# LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# THE REASONS WHY CHURCH MEMBERS DO NOT REGULARLY ATTEND CHURCH

A Thesis Project Submitted to Liberty Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Alan C. McCullough

Lynchburg, Virginia

May, 2006

Copyright 2006 Alan C. McCullough All Rights Reserved

# LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

1	CHESIS	PR C	)IECT /	APPROV	JAI	SHFFT
ч		11/	// // / /	11 11 11 11 1	, , , , ,	

GRADE		
MENTOR		
 READER	 	

**ABSTRACT** 

THE REASONS WHY CHURCH MEMBERS DO NOT REGULARLY ATTEND

**CHURCH** 

Alan C. McCullough

Liberty Theological Seminary, 2006

Mentor: Dr. Homer Massey

This project is an attempt to discover the reasons why people who profess Jesus Christ

as Savior and are members of a Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia church do not

regularly attend church. A survey was mailed to church members requesting reasons they

do not attend and whether Scripture addresses attendance. Arguments were made from

Scriptural exegesis, Church doctrine, Church history, and particularly Baptist history that

believers in the Christ attend church regularly. The goal of this project is to better inform

and equip churches for reaching and ministering to those who do not regularly attend.

Abstract length: 98 words.

iv

# **CONTENTS**

CHAPTER ONE Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Statement of Problem	2
Statement of Limitations	5
Theoretical Basis	6
Statement of Methodology	14
Review of Literature	15
Summary	20
CHAPTER TWO Scripture and Doctrine	21
Scripture and Church Attendance	21
Hebrews 10:25	22
Ephesians 5:25	23
Ephesians 1:22,23	24
Ephesians 3:10	25
1 Timothy 3:15	25
Doctrine and Church Attendance	26
Love	27
Forgiveness	28
Patience	29
The Lord's Supper	
Baptism	
Service	32
The Body	33
Equipping	34
Tithing	34
Fellowship	35
Unity	36
Teaching/Bible Study	36
Preaching	37
Worship	37
Church Discipline	38
CHAPTER THREE Church History and Church Attendance	41
American Baptist History and Church Attendance	49
New England Colonies, 1600's	
Middle Colonies, 1600's	
Southern Colonies 1600's	

Baptists in the Eighteenth Century	59
Religious Persecution in the Colonies and Church Attendance	
Baptists in the Nineteenth Century	
<b>T</b>	
Baptist Associations and Church Attendance	72
2 up v.s. v 1 2550 2 v 100 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	
The Southern Baptist Convention and Church Attendance	73
1	
Baptist Individualism and Church Attendance	75
1	
CHAPTER FOUR Confessions and Covenants	77
Baptist Confessions and Church Attendance	77
The Schleitheim Confession (1527)	
The Short Confession of Faith (1609)	
The London Confession (1644)	
The Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742)	
An Orthodox Creed or A Protestant Confession of Faith (1679)	
The New Hampshire Confession (1833)	
The Baptist Faith and Message (1963)	
The Presidential Theological Study Committee (1994)	94
Partist Church Covenants and Church Attendance	06
Baptist Church Covenants and Church Attendance	
The Covenant of Middleborough Baptist Church (1756)	
The Covenant of Grassy Creek Baptist Church (1757)	
The Covenant of Kiokee Baptist Church (1771; Revised, 1826)	
The Covenant of Meherrin Baptist Church (1779)	
The Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church (1783)	100
The Covenant of Peter Philanthropos Roots (1806), Verse Edition	101
The Covenant of the New Hampshire Baptist Convention (1833)	102
The Covenant of James Allen, Briggs, and Messinger (1838)	
The Covenant of J. Newton Brown (1853)	
(1300)	
CHAPTER FIVE Results and Applications	105
rr	
Statistical Results	105
Observations	109
O G G G T MATORIS	107
Practical Applications	112
Limitations of Study	138
Difficultions of Study	150
Conclusion.	139
~~11V1WJ1V111111111111111111111111111111	/

APPENDIXES	
Letter to Pastors	142
Letter to Church Members	143
Survey of Church Attendance	144
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

"To go or not to go" seems to be the question when it comes to adult church attendance in America. According to a recent Barna survey, forty-three percent of adults attend church in a typical week. Since 1991, the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled, rising from 35 million to 75 million – a 92% increase. In total, only one out of every three adults attends church consistently.

