

Healthy Members pt2 - Ephesians 4

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Date: 07 April 2019

Preacher: Ralph Depping

[0 : 00] Two of a short series just on healthy members or healthy membership. Trevor's handing around two sheets. The reason for that is it's just some more notes to follow up.

I think there might be some questions or to dig a bit deeper. I guess it's an element of a study as much as a sermon in some ways. There's two pages. If you weren't here a couple of weeks ago or you didn't get notes, there are some copies of the notes from the first week, so please feel free to pick those up on the way out there on the table.

Just to explain, the first sheet is essentially the outline of the sermon. The second one then is some passages from the New Testament that talk about one another.

So it's just to take away for your encouragement and help as you think about what it means to be a healthy member of the church. So question to start.

Is this the church this morning? Is this the church this morning? Did you come to church? Or are you church?

[1 : 08] Have we reached a quota for the minimum number of people, the minimum number of Christians, in one place to be able to say that we're officially a church?

In some ways, church could simply be a few people who love Jesus. Just take the words of Jesus in Matthew 18, on their own, which many do, and then church is simply whenever two or three people are gathered together in Jesus' name.

The author George Barna in his book Revolution puts it like this, Christians have in principle claimed that nothing more, nothing more is required to constitute a church than a couple of believers on a park bench.

Yet the vines of bureaucracy and hierarchy have snaked their way around God's people for centuries, often choking out innovation and progress.

I don't know what you make of that quote or that idea, but for George Barna, church is what two or more believing friends do when they talk about Jesus over coffee at Bean and Leaf or at Starbucks.

[2 : 24] And church needs to be freed from the stuffy and institutional formal structures. And yet I think our hearts are complex and they often mask our true needs.

What might be appealing or maybe right-sounding to our ears initially may not be all that we actually need. Searching for church without structure or searching for church without commitment might not lead us to all that we expect.

So as we look again this week at healthy church members this morning, I want us to see, to really think about the deep riches of all that God has provided to us together as members of his body.

God tells us in his word what the community that he created should act and look like. And our deep, heartfelt need for authentic Christianity, and that's a good desire, that's a good need to have, our heartfelt need for authentic Christianity or authentic church.

I want you to know that that is matched. It is matched and more by God's provision to us of his church. George Barna, who we quoted earlier, is correct in saying that the church is really not a what, but a who.

[3 : 58] Three weeks ago, Johnny helped us to think deeply about church in terms of both who is in the church and how we identify who the members are.

So who the church is and how do we identify the church. And so we can say that the church is all Christians, all Christians in heaven and on earth, one body with Jesus Christ as our head.

But if we stop there, if we stop there, we end up with an idea of church or a definition of church as simply the plural of Christian.

What do I mean by that? I mean, it's just, church is another way of saying two Christians or three Christians or ten Christians and that's all it is. It's just a plural word for Christians. But we know

there's more there, don't we?

Recall some of what was preached a few weeks ago. We are members of one body, marked out in gathered communities by our baptism, by our partaking, which we will do today, of the Lord's table. [5 : 09] Both of which, baptism and the Lord's table, are things the church should do and they're commanded by the Lord. So it's not just sufficient to say church is just Christians.

There are certain things associated with church. On membership, Johnny showed us that church membership is, it's nowhere explicitly taught in the Bible, but it is everywhere, assumed, everywhere you go through the New Testament, membership of a local church is assumed. We saw that in Acts 20. The Christians in Ephesus could be identified as a local church with elders and the church or the members knew who the elders were and the elders knew who was in the church, knew who the members were.

Each in turn knew and the church knew and the church formed in that local place in Ephesus. So last time, our focus was about who the church members, the who of the church members and this morning, we want to look at the what, the what.

What does membership of a local church look like in practice? We're going to turn again back to the book of Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 4.

[6 : 28] Ephesians chapter 4 and we're going to move through a few verses this morning, different parts of the scriptures, but let's look at Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1. You see, the church in the New Testament was not just the few Christians meeting up during the week for a spiritual conversation at the marketplace or a couple of buddies getting together to go to the Colosseum to watch some sport and have a chat about Jesus in the middle.

No, believers were bound together as members of an identifiable local church in a covenantal love towards one another.

Ephesians 1 and 2. Paul writing to the church in Ephesus, as a prisoner for the Lord then I urge you, urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

The calling that you have received to be a follower of Jesus, to be a Christian. And what is the calling that Paul writes of? What is he saying here?

[7 : 43] Well, I think it's simply this. God has called you to love your spiritual family. love your family.

John 13, the words of Jesus. Jesus speaking. A new command I give you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. God is our Father.

Jesus is our elder brother. Therefore, we are all, because we are united to Jesus Christ by faith, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are family. Love your family. To illustrate this, let me read these words again as if I was urging my own family.

