

**I Am First Baptist Church:
I Will Treasure My Church Membership
Ephesians 4:11-16**

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Introduction: We return to our series called “I Am First Baptist Church.” The idea for this series comes from a book titled, *I am a Church Member*, by Thom Rainer. The book calls every church member to make 6 commitments to his or her local church. The first commitment was “I will be a functioning church member.” The idea is that as a church member, we must function within the body of Christ, using our spiritual gift. The second commitment was “I will be a unifying church member.” We discovered that at the heart of Church unity is our love for the LORD and our love for the lost. The third commitment is “I will not let my church become about me”—that is my preferences and desires. The fourth commitment sounds easy, but requires a great deal of discipline and long-term commitment. I will pray for my pastor (s). I want to just say at this point that I am overwhelmed by your outpouring of love, affirmation, and rededication of praying for me. This has been humbling this week and reaffirming this week of your love for your pastor and I am thankful.

Text: And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,¹² for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.¹⁴ Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.¹⁶ From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Introduction: There are many reasons that someone comes to love a church. You may love the music of a church, the preaching of a church, the Bible Study of a church. Someone may love a particular church for its location or its size. Some love a church because of family ties to a church. In Ephesians 4 we find some Biblical reasons treasure the church.

The commitment that I want to impress upon you today is the reaffirmation of this commitment: I will treasure my church membership as a gift. Here are three reasons to treasure your church.

It is where I exercise my spiritual gift.

I’ve always believed that God places in an individual church the right pieces of the puzzle, so to speak. He places in each church the people with the gifts to do the things that He calls that church to do. The church experiences great problems when an individual does not use his or her spiritual gift.

This passage teaches us that our gifts are individual gifts. These are reminders that we looked at just a few weeks ago when we talked about being a functioning church member. Every believer has a spiritual gift. Some people don’t know what their spiritual gift is, but that doesn’t mean that a person does not have a spiritual gift. Furthermore, that spiritual gift is given to you by God, Himself. Because each gift is an individual gift, it is also true that each gift is an important gift.

The first reason that we ought to love our church is because it is the place where I get to put into practice the unique giftedness that God has given me. In addition, that spiritual giftedness will manifest itself with results. In regards to exercising our spiritual gifts, notice the two results.

Results:

- Ministry—We will be involved in a ministry. Inside the body of Christ, we will help that body of Christ, by being involved in the ministry of that body of Christ.
- Missions—Our gift will result in our being involved in missions.

In 1981 at about the same time, two things of great significance happened. First, President Reagan was shot. Second, the sanitation workers in Philadelphia, PA went on strike. You might think that President Reagan's attempted assassination was a more important event. However, the country continued in his absence from office. While President Reagan recovered, the Vice-President stepped in, and things remained rather normal. In Philadelphia, though, the city nearly came to a halt.

I've been tempted a time or two across my years in ministry to not show up at church. Just one Sunday, I would like to just not show up at church. Not tell anyone, not provide someone to take my place. Just not come. "But you are the pastor," one might say. The truth is I'm only one piece of the puzzle. When folks don't show up to carry out their spiritual gift, it hurts the ministry.

It is where I am instructed the word of God.

The second reason to treasure my church is that the church is the place where I am instructed the word of God.

We've observed recently that one of the distinctive features of the early church was that they "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." (Acts 2:42) We don't need gimmicks, we don't need feel good homilies, what we need is the sound doctrinal preaching of God's word.

We need to be instructed in a group setting. Yes, you can and you should read and study the Scripture on your own, led by the Spirit, but we need to come together to study God's word. Paul tells us why in Ephesians 4:14. By being instructed together, we can avoid being carried away by false doctrine.

You will also notice that this instruction is to be carried out in love. Here's another reason to study in a group. You build an atmosphere of love and respect in the group.

A Church-goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them... So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the

life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this... They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

Result:

- Maturity—The result should be that we are “growing up.” (v. 15) After I am saved, the greatest need of my life is to grow up in all things into Him. That means, that the greatest need of my life is to become like Jesus in everything. I am not going to do that apart from the church. Every so often, I encounter the person that has grown frustrated with the church for some reason or other. That person proclaims that they do not need the church. They will continue to grow on their own. In every case that I know about, that same person stopped maturing in their Christian faith. I treasure my church because I need my church. I need it in order to be instructed the word of God.

It is not my church...it's the Lord's Church.

The third and most important reason that I treasure my church is that it is not my church, it is the Lord's Church. We often talk of the fact that as Baptists, we believe in Congregational rule. Though that may be our route to understanding God's will, we are not a democracy. We cannot make decisions based on what we think we should do. We must make decisions based on what God wants us to do.

There will be two results when we recognize our church as the Lord's Church.

Results:

- We will Magnify the Savior. Once the focus is on Jesus, our focus will be on worship. Our preferences will no longer matter; our pettiness will no longer matter. Our focus will be on Jesus.
- We will Maintain unity among the Saints. The greatest obstacle to church unity is to consider the church our church. If we consider the church to be our church, we will want our way. But, when we understand that the church is the Lord's church, we will want His way.

Sometimes, folks complain that they cannot find a church home. You may be looking for something that is too perfect. If you can't find a church home with all of the options available, you might need to begin to change the focus of your search. Your search may need to focus more on you than a church.

I love my church, but not because of the music, the preaching, or the facilities. I love my church because it is the place where I use my spiritual gift, where I receive God's Word, but most of all, because it's His Church.

Before we close, notice the caution in verses 17-19. Don't let this happen. Don't grow hard and calloused of heart.