Included in these numbers are many church members who for various reasons no longer attend or do not attend regularly. Barna states, "while half of the churched population has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, one out of every six unchurched adults (17%) has done so, as well." It is startling that so many who profess Jesus Christ as Savior do not attend church regularly. According to Barna, "If the minority of unchurched adults who are born again were connected to a church, the resulting increase would be nearly 13 million new people, more than have joined the nation's churches in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The Barna Group Online, *New Book Describes the State of the Church in 2002*, 4 June 2002, <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=114">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=114</a>> (5 March 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The Barna Group Online, *Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991*, 4 May 2004, <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=163">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=163</a> (5 March 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the past decade combined".<sup>4</sup> Carrigan says, "A typical Southern Baptist Church in America generally has twice as many total members as they have active members and three times as many total members as the number in attendance on any given Sunday...the apparent high ratio...should be a matter of greater concern for Southern Baptist churchmen."<sup>5</sup> Somewhere, believers have lost their way to church on Sundays.

During weekly visitation throughout the community, this author discovered many professing believers who were members of a local church did not regularly attend. To this author's surprise, many of them said, "I'm a member of your church!", though this author had never met them nor seen them in worship. What reasons do these non-attendees give for not attending and what can pastors and churches do to better reach out to them? This project seeks to address these questions.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The data suggests pastors and churches face a chronic problem with members of their churches no longer attending on a regular basis. Many churches have developed an active and inactive membership roll to distinguish between the two groups. This is the case in this author's current church where about half of the members listed on our books are not regularly attending.

There was great hope after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on America that a spiritual awakening might occur as attendance rose. Though nearly half the population reported that their faith was a critical resource in helping them respond to the attacks, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Cky J. Carrigan, *Believer's Church and Believer's Baptism: A Current Concern in Southern Baptist Churches?* 1999, <a href="http://ontruth.com/believersbaptism.html">http://ontruth.com/believersbaptism.html</a> (13 March 2005).

commitment level to their Christian faith remained statistically unchanged. Barna's study indicated that there has been no lasting change in people's religious practices. By November, attendance was back to normal levels, around 48% attending on a weekly basis (statistically, no significant change). Barna is quoted as saying, "I was among those who fully expected to see an intense spiritual reaction to the terrorist attacks. The fact that we saw no lasting impact from the most significant act of war against our country on our own soil says something about the spiritual complacency of the American public."<sup>7</sup> American adults have lost their biblical understanding of the significance of church attendance. Barna's research indicates that "the explosion in the number and quality of lifestyle diversions, combined with the nationwide decline of acceptance of rules and absolutes, has diminished people's sense of commitment and spiritual urgency regarding worship participation." Unchurched Americans are characterized as having a noncommittal nature, resulting in a distancing of themselves from church attendance through a moderate theology, ambiguous theological perspectives, and a substantially lower level of self professed commitment to their faith of choice. The spiritual consequences of infrequent attendance include being less likely to read the Bible, to pray, to believe the Bible to be accurate, that Jesus was sinless, that Satan is real, that salvation in through the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>The Barna Group Online, *How America's Faith Has Changed Since 9-*11, 26 November 2001, <<a href="http://barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=102">http://barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=102</a> (5 March 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>BP Press, Sept.11 Attacks Hardly Influenced Americans' Spirituality, n.d., <a href="http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/">http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/</a> article main page /0,1703, A%253D1501772526M%253D50011,00.html> (13 March 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>The Barna Group Online, New Book Describes the State of the Church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>The Barna Group Online, *Number of Unchurched Adults*.

grace of God, and that God is the creator and present-day ruler of the universe. <sup>10</sup> Church no longer plays a significant role in many American's lives. In fact, as Barna says, "worship isn't even on their radar screen". <sup>11</sup> American's perspectives of church are far different than the Bible's perspectives of church.