[8 : 50] my wife and children, as to how we should live together. So you can just picture Cherry and the kids there. Maybe we are around the dinner table. I urge us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received as members of this family around this table.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. We need to bear with one another in love. As a parent, or as a child, or as a brother, or as a sister, can you see that these words that we have in front of us, verse 2, speak of family life?

You see, those are the kind of words that I need to embrace as a father when my son or daughter is huffing and puffing and refusing to engage when they're saying, everything's fine, when I know they're bottling up some hurt or some slight.

I need to be patient and humble and kind. And these are the words, and these are the kind of words of instruction encouragement I need so that I can put the needs of my wife above my own when we're both wrecked and one of us has to do this bit of work so that the other can rest.

These are the words. These are words that are intended to govern and to shape and to help a family, family life, spiritual family life.

[10 : 20] Jesus says, love one another. Love your spiritual family. You see, I've bought them at such a great cost, the cost of my own life, and I've given my life to them so that they could be your brothers and be your sisters.

They can be your spiritual father or your spiritual mother, the spiritual offspring in your care because I love them and I want you to love them.

Love them. Uphold them. Be patient. Bear with their failings. Members then, they uphold one another in this holy brotherly love.

There's a great phrase I want us to see just at the end of verse 2 and we need to note it so carefully and look for it in our Bibles. You see that phrase verse 2 the end one another one another each and every time we see those words in the scriptures we should automatically think of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So who are my brothers and sisters in Christ? I am to love like this. What's in view here? Well yes, we can say all Christians regardless of their church affiliation are to be considered.

[11 : 53] That's absolutely true. Johnny on his travels to Ghana and Johnny must love his brothers and sisters that he meets when he's in Ghana.

As he has opportunity he must do good to them. But I believe that there is a special bond for those that Christ has brought us close together in a local church.

Those within the local fellowship for which there is this special ongoing covenantal bond. You see we can multiply examples of this one another language from the other New Testament letters.

And I'm going to take one of those sheets from some because I forgot to give one to myself. But let's just read the ones from Romans if you want to turn to the sheet or just listen.

Listen to the language and think of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Romans 12 10 Be devoted to one another in love.

[12 : 55] Honor one another above yourselves. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

It's a great one. let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. Whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God. I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and competent to instruct one another.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. You see, we make the most sense of the New Testament writings on loving one another when we consider local church membership.

[14 : 13] It's in that ongoing, covenantal, long-term love and commitment that's marked by humbly upholding one another as brothers and sisters in holiness.

Jesus says, love one another. And the Bible's realistic about the struggle and difficulty that it is to love in a sinful world where our brothers and sisters are not perfect, yet healthy church members still covenant together in the midst of sin.

They share their food and their homes. They look after the sick, look after the elderly. Brothers and sisters greet one another warmly. They're patient when they're offended.

They're long suffering in their grievances. They accept one another. They don't give up easily. They rebuke and they correct one another in love so that Satan will have no opportunity to sow discord. They forgive one another. This is church. So members live out their lives as a community of love together, but that community must gather together as a local church body.

[15 : 40] And the word church has that idea of gathering or assembly built into it. I don't know if you know, but I'm not an expert on Greek, but the Greek word literally means just that, a gathering.

The word church is built into it, the idea of gathering. And that idea of gathering has, for God's people, has its origins way back in the nation of Israel, Mount Sinai, when God said to Moses to gather the people before him or assemble the people before him, God's people, before God.

And Jesus, when he talked about the church, he said, I will build my church or I will build my gathering. The church is not just about, it's no less than this, but it's not just about individual faith in Christ.

It's not just about individual Christians. It is seen in the gathering and assembling of saved people as a local church.

And we sometimes speak about that, like, don't we, on a Sunday, we talk about our Sunday morning time as the gathering, or a gathering, and that's very purposeful.

[17:02] We assemble on Sunday, the Lord's Day, as his gathered people, his church, his assembly. healthy. So healthy members will come together to practice the spiritual disciplines and graces that God has given to us as a gathered people.

There's many spiritual disciplines we practice ourselves as believers, yet there are many that we can only do as a gathered people, as a church. Let's look at Ephesians chapter five and verse 15 for some ideas of what it looks like and what these spiritual practices are.

Ephesians five and verse 15, be very careful then how you live, not as wise, unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but instead understand what the Lord's will is.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence.

[18:28] You see, Paul is encouraging the church to be filled with the Spirit and to speak to one another through songs and music. We read earlier from Hebrews and the writer of Hebrews instructed the believers to not forsake meeting together, but instead to spur one another on to good works.

If we look in the book of Acts, we read about the early believers, the first believers in Jerusalem, and they gathered together. They devoted themselves, it says, to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread, to prayer.

