

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF "THE WAY"

Church Membership is a Job

by Jonathan Leeman

WHAT'S THE MEMBER'S JOB?

That's the biblical-theological backdrop. Concretely, then, what is the authority and work of every church member? **Our work is to share and protect the gospel, and it's to affirm and oversee gospel professors—church members.**

Think about Paul's "amazement" in Galatians 1: "I am amazed that you are so quickly . . . turning to a different gospel" (v. 6). He rebukes not the pastors, but the members, and tells them to reject even apostles or angels who teach a false gospel. They were supposed to have protected the gospel.

Or think of Paul's astonishment in 1 Corinthians 5: the Corinthians were accepting sin "not tolerated even among pagans" (v. 1). "You are to remove the one who has done this thing," he says to the whole church (1 Cor. 5:2). He even describes how this should happen—not on Thursday evening behind the closed doors of an elders meeting, but when the whole church gathered and could act together: "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, with my spirit present and with the power of the Lord Jesus, hand this man over to Satan so that his spirit may be saved" (vv. 4–5). The power of the Lord Jesus is actually there when they're assembled in his name. With that power, they were supposed to have protected the gospel *by* removing the man from membership.

Every member of a church should recognize, "It's my responsibility to protect the gospel, and it's my responsibility to receive and dismiss members. Jesus has given it to me." To use the business lingo again, we're all owners. We all have a share in the losses and the profits.

Therefore, pastors who fire church members from this job, whether by formal church structure or by turning them into consumers, undermine the members' sense of inclusion and ownership. They cultivate complacency, nominalism, and eventually theological liberalism. Kill church membership today and you can expect biblical compromises tomorrow.

Of course, the job here is bigger than showing up at members' meetings and voting on new members. The church member's job lasts all seven days. Ours is the work of representing Jesus and protecting his gospel in each other's lives every day.

So we must study and work to know the gospel better and better. We must study the gospel's implications and consider how they relate to repentance. Further, we must work to know and be known by our fellow members seven days a week. We cannot affirm and give oversight to a people we don't know, not with integrity anyhow. We try to start including more of our fellow members

into the regular rhythm of our lives. This is not a gas station rewards program: fill out a form and drive away.

WHAT'S THE PASTOR'S JOB?

What then shall we say about the pastor's office? What's his job?

Ephesians 4 says it's the job of the pastors to equip the saints for the ministry of building up the church (vv. 11-16). Notice the two jobs in this passage. Job one is the pastors': equip the saints. Job two is the members': the ministry of building up the body of Christ.

The weekly church gathering, then, is a time of job training. It's when those in the office of pastor equip those in the office of member to know the gospel, to live by the gospel, to protect the church's gospel witness, and to extend the gospel's reach into one another's lives and among outsiders. If Jesus tasks members with affirming and building up one another in the gospel, he tasks pastors with training them to do this. If the pastors don't do their jobs very well, neither will the members.

When you put the pastor's office together with the member's office, what do you get? Jesus' discipleship program.

CONCLUSION

When someone wants to join a local church, it's helpful for pastors to communicate these things in the membership interview. An example would be something like this:

Friend, by joining this church, you will become jointly responsible for whether or not this congregation continues to faithfully proclaim the gospel. That means you will become jointly responsible both for what this church teaches, as well as whether or not its members' lives remain faithful. And one day you will stand before God and give an account for how you fulfilled this responsibility. We need more hands for the harvest, so we hope you'll join us in that work. The membership interview is a job interview, after all. I want to make sure they know this. I want to make sure they're up for the task.