By definition, "church" is the term used in the New Testament most frequently to describe "a group of persons professing trust in Jesus Christ, meeting together to worship Him, and seeking to enlist others to become His followers." This description indicates a fundamental connection between being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and gathering together to worship Him. What does it mean to be inactive? Jones suggests, "An inactive member is a resident member of the church who has ceased to participate in the life and work of the church as evidenced by a lack of attendance and financial support or has shown a marked decrease in such participation to the point that this participation is minimal." Too many Baptist church members qualify as "inactive" by this definition.

Many church members have missed the connection between their relationship with the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, and His Body, other believers. This project will attempt to discover the reasons why people who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and are members of a church in the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia do not regularly attend church. This will be accomplished by mailing a survey to these church members requesting reasons why they do not attend and whether the Scriptures traditionally

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>Harold S. Songer, "Church", in *Holman Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 259ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>Mark S. Jones, *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 76.

understood to teach regular church attendance are applicable. Arguments will be made from Scripture, Church doctrine, and Church history that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ attend church regularly. The results of this survey will be shared with pastors and churches in hopes of better equipping pastors and churches for reaching out and ministering to those who do not regularly attend. It is this author's opinion that this project will provide the insight and impetus for pastors and churches to recommit themselves to the difficult task of reclaiming non-attending members.

#### **Statement of Limitations**

This project will be limited in the following ways. First, the project is designed to measure subjective opinions of non-attending church members. These opinions are subject to debate. Secondly, the project does not explore the unchurched who are not members of a church. It is limited to non-attending church members. By the Southern Baptist definition, a member is an individual who has professed Christ as Lord and Savior and been baptized by immersion and formally joined a local Baptist fellowship. Thirdly, the project does not explore the non-attendance patterns of church members of other denominations. It is a measurement of Southern Baptists church members, particularly Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia in the southwest area of the state. Fourthly, this project is not intended to be critical of those who for health reasons or lack of a local church in rural areas cannot attend church regularly. Fifthly, the suggestions of what churches and pastors can do are not guaranteed to be effective since there are so many variables at play when trying to reclaim non-attendees.

#### **Theoretical Basis**

The theoretical basis for expecting professing believers in Jesus Christ to be regularly attending church is four fold: Scriptural, Doctrinal, Historical, and Methodological. Each of these fields of study indicates a consistent pattern that believers in Jesus Christ attend church. It is the modern American version of Christianity that truncates church attendance from church membership.

Scripturally, all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ become faithful members of the church which includes regularly attending worship. In one of the earliest passages describing church life, Peter wrote, "And all who believed were together." The passages that follow throughout the New Testament indicate a clear pattern of church attendance. The church belongs to the Lord and gathers to worship Him at least weekly on the Lord's Day. When discussing the word "church", Stevens says,

The English word is very similar to the Scottish word kirk and to the German word *Kirche*, although it is probably derived from the old Saxon words *circe*, cirice, or cyrace. These were probably derived from the Greek term kuriakon, which was used by Greek Christians to denote the house of worship. . . The Greek word *kuriokon* is merely the neuter adjective of the Greek word for Lord. Therefore it means pertaining or belonging to the Lord, or the Lord's house or place. In all the early literature of the Greek Christians this neuter adjective was used like a noun (by adding the article) and applied to the house of worship. Usage was then transferred to those worshipping in the building, or the assembly of the people themselves." As for the biblical word ekklesia, Stevens notes the word is "derived from two words, ek meaning "out" and kaleo meaning "to call". Therefore it originally designated the assembly of citizens "called out" from their houses to the gathering place for the purpose discussing public business. The "called out ones" were those summoned to attend these gatherings. Then the term passed over into the New Testament documents and designated the assembly of those gathered together for public worship, or those called out to assemble for Christian purposes.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>Acts 2:44 NKJV

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>William W. Stevens, *Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 299.

The people of the church must also be understood from the use of the word "ekklesia". According to Erickson, "the meaning of the New Testament concept must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and that of the Old Testament. In classical Greek the word ekklesia is found as early as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, and Euripides (fifth century B.C. onwards)". It refers to an assembly of citizens of a polis (city). Such assemblies convened at frequent intervals, as often as thirty to forty times a year in the case of Athens. 17. In the secular sense of the word, then, ekklesia refers simply to a gathering or an assembly of persons, a meaning still to be found in Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

Discussing the Old Testament words *qahal* and '*edah*, Erickson states "the former term, perhaps derived from the word for 'voice', refers to a summons to an assembly and the act of gathering. It is not so much a specification of the members of the assembly as a designation of the occurrence of assembling. The other Hebrew term of relevance for us is '*edah*. It refers to the people, particularly as gathered before the tent of meeting." <sup>18</sup>

Songer says the Greek word *ekklesia* is used to translate *qahal* over one hundred times in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. "The Hebrew term *qahal* meant simply 'assembly' and could be used in a variety of ways, referring for example to an assembling of prophets (1 Sam. 19:20), soldiers (Num. 22:4), or the people of God

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup>Karl L. Schmidt, "ekklesia", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1064-1976) vol. 3, 513; quoted by Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1031.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>Lothar Coenen, "Church", in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), vol. 1, 291; quoted by Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1031.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup>Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1031-1032.

(Deut.9:10). The use of the term in the Old Testament in referring to the people of God is important for understanding the term 'church' in the New Testament." <sup>19</sup>

Paul's letters are always addressed to "the *ekklesia* which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1), "to the *ekklesia* of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "to the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). John wrote to the seven *ekklesia* in Revelation (Rev.1-3). Acts refers to all Christians who are gathered in one city as the *ekklesia* (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:1,5; 13:1).

Erickson says the "local sense of the church is evidently intended in the vast majority of occurrences of the word *ekklesia*". <sup>20</sup> At times, churches are also said to have met in individual homes. Paul greets "the church (*ekklesia*) in their house" when referring to Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:5). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, "Give my greetings to the brethren in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church (*ekklesia*) in her house." (Col.4:15). However the majority of uses of *ekklesia* refer to all believers in a given city (Acts 8:1;13:1). A few times, the term *ekklesia* is used to refer to believers in a larger geographical region, such as in Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and Asia (Acts 9:31;1 Cor.16:19).

When explaining how the church is present in every local congregation, Erickson notes that "the church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place." It is in the gathering that the church is seen. This suggests that the church is not found so much when believers are scattered during the

<sup>20</sup>Erickson, 1033.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>Songer, 259.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>Ibid.

week as much as when it is assembling each weekend. This discounts the suggestion by many that they are Christians (i.e. part of the church), they just don't attend church. The church, by its definition as "a gathering" is in its truest sense seen in the whole gathering together in worship. The whole of the church "appears only as it gathers in particular places". It is in the gathering in a certain place that makes the church clearly seen as representative of the church all over the world. The abstract idea of the universal *ekklesia* becomes concrete when believers gather together for worship. As Criswell puts it, "The church is the convocation, the gathering together of these regenerated members who have been called into faith and into the family of the Lord." <sup>23</sup>

While the church is clearly seen as a local assembly of believers, it is still universal in nature. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 "I will build my church" and was referring to the worldwide body He would establish. Erickson writes, "the church includes all persons anywhere in the world who are savingly related to Christ. It also includes all who have lived and been part of his body, and all who will live and be part of his body...While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole." <sup>24</sup>

This review of the biblical terms indicates an ancient and biblical understanding that believers by definition of the word *ekklesia*, gathered together regularly for worship.

Those who forsake this gathering are forsaking the Scriptural demands of the believer.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>Coenen, 303; quoted by Erickson, 1033.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>W.A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* Vol. 3 Ecclesiology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup>Erickson, 1034.

Doctrinally, the project explores biblical teachings on topics directly related to the practice of gathering for worship with other believers. Most New Testament doctrines pertaining to an individual's relationship with God and with others pertain to church life. These include, among others, forgiveness, patience, spiritual gifts, edification, baptism, the Lord's Supper, equipping, fellowship, unity, preaching, singing, bible teaching/bible study, church discipline, etc. These doctrines and others assume a gathering of believers to actively live out these doctrines among one another. These doctrines by nature cannot be accomplished in isolation. They depend on believers being with other believers. To forsake regularly gathering for worship is to forsake biblical doctrine.

Historically, the project is designed to illustrate that to be a believer, especially a Baptist believer, is to be faithful in church attendance. The infant church initially continued its Jewish heritage of meeting on the Sabbath day and worshipping in the Temple. For the Jew, the coming of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of, not a replacement of Judaism. To this gathering on the Sabbath, they added gathering on the first day of the week to celebrate the Lord's resurrection. This practice has carried over to this day. With the rapid growth of the church after Pentecost, churches of the New Testament gathered in homes. When the homes could no longer accommodate additional Christians being saved, they would dedicate the entire house to worship, hence the term "house of worship". There is a consistent pattern indicated of new believers becoming attendees which necessitated additional space.

As the church spread west, through the ministry of Paul, the practice of the church gathering continued. The church often met in catacombs to be near their Christian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1999), 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup>Ibid., 95.

ancestors as they celebrated the Lord's Supper together.<sup>27</sup> The church was seen as a gathering of living and dead believers to celebrate the resurrected life they had in Christ.

Persecution could not stop the gathering of Christians to worship. In A.D. 111, Pliny made being a Christian illegal and had Christians arrested on the charge "that Christians gathered before dawn to sing to Christ 'as to a god', and to join in an oath not to commit theft, adultery, or any such sins. They also used to gather for a common meal, but had discontinued this practice when the authorities outlawed secret meetings."<sup>28</sup>

During the Middle Ages (600-1500), the church was the center of people's lives. Church attendance was desirable because of few printed copies of Scripture with even fewer in the language of the people. The people depended on the priests to read and explain the Scriptures to them. Also church attendance was more compulsory due to the church's teaching that grace was obtained through the sacraments, delivered each mass. At this time, everyone belonged to the church. With absolute power over the church, the Pope could excommunicate someone from the church, sending them to hell when they died. Thus there was great incentive for believers to abide by the teachings of the church, ensuring regular church attendance throughout the Middle Ages.

During and after the Reformation, a time called "the Age of Confessions", religious bodies published doctrinal positions in Europe and England and eventually America.

These doctrinal statements held a high view of the church and the gathering of believers on the Lord's Day for worship. However, church attendance did not necessarily reflect

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup>Ibid., 40.

piety in the Church of England, in that the Act of Uniformity of 1559 ordered church attendance at the parish church or pay a fine of 12 pence, known as the recusancy fine.<sup>29</sup>

Early Baptists in England and America held a high view of gathering for worship as indicated by a long line of writings and formal confessions and covenants. These included, among others, *The Schleitheim Confession: Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles* (1527) which stated that church meetings and attendance must be united with God and Jesus Christ as opposed to the "popish" way of conducting church and *The Short Confession of Faith in Twenty Articles by John Smyth* (1609), which stated in Article Twelve, "That the church of Christ is a company of the faithful".<sup>30</sup>

Other confessions followed similar patterns, often emphasizing the importance of church life for the believer, including *The London Confession* (1644), *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742), *An Orthodox Creed or A Protestant Confession of Faith*, *Being an Essay to Unite and Confirm All True Protestants in the Fundamental Articles of the Christian Religion* (1679), and *The New Hampshire Confession* (1833). Early Baptist covenants include *The Covenant of Middleborough Baptist Church, Middleborough*, *Massachusetts* (1756), *Covenant of Kiokee Baptist Church, Kiokee, Georgia* (1771; *Revised, 1826*), *Covenant of Meherrin Baptist Church, Lunenburg County, Virginia* (1779), *Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church, Washington County, North Carolina* (1783), *Covenant of Peter Philanthropos Roots* (1806), *Verse Edition, Covenant of the New Hampshire Baptist Convention* (1833), *Covenant of James Allen,* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup>Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church, 2d. ed.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 238.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup>Timothy George and Denise George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 1996), 33.

Avery Briggs, and E.C. Messinger (Massachusetts, 1838), Covenant of J. Newton Brown's The Baptist Church Manual (1853), as well as the Baptist Faith and Message 1925, 1963, and the 2000 editions. These documents represent a consistent pattern throughout Baptist history of the importance Baptists placed on the regular gathering of believers for worship.

From its early days in Jerusalem, Asia Minor, and Europe to early American life in the colonies, believers understood and practiced attending church with regularity. To forsake regular gathering for worship is to forsake church history.

Methodologically, the project attempts to make suggestions to pastors and churches for reaching those who no longer attend regularly. These suggestions are an attempt to address some of the factors that may have caused church members to leave and/or is preventing church members from being active. Beginning with an understanding of why they left, the project will explore methods of reaching out to them again. These methods include among others, the development of new ministries, improvement of existing ministries, an improved church wide atmosphere of caring, and the spiritual tools necessary to reach out, such as increased prayer, improved preaching, and improved bible teaching, and increased visitation. Some of these will be pastor based, while most will be a church wide effort. There will also be a discussion on prevention, through assimilation processes. To ignore the reasons why church members leave and ways to reach out to them is to indicate a lack of concern for those who have fallen away.

## **Statement of Methodology**

The design of this project consists of cooperating with pastors in retrieving names and addresses of non-attending church members. A cover letter to pastors<sup>31</sup> will be mailed to pastors along with a copy of the church member cover letter and survey. Pastors and churches who are willing to participate will supply this author with names and addresses of church members who no longer regularly attend their churches.

The method of research is a survey. The participants will receive a church member cover letter <sup>32</sup> stating the purpose of this study and how they can help pastors and churches more effectively minister by completing and returning the survey by mail in the postage paid envelope enclosed. The survey of church attendance explores seven basic questions pertaining to church attendance.<sup>33</sup> First, the participants are asked if they consider themselves born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are asked to check yes or no. Secondly, they are asked if they are a member of a Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia church. They are asked to check yes or no. Thirdly, participants are asked to indicate how often they attend church. The choices are Almost every Sunday (40 or more Sundays each year), About every other Sunday (20 to 39 Sundays each year), About one Sunday each month (6 to 19 Sundays each year), Holidays and Special Sundays (5 or fewer Sundays each year), and Have not attended for one year or more. They are asked to check their answer. Fourthly, participants are asked why they do not attend church regularly. The choices of answers include "Got out of the Habit", "Health", "Hobbies", "Hurt by Church or Pastor", "Lacks Programs/Ministries",

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup>The letter to pastors is in Appendix 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup>The letter to church members is in Appendix 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup>The survey of church attendance is in Appendix 3.

"Lacks Leadership, Direction, Organization", "Neglected Need by the Church or Pastor", "No Application to Daily Life", "No Friends, Connections", "Style of Music", "Style of Preaching", "Too Busy", "Work", and "Other" (Describe). Participants are asked to check all that apply and indicate the order of importance to them (1,2,3,4, etc.). Fifthly, participants are asked to review five passages of Scripture and indicate if and how these verses pertained to church attendance. The verses are Hebrews 10:25, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 3:10, and 1Timothy 3:15.

Based upon a strongly developed case for the Scriptural, doctrinal, and historical practice of believers attending church regularly, this survey is designed to help pastors and churches better understand, reach out, and minister to those who are not attending regularly. In the process, it is also a goal that non attendees will reconsider their reasons for not attending regularly and return to church.

#### **Review of Literature**

Many books, journals, and internet articles have been written to explore the reasons why people do not attend church regularly. Many will address the subject from theological, historical, church growth, current trends, cultural, and methodological perspectives.

The theological sources cited in this research will form a strong biblical basis for expecting church members to attend church. These books will consist mainly of systematic theology texts and bible dictionaries, as well as books on the doctrine of the church. Examples of these sources are:

Butler, Trent C. Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991.

- Buttrick, George Arthur, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.1, A-D, "Church, Idea of" by P.S. Minear. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.
- Criswell, W.A. *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. vol.3, "Ecclesiology". Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1983.
- Draper, Jr. James T. Foundations of Biblical Faith: Faith-expanding Studies of Great Biblical Doctrines. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979.
- Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Stagg, Frank. New Testament Theology. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962.
- Stevens, William W. *Doctrines of the Christian Religion*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967.
- Vine, W.E. and F.F.Bruce, eds. *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981.
- Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Greek Parallel*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992.

Sources that explore the historical practice of church attendance will illustrate a strong sense among Christians, especially early Baptists, throughout the centuries, that church attendance was common for believers, to the extent that non-attendance received very little attention in early Christian councils and creeds. They will include sources such as:

- Bettenson, Henry, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- McBeth, H. Leon. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville, Broadman Press, 1987.
- Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991.
- Noll, Mark A. A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992.

- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day.* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.
- George, Timothy and Denise, eds. *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.

Books on church growth are utilized to demonstrate that growing churches are paying attention to attendance patterns of members and taking proactive steps to prevent non-attendance, as well as steps to reclaim non-attendees. These sources include:

- McIntosh, Gary and Glen. Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- Rainer, Thom S. Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Who Reveal What Works and What Doesn't. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1993.
- Towns, Elmer and Warren Bird. *Into the Future: Turning Today's Church Trends Into Tomorrow's Opportunities*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 2000.

Books and articles exploring current trends are utilized to demonstrate statistically that non-attendance of church members must be addressed. These sources are abundant online as well as in magazines and journals. They include:

- The Barna Group Online. "Adults Who Attended Church As Children Show Lifelong Effects," <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdate">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpd
- \_\_\_\_\_. "New Book Describes the State of the Church in 2002,"

  <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=114">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=114</a>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991,"

  <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?PAge=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=163">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?PAge=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=163</a>.
- Day, Elizabeth. "The Secret of Long Life... Go to Church," <a href="http://portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/12/26/nchurch26.xml">http://portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/12/26/nchurch26.xml</a>.

- Gallup, George H. "Protestants Overtake Catholics in Church Attendance," *America*; <a href="http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=11928709">http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=11928709</a>.
- Gunnoe, M.L. and K.A. Moore. "Predictors of Religiosity Among Youth Aged 17–22: A Longitudinal Study of the National Survey of Children," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41:4 (December 2002). <a href="http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=7693034">http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=7693034</a>.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk and P.L. Marler. "Did You Really Go to Church this Week? Behind the Poll Data," *The Christian Century*, (May 6, 1998): 472-475. http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=237.
- Hahn, Celia Allison. "Do You Really Have to Go to Church to Be Religious?," *The Christian Century*, (February 27, 1985): 211-214. <a href="http://www.religion-online.org/showsarticle.asp?title=1914">http://www.religion-online.org/showsarticle.asp?title=1914</a>.
- Kelley, Dean M. Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a New Preface for the ROSE Edition. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986.
- Rainer, Thomas L. Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2001.
- Reid, Alvin L. "A Hotel for Saints or A Hospital for Sinners: Reaching the Radically Unchurched in America", *Faith and Mission*, David E. Lanier ed., vol.16:2, Spring, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_\_. Radically Unchurched: Who They Are and How to Reach Them. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002.

Books, journals, and magazines addressing current cultural factors are vital for informing pastors and churches of the mindset of Americans whom they are attempting to reach and keep. In addition, these sources explore modern church movements that are in some ways attempting to replace the traditional view of church member commitment to attendance. Among others, they include:

Anderson, Leith. A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bringing Change to Your Church to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Society. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1992.

- \_\_\_\_\_\_. Dying for Change: An Arresting Look at the New Realities Confronting Churches and Parachurch Ministries. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998.
- The Barna Group Online, "More Americans Are Seeking Net-Based Faith Experiences," <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?</a> Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=90.
- Bruun, Kristin A. "Hospitality at Church: Its Free and It Works," *America*; 9/20/2004, 191:7,16. http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=14422336.
- Copen, Lisa. "What's the Big Deal About Church". *And He Will Give You Rest* Monthly Newsletter, 5:8. <a href="http://www.restministries.org/ARTICLES/arat-bigdealchurch.htm">http://www.restministries.org/ARTICLES/arat-bigdealchurch.htm</a>.
- Crabb, Larry. Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships A Radical New Vision. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1997.
- Gilbert, Rod "The Southern Baptist Identity Crisis: An Appeal to Rediscover Our Ecclesiological Revolution". *Faith and Mission*, David E. Lanier, ed., vol. 17:1, Fall, 1999.
- McBurney, Louis. "Why I Resist Accountability". *Leadership Journal*, Summer 1996, 34.
- Moens, Gabriel, A. "The Menace of Neutrality in Religion". *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 2004, vol. 2004:2, 535.
- Olson, Daniel V. A.. "God is Dead: Secularization in the West". *Journal of Religion*, 84:1 (Jan 2004): 172.
- Reese, Russ. "Welcome to Cyber-Church.com," http://www.cyber-church.com.
- Robinson, B.A. "Trends Among Christian Believers in America," <a href="http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\_tren.htm">http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\_tren.htm</a>.
- Strom, Andrew. *The Out of Church Christians*. http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~revival/00-Out-Of-Church.html.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995.

The books and articles on methods to reach the non-attending church member combine doctrinal approaches with church growth approaches. They include:

- Byrne, Herbert W. *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*. Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2003.
- Draper Jr., James T., *Bridges to the Future: A Challenge to Southern Baptists*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1994.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. What Can We Do about Church Dropouts? Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.
- Hemphill, Ken and Bill Taylor. *Ten Best Practices to Make Your Sunday School Work*. Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2003.
- Jaimieson, Alan. "Ten Myths About Church Leavers," *Reality Magazine*, 32. http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/32/32-jamieson.html.
- Kiser, Wayne. Getting *More Out of Church: You Can Find More Meaningful Involvement*. Wheaton, Illinois: SP Publications, 1986.
- MacArthur, Jr., John F. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.
- Mack, Wayne A. *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1996.
- McIntosh, Gary and Glen. Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelsim and Assimilation in the Local Church. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- Patterson, Ben. "Why Join A Church? A Defense of an Old-fashioned Idea". *Leadership Journal*, Marshall Shelley, ed., 5:4, (Fall, 1984).
- Powell, Ruth. "Why People Don't Go To Church and What Churches Can Do About It," *Christian Research Association*, <a href="http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000242.cgi">http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000242.cgi</a>.
- Schaller, Lyle E. 44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.

The review of the literature pertaining to church attendance reveals that the problem in American churches is chronic, common and antithetical to what Jesus intended for His followers as revealed in Scripture, developed in doctrine and demonstrated throughout church history. Pastors and churches must reclaim and maintain the high expectation of church attendance for believers as has been the pattern throughout church history.

# **CHAPER TWO**

## SCRIPTURE AND DOCTRINE

## Scripture and Church Attendance

The Scriptural references pertaining to the importance of church attendance are abundant. Many who do not attend church regularly enjoy expressing that "nowhere in the Bible does it say you have to go to church to go to heaven." True, the Bible doesn't say "thou shalt go to church regularly" in so many words. It does express, however, the expectation that those who are going to heaven will be attending church. