**November 24, 2019**

**1 Corinthians 12:14-27**

**The Body of Christ at First Baptist Dothan**

**Introduction: Today we are going to talk about membership at First Baptist Dothan. I’m going to walk you through the information that we will be sharing with people that choose to go through our membership class that will begin in January. Before I teach that class to new people who might want to join I wanted to grandfather all of you in. The word “membership” has gotten hijacked by the world’s definition of membership. Typically when we think of membership we think of membership in a civic organization or maybe even a country club. In those types of clubs, the members pay their dues and in return they are given access to the services that the club or organization provides. I know we have some people here who are members of the Dothan Country Club, and you pay for your dues and in return are given access to the fitness club, golf course, pool, etc. And so I think many people who have not studied the concept of membership in church closely often times think that we want you to join so that we get your money. But that’s not why we value membership at all. You don’t become a member of a church to get any type of perk. You become a member of a church so that you can identify with a local body and through that local body be used to achieve the kingdom purposes that God has for his church. There are 3 types of people in the room this morning. 1) The members who are going to agree with everything I say today and are already fully engaged in the life of the body here. 2) The second group is those that are members in name only. You joined our church because it’s just what you have been taught to do, but you aren’t really engaged in the body of Christ. You show up for worship on Sunday whenever you are in town, but you don’t have deep relationships with people, and you aren’t really committed to the church. 3) Then there are some who have been contemplated joining this church, but they want more information. They want to make sure they can commit before they join. Today’s message will resonate with all 3 groups of people I just mentioned. If you have your Bible turn to 1 Corinthians 12:14-27. We will see what God’s word has to say about membership in this passage.**

**As I teach this class, we are going to focus on three aspects: 1) Information 2) Expectation and 3) Attitude. These 3 sections are not original to me I got them from Thom Rainer who is a church consultant, was President of Lifeway for many years, and has written and talked a lot about developing a membership class.**

**I. Information**

**What We Believe:**

A. I’m going to skim over the history of the church section because most of you in here are aware but here is a synopsis: First Baptist Dothan began in …. Currently, we have a pastor, an associate pastor, Bob Gross, a worship minister Tim Smith, an interim youth minister Tommy Tolleson, and a children’s minister, Cindy Thomas. We also have a number of other support people on our team including Doug Man who keeps our facility in top shape.

B. We believe that the Bible is the word of God without exception. All of the Bible is relevant and important to our lives. We believe that man is born sinful and that because of that we cannot have a relationship with God. We believe that God had a plan for this problem though and sent his only son Jesus to earth to live a sinless life. Through Jesus’s sinless life and his sacrificial death on the cross for us, we can now have relationship with God and be made right with him. We believe that we have direct access to God through our relationships with Jesus. We don’t need anyone to go before God on our behalf because if we have a relationship with Jesus than he grants us that access to God.

C. We believe there is no other way one can have a relationship with God apart from Jesus. We believe that those who profess faith in Christ will be with Jesus forever in eternity, and we also believe that those who do not profess faith in Jesus will be in eternity apart from God in hell.

D. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is God’s plan for fulfilling the commandment that Jesus gave us to go and make disciples.

E. We believe that God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.

F. We believe that Jesus will return, and it will be sudden, personal, visible, and bodily. When Jesus returns he will judge unbelievers and reward believers with life with him in a new heaven and a new earth. We could flesh out a number of other theological points, but those are the basics of what we believe as church The reason we share those things with potential new people is because if they don’t agree with us on any of those theological issues than they won’t be happy at our church and so it’s better for them to know this on the front end.

**Operations of the Church:**

H. Another aspect of information is how we operate as a church. We are a church that operates with a balance of staff and church members. The staff is primarily responsible for planning, ministering, and programming but the church member comes alongside of the ministerial staff to assist in the work of the church through committees. These committees are both selected by the church members and voted on by the church members. The advantage of this type of model is it does not allow any one person in the church to have too much power. These committees rotate on a 3-year basis, and we strive to make sure that multiple people don’t serve on too many committees at one time.

**II. Expectation**

Remember a few weeks ago I talked about how frustrating it is to be in a job whether paid or volunteer when you have not been given any direction of what is expected of you. One of the key components of our membership class is setting expectations of what members should be doing:

1) **Conversion:** All potential members need to be able to articulate their conversion experience. And if someone doesn’t have that conversion story it is an opportunity for me to sit down and share the Gospel with them.

2) **Groups:** We expect our membership to be involved in a group. We call them community groups at this church. In New Orleans we called them small groups, and I grew up calling it Sunday school. The name isn’t really as important as the function. Group participation is vital to the growth of our church. In fact, I would argue it’s probably one of it not the most important thing we can do. Did you know that people are 5X more likely to get involved in churches if they join a group? No other area of the church has the stickiness factor that groups have. So once people have gone through this class. We will sit down with them and help the find a group. And then when they go to that group, I expect you as the current membership of the church to go out of your way to make them feel welcomed and loved. That responsibility is on us. You suffocate them with the love of Christ when they come to your group. I’ve never met anyone who left a church tell me I had to leave because they were just too loving and friendly.

3) **Worship Attendance:** If you’re in town we expect you to be in worship. Gathering with the whole body of Christ in worship is healthy function of the body of Christ. It’s a time of encouragement, a time to study the word of God, and a time to be equipped as we go out into the world. If you’re able and healthy enough to come, we want you in the room. Facebook and website options are available for those that may be traveling or are unable to get out for health reasons. Your first choice should always be to gather with your church family.

4) **Financially Generous:** Notice I didn’t say tithe. Here’s why I choose to use a different term. At a minimum, we should be giving 10% of our income to the Lord’s work in the local church. But I don’t want to be legalistic with that. For some people getting to a 10% figure is a work in progress. They have to reevaluate their money and budget accordingly. I recommend that you begin giving what you can immediately, and then work your way towards that 10% figure as you learn how to manage your money better. But the real reason I say financially generous is because many of us in this room can afford to give a lot more. Many times we like to be legalistic with the tithe to tell people you must give 10% but it is equally as legalistic to give just 10% when in reality you know that you can give 20% or 30% of your income. Let’s say you make 100 million dollars a year. Do you really think God only wants you to give $10 million dollars a year? You think he would be okay with you living off of a 90-million-dollar income every year. Is that really being a good steward of the money God has given you? Of course it isn’t. So we should give generously and proportionately to our income. Some of you make more than others. The goal is not to tithe 10% and then spend the other 90% on ourselves. We don’t need 90 million dollars a year on ourselves. The goal is to be as generous as possible with what we have regardless of what we make. Currently, we have 5,375 languages spoken globally. 2,469 of those people groups do not have scripture in their language. Wycliffe Bible Translators estimate that 500 million dollars is needed to start a translation in every language in the world. We as Americans spend 1.2 billion dollars a year on Big Mac’s. I realize not all of those people are Christians, but I’d challenge you as I challenge myself to examine where your money goes. The reality is that we get offended in the church when new start talking about money and the reason, we get offended is because we think no one should be allowed to tell us where our money goes but that type of attitude shows that we serve our money instead of our money serving us. And that’s the wrong attitude to have. It’s not ours. Give it away generously.

5) **Ministry Involvement**: We expect our members to be involved in ministry. The ways that we will help people to do that is to take a spiritual gift assessment so that we can find out how God has gifted them, and then we will connect them with the proper ministry in our church. Perhaps that’s teaching, perhaps it’s singing in the choir, greeting people on Sunday mornings, serving on one of our committees, going on a mission trip, and serving with our local ministry centers like The Harbor, the Ark, or Love in Action. No one should simply come and sit and then leave. We should have so many people serving that we don’t have enough spots for people to serve.

6) **Missional Living**: Every member is a missionary. God has equipped you to use your gifts in your home, at work, in your neighborhood, and with your friends. I challenge all of you to think of how you can be a missionary in all of the different areas where God as placed you. Also, I’d challenge you to come up with creative ways that we as a church could maximize our resources and people in your places of employment. Maybe instead of doing a fall festival here at the church we gather our resources and we sponsor a fall festival at a local elementary school or at Grove Park, or some other big neighborhood where we as a church could interact with the people of our community.

Paul says that the body does not consist of one member, but many. What Paul is teaching using these human illustrations is that every part of the body matters, and how they function matters as well. Let’s stick with the human body illustration. I bet some people in this room don’t have a gall bladder. You don’t have to have your gallbladder in order to live, but there are side effects from losing the gall bladder because the function of the gall bladder is to store bile that is produced by the liver. Even though you can live without it, ask anyone who has had their gall bladder taken out and they will take you that digestive process moves a little differently without it.

In the same way, these 6 expectations that I have outlined are for your benefit. You will operate at full capacity as a church member if you adhere to these 6 expectations. You can continue to function without some of them, but there are side effects for each of them. To be a fully functioning member of the body at First Baptist Dothan we expect you to do all 6 of these things.

**III. Attitude**

**A**. **Be a Unifying Church Member:** Paul’s primary concern in this passage is that of a unifying church member. Paul throughout all of his letters is very concerned about divisions within the church. It is vitally important that you do everything you can to buildup and unify our church. I heard just a couple of weeks ago this great little illustration. Every church member has two cups in their hands. One cup is full of water, and the other is full of gasoline. When you come upon potentially dangerous conversations where gossip and misinformation is spreading everyone has a choice. They can pour water on that conversation or they can pour gasoline. The biblical attitude is to pour water. If you ever hear people using generic terms to describe people don’t tolerate that. Anonymous sources should not be tolerated. If there is a problem in the church that person should be willing to go directly to the other person and handle it in a biblical way. If you come to me and say Pastor, “some people” in the church are concerned about this or that. I’m not going to acknowledge it. We are all adults here and we need to be willing to have adult conversations when we don’t agree with one another.

**B. Put** **Others Before Ourselves:** I want us to have the attitude that puts the needs of others ahead of ourselves. Ask yourself this question, what can we do as a church and what can I do individually to be as accommodating as possible to lost or unchurched people without sacrificing the truth of God’s word? What if we came every Sunday morning ready to die to our own preferences and our own ideas of what church should be like so that we can reach people who normally wouldn’t come into the church. We cannot continue to do church the way it has always been done and continue to expect the younger generations to come. If we desire for our church to continue to reach future generations here is the mentality we have to have. We hold tight to the message and we hold loosely to the method.

**C. Celebrate God at Work:** If God is at work in your life or in the life of someone you know I want you to tell us. God is at work in your life, and we need to know how God is at work in your life. Let’s celebrate the things that need to be celebrated. Baptisms, conversion experiences, and Gospel conversations are all opportunities for us as a church to celebrate. We want to create a culture of celebration for all of the ways that God is working in our church.

**Conclusion: As we close today, I know some of you are thinking, Geez Taylor that’s a lot of expectation. Don’t you think this is asking too much of people? Let me ask you a question: Do you have clear expectations at your job? Do you have clear expectations at other clubs or civic organizations? Why should we shortchange the church of Jesus Christ? Is there any more important organization in the history of the world? We want to do everything within our ability to set this church up for success. We know that ultimately the church of Jesus Christ does not rise or fall with this membership process, but I believe that if we implement these expectations and have the right attitude that God work in our midst because we are exhibiting the right type of mentality.**