23)
  
  - Are we walking in the light or in the darkness? (1 John 1:6-7)
    - Truly converted persons grieve at their sin, and seek to turn from it rather than deny it (1 John 1:8-10)
    - Truly converted persons cannot habitually and unrepentantly continue in sin. (1 John 3:5)
  
  - Do we love God the Father?
    - We cannot think of Jesus as a God of love and tolerance but view God the Father as a God of wrath.
    - Love for the God the Father is a test of genuine faith and conversion. (1 John 2:22-23)
    - Love for God the Father and the things of the world cannot coexist in a truly converted person. (1 John 2:15)
  
  - Do we love other Christians?
    - Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is a primary mark of being converted. (1 John 4:7, 4:20, 5:1)
    - Hatred for our brother or sister is a sign of lack of spiritual life. (1 John 3:14-15)
  
  - Do we have the testimony of God that we are His children?
    - God has adopted us as His children by His Spirit (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) and declares to our inward spirit that we are His children. (Romans 8:16)
    - As His children, we will not be popular with the world. (1 John 3:1)



- Are we persevering in the faith?
  - A truly converted Christian is one who overcomes and perseveres to the end. (1 John 5:4-5)
  - Those who believe and continue to believe are those who overcome the world by faith. Genuine faith is a *persevering* faith. (Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21)
- What are the implications for evangelism that a Biblical understanding of conversion might have?
  - The healthy church member will understand that it is God who converts the sinner.
  - Evangelism then is not a matter of clever presentation or technique, but of God's Spirit at work through His gospel to convict the sinner, bring about new birth, repentance and faith.
  - Example: Acts 13:48.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Has this lesson affected your understanding of what it means for a person to be converted to faith in Christ? In what ways?
- The tests given here to examine ourselves to ensure we are genuinely converted should be pursued with a group of mature Christians to provide perspective. Consider getting together with a few brothers or sisters and discussing these questions.



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Who does the Bible say the task of evangelism has been given to?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- Based on our last two lessons, how does a Biblical understanding of the *gospel* and a Biblical understanding of *conversion* impact our understanding of *evangelism*?
  - Without a solid and accurate Biblical understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have nothing of eternal consequence to share with others or to testify about.
  - Without a Biblical understanding of authentic conversion, which includes both a change of belief and a change of behavior, we are in danger of miscommunicating the marks of true faith and repentance, and giving assurance of salvation where none is warranted.
  - Biblical evangelism is only possible based on a Biblical gospel motivated by a desire to see people Biblically converted to faith in Christ.
  - *"Apart from a Biblical understanding of conversion and evangelism, a church member will be most unhelpful in completing the churches mission of making disciples."* – Thabiti Anyabwile
- How does a Biblical view of evangelism affect our own personal evangelistic efforts?
  - We realize that evangelism is not dependent on eloquence, proper mood setting, emotional stories and songs, high pressure sales pitches, or other pragmatic gimmicks.
  - We are then freed to:
    - Simply trust in the gospel as the power of God to salvation to produce the fruit He desires (Romans 1:17).
    - Allow God to make His plea to sinners through us, as His ambassadors and fellow laborers (1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 6:1).
    - Realize that His Spirit will not allow His word to be of no effect (Isaiah 55:11).
    - Plant and water faithfully, confidently trusting God to bring the fruit (1 Corinthians 3:7).
- What is the main thing that Biblical evangelism requires of us?
  - That we be faithful to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ with the people God places us in contact with (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
  - This faithful evangelism includes:
    - Being 'content specific', presenting the truth about Who God is, Who men are, What sin is, Who Jesus is, What Jesus has done about our sin, What we must do about what Jesus has done.



- Clearly presenting the truth that Christ is the exclusive way of salvation.
  - John 14:6, Acts 4:12
- Calling the hearer to repentance and faith in Christ.
- What are some essentials, then, for Biblically doing the work of an evangelist?
  - Tell people *honestly* that if they repent and believe they will be saved – but it will be *costly*. (Luke 14:26-33)
    - Communicate the gospel in terms that focus on deeds, not simply words; a change of life, not simply a change of belief.
    - Avoid using the language of *decisionism* (just believe, ask Jesus into your heart, accept Jesus) in favor of the more Biblical language of *conversion* (surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, turn from sin and trust Christ for forgiveness and live a life of obedience).
  - Tell people *urgently* that if they repent and believe they will be saved – but they must do so *now*. (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:14-15)
    - We must declare the gospel and call for a response from people with a sense of urgency since their life could be over at any time.
    - But we must temper this urgency so as not to push too hard for a 'decision' apart from a clear understanding of repentance and belief.
  - Tell people *joyfully* that if they repent and believe they will be saved, and regardless of how difficult it may be, it is *infinitely worth it*.
    - Avoid giving the impression that the gospel is therapeutic, that trusting Christ will solve their life problems or address their felt needs.
  - Tell people *authoritatively* that if they repent and believe they will be saved – based on the *truth of the Bible*.
    - Focus on a serious Biblical view of sin and guilt, rather than as an abstract concept.
    - Refer to the Scriptures to clearly show that the gospel of Christ is God's plan for salvation, and not based in the religion or wisdom of man.
  - Remember to *pray*.
    - Since conversion is wholly an act of God, He is the one we must ask to bring the sinner to repentance and faith.
    - We can and should pray for the right words in witnessing, accuracy in sharing the gospel, etc. But we should pray even more for God to do His saving work in the hearts of those we evangelize.
- What role does the local church play in our evangelism?
  - A healthy local church can be central to healthy church members' evangelistic efforts.



- A church where the word of God and the gospel is clearly preached and taught each week is a great resource to bring unsaved people to hear the gospel.
  - A church filled with healthy Christians gives unbelievers an opportunity to see the gospel of Christ 'fleshed out' and lived in community with one another, and demonstrates the kind of life the believer is called to live.
  - Unbelievers can be exposed to literally hundreds of other Christians besides ourselves who can share their unique experiences of God's saving grace and power as a testimony.
- What would you say is the number one reason Christians fail to engage in doing the work of an evangelist?
    - Fear of rejection? Lack of knowledge? Indifference? Others?
    - The main reason is that we do not believe the truth of Romans 1:16. We do not have confidence in the gospel because we fail to believe that it is *God's power to salvation*.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- When was the last time you communicated the gospel of Christ to someone? How did you share Christ with them?
- Does the way you speak to others about Jesus include all the essential ideas of the gospel? How can you be more clear and faithful in this?
- Does the way you speak to others about Jesus demonstrate confidence in the gospel message, that it is the power of God for salvation? How can you grow in your confidence in the gospel?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Why does it seem so many people today have an issue with commitment to anything? Does this affect the life of the church?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- Many Christians today seem to view membership in the local church as optional, even detrimental to their spiritual well-being. What may be some reasons for this view?
  - *Indifference* – they can take it or leave it, it just doesn't matter to them.
  - *Ignorance* – they've never been taught or considered the Bible's view of the local church.
  - *Indecisive* – they can't make up their mind about joining so they don't.
  - *Independent* – they don't want to be saddled with the burdens of church membership.
  - *Inverted affections* – they are still attached to a 'home church' they grew up in.
  - Others?
- What's at the root of all these views of local church membership?
  - They fail to understand or take seriously God's purpose for the local church to be central to the life of His people.
  - Commitment to a local church is how God intends His people to live out the faith and experience Christian love.
- Formal institutional church membership isn't directly found in the Bible. However, it's implied throughout the New Testament in the following areas:
  - Church Leadership:
    - Qualifications given for local church leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)
    - Commands given for leaders to shepherd the flock, and for Christians to submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17)
    - Implies leadership of a defined group of believers, and that group of believers committed as a group and submissive to those leaders.
  - Church Discipline:
    - Paul gives commands for removal of an unrepentant sinning brother from the membership of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5)
    - Jesus gives clear commands regarding church discipline and dealing with sin in the church, among members (Matthew 18:15-17)
    - This teaching is intended to make a clear distinction between who belongs to the church and who does not (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)
  - Keeping Lists and Voting:
    - Many examples of listing counts of who was in a local group of believers, as a membership list (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 1 Tim 5:9-11)



- A majority voted to remove the man from membership in the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:6)
- Implies a defined group of believers, recognized by church leaders and functioning as a local body.
- It's clear from the NT that some form of membership was practiced and seen as vital to the early church. And it is still so today.
- What then is the essential mark of membership in a local church?
  - Jesus specified one defining mark for His disciples: love for one another (John 13:34-35).
  - A healthy Christian is committed to expressing this kind of love to other believers – and the best place to do so is in the assembly of Christians in the local church.
  - This is seen in the commands of Hebrews 10:24-25 – stir one another up to love and good deeds, by continuing to gather together.
- What does a committed church member look like?
  - Attends regularly
    - Being present, being known and being active are necessary to make Christian love possible. (Hebrews 10:24-25)
  - Seeks peace
    - Committed members are committed to maintaining peace in the congregation. (Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:1-3)
  - Edifies others
    - The goal of the public meeting of the local church is mutual edification, the building up of one another in the faith. (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16)
    - Healthy church members seek to *serve*, not to *be served*; seek to *provide*, not merely be a *consumer*.
  - Warns and admonishes others
    - A committed member is committed to speaking the truth in love to brothers and sisters in Christ, for their good. (Ephesians 4:15)
    - Committed to fellow members' growth in holiness, avoidance of sin and error, and spiritual growth.
  - Pursues reconciliation
    - As those who have been reconciled to God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), committed members seek to repair issues with fellow Christians as quickly as possible (Matthew 5:23-24).
  - Prepares for the ordinances
    - Christ has given members of His church the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's table as visible proclamations of His gospel.
    - Committed church members rejoice at the baptism of new believers in the church, and examine themselves in preparation for approaching the communion table.



- Supports the work of the ministry
  - Committed church members give resources, time and talent to furthering the gospel in the local church.
  - This includes exercising the spiritual gifts God has provided (Romans 12:6-8), and joyfully and sacrificially giving of their finances (2 Corinthians 8-9).

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Some religious traditions place too much focus on membership, one that is un-Biblical and implies salvation is through membership in their church. How can this warp people's understanding of church membership?
- Does your local church give appropriate attention and priority to church membership? How is that displayed?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your level of commitment to membership in your local church? If it's not a 10, why not?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “discipline”?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- What is the real definition of the term “discipline”?
  - The term discipline (Greek *paideia*, rearing of a child, training) comes from the same Latin root as *disciple* (Greek *mathetes*, a learner).
  - A disciple studies a certain discipline to learn a profession, etc, and has their life ordered according to the principles of that discipline.
  - Discipline, then, refers to *order*.
- How does this definition of discipline apply to the church and the church member?
  - Scripture commands that everything in the church be done with order, not chaos (1 Corinthians 14:40). This order in the church is necessary for edification.
  - Order in the form of habits, patterns, routines and boundaries is also needed for growth in the life of the individual Christian. These are commonly referred to as spiritual disciplines.
  - Discipline in the life of the congregation and in the healthy church member provides the atmosphere for spiritual growth and development.
- What does discipline look like in the life of a healthy church member?
  - All spiritual discipline has its source and basis in the word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Two forms of discipline are described here:
    - Formative discipline
      - “profitable for teaching”, “training in righteousness”
      - Refers to the shaping and molding of the Christian by the Scriptures as they are preached, studied, and applied.
      - The vast majority of discipline in a healthy church is formative.
    - Corrective discipline
      - “for reproof, for correction”
      - Loving correction applied to a brother or sister in Christ who is in sin.
      - Scripture provides the pattern and boundaries for holy living, that discipline seeks to restore the Christian to.
      - Many situations described in the Bible where corrective discipline is needed:
        - A Christian sins against a fellow believer (Matthew 18:15-17)
        - A believer in the church in sin (1 Corinthians 5)
        - Even less severe sins like laziness (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11), false teaching (Titus 3:10)



- The healthy church member understands the need for order in the Christian life, and embraces both formative and corrective discipline as a means of grace.
- How does the healthy church member joyfully seek discipline? How do we cultivate a desire for both formative and corrective discipline in our Christian lives?
  - Receive the word of God with meekness (James 1:21)
    - We must be humble and lowly before the Scriptures, recognizing their authority over us and the need for our submission to what God says.
    - We must recognize the word of God as the source of salvation, and the key to godly living.
    - Some questions to consider:
      - *Am I looking to the Scriptures for information, or formation, trusting that God speaks through His word?*
      - *Do I look to the preaching/teaching of the Scriptures to have my needs met, or to understand and apply what God says?*
      - *Is my first reaction to the word "How does this make me feel?", or is it "Do I accept this as true?"*
      - *Is my listening posture to preaching/teaching defensive or combative, as if to say "prove it to me"?*
      - *Do I judge other philosophies or viewpoints by the Scriptures, or the other way around?*
    - We must accept the Bible as true, as the only sufficient authority for shaping our lives, that it must govern how we think and feel, in order to be prepared for the Scripture's formative discipline.
  - Learn to recognize chastisement as evidence of God's love.
    - God Himself is a loving Father who disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:5-7).
    - God's discipline of us is a source of assurance that we are indeed His children (Hebrews 12:8).
    - God's goal in His discipline is to protect our lives and conform us to His holiness (Hebrews 12:9-10).
  - Humbly accept correction from others.
    - God's correction often comes through others in the church.
    - Biblical correction from a brother or sister is an act of faithful love (Proverbs 27:5-6).
    - It's a sign of maturity and spiritual health to seek and accept the loving rebuke and correction of others (Proverbs 1:7).
  - Take seriously our responsibility to discipline others.
    - We are commanded to show love one to another through our warning and admonishing others when needed (Colossians 3:16).



- The classic Biblical passages on dealing with unrepentant sin (Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5) end with the congregation taking responsibility for discipline. But the process begins with an individual responsibility.
- Don't forget to rejoice!
  - It's normal to think of discipline in terms of grief and sorrow (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5:2). But the whole process is a reason for joy as the end goal is repentance and restoration (2 Corinthians 2:6).

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Discipline, both formative and especially corrective, is often not practiced in churches today. Why do you think this is?
- Consider the questions listed above regarding receiving the word with meekness to evaluate your health in this area.
- Consider how you can more Biblically and more intentionally be one who takes seriously our responsibility to seek and provide loving Christian discipline.



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Since so much Biblical teaching about living the Christian life is focused on growing as disciples, why is this mark of health so far down on this list?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- Why is spiritual growth an important indicator of the health of a church member?
  - Growth in the physical sense is an indicator of the health of the animal, plant, person, etc. It's a sign that there is life present, and that life is producing growth.
  - In the same way, spiritual growth is an indicator that spiritual life is present in a person, and that the life is bearing fruit in spiritual growth.
- Is spiritual growth to be a normal experience in the life of a Christian?
  - Yes. All through the Bible, advancement in the knowledge and the likeness of Jesus Christ are presented as normal for the believer in Him.
  - A growing disciple is one who is being trained and shaped by formative and corrective discipline (last lesson).
  - Example: Hebrews 5:12-6:2, where the writer chastises believers for still being babies and requiring "milk", rather than growing and maturing as they should have.
- What then do we mean by the term "spiritual growth"?
  - Jesus' teaching in Luke 18:9-14 shows three *wrong* attitudes that hinder true spiritual growth.
    - Equating "performance" with spiritual growth.
      - The Pharisee based his view of his righteousness and spiritual maturity on his religious performance, outward acts (Luke 18:12).
      - We too can seek to evaluate our spiritual growth based on "numbers" – how many quiet times we have, how many times we share the gospel, how many Bible studies we attend, etc.
      - None of these things are wrong, but they are merely external acts that may have no connection to the inward reality (as in the case of this Pharisee.)
    - Judging by the wrong standard.
      - The Pharisee was evaluating his righteousness in comparison with others (Luke 18:11), even the tax collector praying next to him.
      - We are not to judge our spiritual growth relative to others, but rather in comparison with the perfect standard of godliness in Jesus Christ.



