

## Everyday Ecclesiology

Having spent over 12 weeks studying “the doctrine of the church,” (i.e. the “what?” and “so what?”), our work is not complete without applying it practically to our own lives (i.e. the ‘now what?’).

The leaders at GCC are seeking to implement a culture of biblically faithful and robust ecclesiology, where every member is contributing to the whole, resulting in Christ’s church “building itself up in love” and witnessing to outsiders the transforming power of the gospel.

Here are some realistic takeaways for every single Christian who wants to see this kind of culture increasingly pervade our church:<sup>1</sup>

1. Realize that Christ’s mission is bound up with the local church.
  - Therefore, if we want to maximize our [biblical] fruitfulness, we will need to sacrificially love and invest in a local church.
2. Realize that you exist for the church, and not vice versa.
  - This is the “mind of Christ,” who gave Himself up for His bride.
  - We have received the Spirit and His gifts not for ourselves, but for the “common good” of our local church.
    - The Spirit of Christ is always “others focused.”
    - ➔ How many Christians leave church angry because no one said hi to them, even though they themselves were guilty of the same thing.
3. Obediently become an active and committed member of a local church.

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, this is not to be seen as some kind of guilt-inducing, legalistic “to-do” list that becomes a burden instead of a delight. Not every Christian is going to be able to “check off” all of these, largely in part to life circumstances (e.g. busy moms or those who are called to work more than others, etc.). However, this list is to encourage a greater desire for all Christians to “invest” in their local church, and most of these applications (e.g. becoming a member, praying for the church, etc.) are “doable” for all Christians at all times.

- This is more than merely [and selfishly] ‘showing up’ whenever is convenient!
  - We need to regularly and consistently invest in being around other Christians. Some suggestions include:
    - ➔ Participate in – not just attend – grace groups by studying the material, praying for others during the week, and being vulnerable enough to ‘share’ when appropriate.
    - ➔ Sunday school, ladies’ study, prayer meeting
- This means participating in singing<sup>2</sup> together, reading and listening to the Word together, giving together, partaking the Lord’s Table together, and even eating together afterwards.

#### 4. Encourage and exhort meaningful church membership to others ‘in’ the church.

- If fruit requires community, then loving those who are in isolation means getting them outside of their comfort zone, where they can be ministered to, as well as minister to others.
- Christians who refuse to submit<sup>3</sup> and commit to a local church are living in disobedience, which means they are forfeiting the fullness of God’s blessing in their lives and families.

#### 5. Regularly pray for your local church.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the words of Luther, we ought to sing “lustfully” to the Lord when we gather together. It is interesting that Paul says when Spirit-filled Christians sing together they “speak to one another” (*λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς, lalountes heautois*) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). We are of course singing to the Lord. But Paul says the Spirit uses us to minister to one another as we sing to one another.

<sup>3</sup> For e.g., see Hebrews 13:7, 13: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Also, 1 Thes. 5:12 – “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” Part of being a member of a local church is actually submitting to the shepherds God has commissioned to oversee the flock. This is a hard pill to swallow in our individualistic, isolationist culture. But it is a biblical pill nonetheless.

- Piper’s “concentric circle” model may be helpful (i.e. start with those who are most in your life, and then work your way out from there).
  - For your immediate ‘family’ (grace groups)
  - For the leadership (elders, deacons)
  - For the various ministries and those who lead them (Sunday school, studies, outreach, etc.)
  - For those especially who are hurting
- Make attending the church’s bi-annual “week of prayer” meeting a priority.

#### 6. Invest in the church with your time by participating in the church.

- This is the best way to discern one’s Spiritual gifting(s). As Jesus, Paul and Peter teach, the fruit of the Spirit – love – is most often and most visibly manifested congregationally.
  - E.g. Stick around for fellowship meals, and have meaningful and intentional conversations with others. You’ll be surprised how much you can lovingly learn about – and then pray for – others by asking good questions and following James’ advice to be quick to listen.

#### 7. Serve the church

- Ask the Lord to give you a heart that loves and longs to serve Christ’s bride.
- Ask the elders, deacons, or those leading various ministries, how you can practically serve or help out in some way.
- Seek out intentional discipleship opportunities.

#### 8. Study to be equipped for the work of ministry

- “Selfish learning” is easy, and often puffs up. But learning for the purpose of serving others in love builds up the church (Eph. 4:11-16).

- “Multiply” this teaching to others. This is what discipleship really looks like!

9. Contribute financially to a local church

- To not contribute is really a way of rejecting the leadership and direction of a church.

10. Refuse to gossip about others in the church, especially the leadership

- This happens more often than we would like to admit, and inevitably leads to the spread of cancerous bitterness in the body.

11. Come early to church

- Meet with others to encourage them
- Pray with others for the ministry of the Word

12. Don't immediately leave once church is done

- Intentionally meet with 2 other people after the service
  - Ask them how they're doing
  - Ask them how you can pray for them
  - Talk about the sermon

13. Love the church enough to confront sin in the church

- Matt. 18:15-20 rarely begins with the elders.
  - This is what loving a brother or sister can look like. The goal is that they may be “won back” to Christ and His church.

14. Regularly bring your kids to Sunday school

- We need to teach and model to our kids the importance of church. They can ‘learn’ ecclesiology at a young age.

If we pray that the Lord would help us to love what He loves, then the answer to that prayer will be an increased love for His bride. This “fruit” not only redounds

to the glory of the Father, but is one of the primary ways that Christ effectually calls His elect and then further sanctifies them.

As we have said many times, our sanctification is ecclesiocentric.

- As we increasingly become more like the Christ, this will not only affect the growth of the church, but also effectively affect our witness to “those outside” the church.

A church with healthy in-reach will inevitably be a healthy church that practices out-reach, multiplying its community of love to the ends of the earth.

In a letter written by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 1944, he seems to have “gotten” the importance of the church in the purposes of God as well:

“We must re-grasp the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come man’s way in the world...This means possibly that many will shy away from the churches and will leave them; and from the point of view of statistics and accounts and collections everything looks hopeless, and those who try to keep the churches alive are afraid. But be sure of this, that the Lord’s word will be verified: ‘Whosoever will try to keep his life will lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake will receive it.’”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, we close with the words of Paul to the Ephesians, a book we have spent much time in our studies in ecclesiology:

*“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:20-21)

---

<sup>4</sup> Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, 1990), 128.