Remember the church in Antioch. They gathered together and they prayed together and they set apart Paul and Barnabas for missions work. So New Testament churches gathered together.

They gathered for many reasons. When needed, they gathered to pass judgment and discipline on those who had brought disrepute to the church body. Paul provides, I think this is a good example again of instruction to the church in Corinth on how they should conduct themselves.

So let's turn briefly to 1 Corinthians chapter 14. And again, the nature of looking at this topic, we need to look at a few different passages because again, it's not taught just in one place, but it's woven into the fabric of the New Testament, this idea of membership and gathering.

[19:57] 1 Corinthians 14 verse 26 to 33. I'm not going to read the whole section, but just note verse 26 and verse 33. What then shall we say, brothers and sisters, when you come together, each of you has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.

Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. Down to verse 33. For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, as in all the congregations or gatherings of the Lord's people.

Being a healthy member of the body of Christ involves this regular pattern of gathering together as a church. You see, our spiritual, our personal spiritual disciplines and preferences don't trump the spiritual disciplines and graces that the Lord has given to us through his church.

They're not to be in conflict. They should complement. Christ loves his church and calls his church to gather in local communities, local outcroppings of the true heavenly gathering.

church. I don't know what everyone's attitude is to church or gathering on a Sunday. In many ways, I'm speaking to those that are here who show their desire to gather.

[21:28] But yes, I think at different times, we need to make a conscious decision, don't we, about being committed to the gathering. To some of those who are in first year of secondary school, they finish Sunday school, and they're with us now in the service and they've gained more freedom.

And you know, I know it's hard at that age, or maybe any age, but particularly at that age, there's things happening on a Sunday. There's birthday parties, there's a Saturday night away, there's the match at 12pm that's hard to resist.

And so, young people, as we think about church and gathering, we have to resolve to honour Christ and his family above those other good things.

And the strength to do that isn't found by looking inwards, particularly, or by being guilted by your parents or maybe by your pastor or elder.

It's not going to cut it, ultimately. The strength to gather regularly is found in the habit of looking to Jesus. Looking to Jesus' death on the cross in our place, following him in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

[22:42] The more we look to Jesus, the more we love him, the more we should love his family. It means knowing that good things come to us through being here on a Sunday.

And Christian, you must also remember that he has, God has given his gifts very widely. I do not have all that I need to function as a healthy member of the body of Christ. I can't do all that I need to do or change in all the ways I need to change apart from the body.

We can turn back to Ephesians 4 and 11 to 13 and see there that it was the whole body as the gifts were distributed that grew and changed and matured until the whole church is brought to completeness and fullness in Christ as we minister one to another.

So can I encourage you to pray for our gatherings? Pray as we come together on a Sunday and as we gather, especially at our members meetings as well, that if the church gathers that we would love one another, that we would honor Christ, that we would care for one another, that we would gather in a good order that shows our love for Jesus and his body.

For sincere Christians hurt or abused by a church, commitment like this to a local church can be a very slow and understandably a very hard process.

[24 : 22] And I think we must make some sense of the shameful ways that some local churches or institutional churches have acted.

We want to say that we see Christ when the church gathers. When the church gathers, we can see Jesus. But how can we see Jesus in abuse?

How can we see Jesus in scandal? Given such failings, we can understand that people turn aside from church and begin to look elsewhere for Christ.

I just want to give three ways briefly that can help us to think through our love for Jesus and his church in the midst of failings. Firstly, we need to admit that churches fail.

Leaders are sometimes characterized by unrepented and gross sin rather than humble service. Good structures within the life of the church can be and are abused.

[25 : 38] And when we see or even directly experience abusive leadership, we should in most cases flee. Flee.

Flee. For the sake of your own heart, for your family, for your witness to the other members that are sane, and your witness to a watching world, we should not lend our credibility to an abusive church. Secondly, the New Testament church, as we read about, knew of abuse and scandal. What we read in 1 Corinthians, where Paul is encouraging good order in the church, Paul was writing to a church that was filled with wrong and shameful practices.

We had wealthy Christians dominating poor Christians in the life of the church. There was sexual relationships happening in the church that the world was ashamed of and the world would have covered up, and yet the church, it was happening openly.

There was chaos and hurt when the church gathered like this, and pain at the gatherings and the meetings. Paul still calls them saints at the start of the letter.

[26 : 51] And with apostolic authority, authority given by Christ, Paul calls them back to follow Jesus, to follow Jesus.

You see, the prescription for a sick church isn't less order and greater individualism. That's not the prescription for the problem. It's this, it's repentance through the power of the Spirit that's seen in a love for Jesus.

Having the Spirit work and change us so that we obey his commands, that we put sin to death, that we love one another, that we do good works and persevere.

You see, that's what makes a healthy church. Not less order and greater individualism, but a proper prescription of a love for Jesus and a love for his people.

Third thing, and this is very pertinent to us as a family of believers, we must hold one another to account. You see, members appoint elders and deacons in this church and members welcome new members and where necessary, members remove leaders or other members.

[28 : 08] You see, Carraghline Baptist Church is a congregational-based church government.

What does that mean? Well, among other things, this, that we believe that Jesus himself gave the keys of the kingdom to the gathered congregation when he said in Matthew 18, tell it to the church.

Jesus says that the final court, when it comes to issues of sin and abuse and bad practice, it's not in the end the elders, although it's good to speak to the elders.

It's not in the end a Christian that you meet up with at Starbucks for coffee. It's not a bishop or a presbytery, but it's the church. It's the gathered body, the members.

I think our best protection for the life and witness of our church is to know the mind of Christ through the gathering of the church members as we listen to the spirit through his word.

All of this matters. All of these things matter as our witness of Christ to a dying world. This is the last point. All that we spoke of, our humble life together as we love one another, our meeting together in good order, our patient discipline of one another as we bear witness to the reality of a risen saviour to the people around us.

[29 : 30] All of these things hold together and bear witness to Christ. This is one of the greatest themes of, the great themes of the Peter's letter, 1 Peter.

And let us just look briefly at some verses from 1 Peter. This theme that the worked out membership of the church as believers work that out in practice, it bears witness to the love of Christ to the world.

We're going to look at two passages. 1 Peter chapter 2 and verses 11 to 17. If I can get to the right location.

1 Peter 2, 11 to 17. And I'm just going to focus on verses 11, 12 and 17. Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans or those that aren't believers that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

[30 : 39] Down to verse 17. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God and honor the emperor.

You see, we're coming back to this again, aren't we? Where we started, if you want to bear witness to Jesus in a corrupt and broken world, God says above all things, love your family.

Love the family of believers. If we turn over to chapter 4, look at verses 7 and 8. The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober minds that you may pray.

Listen to this. Above all, love each other deeply. Because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Above all, love each other deeply.

You see, love is an action that keeps no record of wrong, but forgives as the Lord forgave us. This is why Jesus said, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples.

[31 : 52] If you love one another, a unique love that the world cannot, cannot, cannot offer.

Jonathan Lehman has a short book about church membership and he puts it like this. You see, it's through the lives of its members, the local church defines, defines love for the world.

Jesus says, greater love has no one to lay down his life for his friends. And then he calls us by saying, if you love me, keep my commands.

This is a combination that the world just does not understand. But this is the love of God. Love and holiness are not opposed to one another, but partner together to lead people to God.

Our holy life together, marked by walking in love and gathering as a church body, is God's witness of the love of Christ in the world.

[32 : 59] One brief application or challenge maybe as we finish. Maybe I'd like you to go away and think about this. How would you begin to help a fellow Christian, maybe someone in this church that says, well, I get more out of listening to online sermons and songs at home and I meet up with a couple of friends during the week to pray.

I get more out of that than I do out of being part of a local church and gathering on a Sunday. How would you begin to challenge that or to think about that from God's word or to see why that may not be sufficient?

Finally, I was asked about church membership recently and the question was this, it was a good question. What more would I have to do if I was a member? What more would I have to do if I was a member?

I hope that you see this morning that a member isn't about being another type of Christian with additional responsibilities that are tagged on. Membership is about realizing what it means to be a Christian within a family.

The call is to love one another, to bear with one another, to pray for one another, to gather with one another. This is all expressed in our church covenant, which is part of our church constitution here in Carragoline.

[34 : 22] I was able to share that with the person asking the question and to reassure them that it's not about more, but it's about continuing to love the church family as they were already doing.

I'd like to finish with sharing these words from the covenant. Recognizing our own unworthiness and inability and in total dependence upon God, we now covenant to give ourselves first to God and then to this local church.

That we will endeavor to walk in holiness and brotherly love, being concerned to honor God in our lives and encourage one another to love and good works, to pray for one another and to bear each other's burdens.

That we will at all times be loyal to each other, being patient with one another's weaknesses and failings, seeking to maintain unity and avoid all causes of division. That we will endeavor to meet together on the Lord's Day and all other meetings of the church as we have opportunity, encouraging one another by our attendance to pray for and encourage the officers of the church in the discharge of their duty.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the love that you have shown to us through your son, Jesus Christ.

[35 : 41] We thank you that he has died in our place so that we could be accepted by you into your family. We thank you for one another. Convict us, Lord, of our bad attitude at times to one another.

our desire for self above others. But help us, Lord, to change, to grow into all fullness, to become more like Jesus through the life of this church in Carragoline.

For your glory and to bear witness to the world around. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.