- Comparing ourselves with others shows an attitude of spiritual pride, which is in opposition to God and the formation of His character in us.
- Depending on self-effort for spiritual growth.
  - The Pharisee presented his own efforts and works to God as evidence of his spiritual maturity and righteousness (Luke 18:11-12).
  - Spiritual growth requires the work of God's Spirit to achieve, and cannot be attained by mere human effort.
  - Example: Hebrews 6:1,3 indicating that God is the one who will bring about maturity. We are commanded repeatedly to grow in spiritual maturity, but always with a dependence on God. Also Philippians 2:12-13.
- Spiritual growth is growth in godliness and holiness. It's an expression of our sanctification. (2 Peter 3:18)
- Growing disciples look more and more like Jesus in attitudes of heart, thought, speech and actions.
- What are some ways that healthy church members can cultivate spiritual growth?
  - Abide in Christ
    - The key to growth in godliness is remaining in and abiding in Christ, the True Vine (John 15:5-8).
    - Note Jesus' conditional statement: "if you remain in Me, and my words remain in you..."
      - Remaining in Christ means clinging dependently to Him like a branch to a vine as the source of life.
      - Christ's words remaining in us means His commands and teachings are not superficially received, but taken deep within and kept there with obedience and trust.
    - Abiding in Christ and remaining in His word is essential to Christian discipleship and growth. Apart from this there can be no growth.
  - Use the ordinary means of grace.
    - Too often we look for some special event, conference, book, spiritual experience, etc that will catapult our growth. But it's the ongoing, ordinary means of God's grace to us that cause sustained spiritual growth.
    - These means of grace include the study of His word, participation with the church in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's table, and prayer.
    - God has given us these means of receiving His grace to train us in holiness and righteousness (Titus 2:11-12).



- Participate in the local church.
  - Neglecting to participate in the corporate life of the church or failing to serve and be served is a certain way to limit our spiritual growth.
  - Ephesians 4:11-16 indicates that participation in the church is the main way that Christ strengthens and matures His people.
- Look forward to Christ's return.
  - Many of the New Testament exhortations to grow in holiness are connected with anticipation of Christ's return. Examples:
    - Matthew 25, Jesus teaches about His return and gives parables about living faithfully in light of His returning.
    - Titus 2:11-14, commands to pursue righteousness and godliness and to be a pure people are centered on the blessed hope of Christ's return (v. 13).
    - 1 John 3:2-3, the hope we have as Christians of seeing Jesus face to face at His return causes us to live pure lives.
  - Our yearning to be *with* Jesus and to see Jesus is intended by God to make us more *like* Jesus in holiness.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Are there any wrong ways or ideas you may have in thinking about or measuring your spiritual growth and maturity? If so, what are they? What needs to change in your thinking?
- Looking back on your life as a believer in Jesus Christ, at what times has your spiritual growth been the greatest? The least?
- Which of the strategies for spiritual growth we discussed are most needed in your life right now?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- Does our society and culture value the ideas of submission to leaders and those in authority over us? Why or why not? How might this affect the Christian's view of church leadership?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- Before we discuss being a humble follower, let's look at the two primary offices in the Biblical model of church leadership:
  - Elders – the spiritual overseers of the church
    - 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, 14-15
  - Deacons – the physical stewards of the church
    - Acts 6:1-6
- Why is being a humble follower of church leaders so important to the health of individual church members?
  - Our attitude toward the authority of our church leaders can and does affect and reflect our attitude toward God's authority over us.
  - We are commanded to submit, obey, respect and honor those whom God has placed in spiritual leadership over us. To do otherwise is to disobey and rebel against Christ.
  - Examples:
    - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
    - Hebrews 13:7, 17
- What attitudes do healthy church members exhibit toward their church leadership?
  - Honors the elders.
    - Several specifics are given in 1 Timothy 5:17-19:
      - Those who labor in the preaching and teaching of the word of God are to be given double honor (v. 17).
      - This honor includes seeing that their financial and physical needs are met (v. 18).
      - It also includes protecting the reputation of elders and pastors (v. 19).
    - Healthy church members also honor the elder's office, valuing the role and being thankful to God for it. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
  - Shows open-hearted love to the elders.
    - The honor and respect shown to church leaders isn't to be the formal, cold respect of a soldier to a military officer, but rather based on love. (2 Corinthians 6:11-13)
    - A healthy church member will never want to hear their pastor or elder plead for their love and affection as Paul had to do to the Corinthian church. (2 Corinthians 7:2-3)



- Is teachable.
  - A teachable spirit is evidence of humility and a desire to grow in Christ.
  - Since a pastor or elder's main role is to teach, unteachable church members can be a great burden on leaders.
  - Paul's instructions to pastors (2 Timothy 2:24-26) contains good instructions for church members as well:
    - The pastor's teaching is to be gentle and patient. We should see this attitude as a call to repentance.
    - We should consider how we may be opposing or resisting the pastor's teaching.
    - We should pray for knowledge of the truth through the pastor's teaching, and for protection from the schemes of the evil one.
- Based on these healthy attitudes towards church leaders, what are some healthy actions church members should take regarding pastors and elders?
  - Patiently participate in the selection of leaders.
    - Selection of leaders is one of the most important decisions a church body makes.
    - Leaders are to be selected based on spiritual qualities and maturity. (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3)
    - Selection of leaders is to be done with patience and prayer. (1 Timothy 5:22)
    - Healthy church members don't overlook the importance of this responsibility.
  - Obey and submit to leaders.
    - We are directly commanded in Scripture to obey our church leaders and to submit to their authority. (Hebrews 13:17)
    - We are to joyfully, eagerly and completely submit to our leaders for our good, their good, the good of the entire body, and the glory of Christ.
  - Follow the leaders example.
    - One reason for leaders in the church is to provide a living example of faithful, godly living to the congregation. (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3)
    - We are to imitate these men and pattern our lives after them. (Philippians 3:17)
    - We aren't to blindly and cultishly follow "celebrity pastors", but to imitate those leaders God has appointed over us who exhibit genuine godliness.



- Pray for leaders.
  - Even the apostle Paul repeatedly asked those in churches he planted and pastured to pray for him. (Examples: Colossians 4:2-4; Ephesians 6:19-20)
  - We should pray for our leaders' boldness, clarity, and consistency with the gospel.
  
- Support leader's outside ministry and interaction.
  - Healthy church members understand that it's essential for the health of pastors and elders to be refreshed by interacting with other leaders and participating in ministries outside the church.
  - This focus is healthy for church members too, since they will desire to see the gospel of Christ advanced through other churches and ministries, and will seek to share their leaders in support of this goal.

---

**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- Consider the instruction to church members given in Hebrews 13. In what ways have you been blessed or benefitted by your submission to church leaders?
  
- In what specific ways can you pray for your church leaders?
  
- How can you encourage other church members to place greater trust in our church's leaders as the follow Christ?



**THINK & DISCUSS**

- What do you think is the most talked about but least practiced of all spiritual disciplines? Why?

---

**READ & STUDY**

- Why is prayer considered to be a mark of a healthy church?
  - The Bible is clear that the church is to be a house of prayer.
    - It was prophesied through Isaiah (Isaiah 56:7).
    - It was reiterated by Jesus (Matthew 31:13).
  - The early church was marked by a fervent devotion to prayer.
    - The infant church constantly were gathered for prayer (Acts 1:14).
    - Even after the Spirit had come, the church continued devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42).
    - Prayer is the only reason given for husbands and wives to abstain from intimacy for a time (1 Corinthians 7:5).
- If prayer is such a vital indicator of spiritual health, then why does prayer seem for so many believers to be a difficult task, a duty without joy?
  - Prayer is a spiritual discipline that requires cultivation.
  - We may have wrong ideas about prayer, like:
    - Unless we pray, God cannot act.
    - God's already decided everything; He's sovereign, so why pray?
    - God's too busy to listen to my prayers.
    - Others?
  - We need to develop a Biblical understanding of what prayer is, a gospel-centered understanding of prayer.
- How does an understanding of the gospel inform our understanding of prayer?
  - Through believing the gospel of Christ, our status changes from outsiders to insiders in the family of God. We are adopted through faith in Jesus Christ as sons and daughters of God the Father.
  - On the basis of this relationship, we may speak to God as His redeemed children.
- With the gospel shaping our understanding of prayer, then how and when should we pray as healthy Christians?
  - We are to pray *constantly*.
    - Paul told the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
    - He commanded the church at Rome to constantly pray (Romans 12:12).
    - And he exhorted the Colossians to be steadfast in prayer (Colossians 4:2).



- We are to pray *in the Spirit*.
  - Prayer controlled and led by the Spirit will always be according to the will of God. (Romans 8:14)
  - The Spirit helps us to pray when we don't know how. (Romans 8:26-27)
  - It is this kind of prayer by which we engage in spiritual battle. (Ephesians 6:18)
- For what and for whom should we pray?
  - Pray for *laborers and shepherds*.
    - Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for God to send laborers to the harvest. (Matthew 9:37-38)
    - The reason He commanded this was because he saw people as lost sheep with no spiritual shepherds to lead them to Him and to pastor them. (v. 36)
    - We should pray then for both workers to take the gospel to those in need of it, but also for shepherds to lead the church in the making of disciples.
  - Pray for *all the saints*.
    - Praying for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is an act of Christian love toward them. (Ephesians 6:18)
    - We should pray for our fellow church members sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
    - We should pray against temptation and for their watchfulness. (Matthew 26:41)
    - We should pray that they be filled with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25)
    - We should pray for anything the Bible commends for Christians – endurance, faithfulness, holiness, joy, etc.
  - Pray for *those in authority*.
    - Paul commanded Timothy to pray for all those in authority. (1 Timothy 2:1-3)
    - All authorities are ordained by God – from government leaders (Romans 13:1-2) to parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).
    - When we pray for those in authority, we are really praying for God's blessings through them to us.
  - Pray for *those who abuse and persecute you*.
    - Jesus commands us to pray for those who curse and abuse us. (Luke 6:28)
    - The love of Christ compels us to pray for these people. (Matthew 5:46-47)
    - This kind of prayer gives evidence that we are children of God. (v. 45)



**APPLY & PERSONALIZE**

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the vitality of your prayer life? Why?
- Do you have a specific plan for prayer? Consider making a prayer plan that includes the following:
  - Private and group / public times of prayer.
  - Times and places of prayer.
  - Specific individuals and groups of people to pray for.
  - Gospel and church concerns.
  - Passages of Scripture you find encouraging in prayer.
- How can we in this small group encourage one another to be more faithful prayer warriors?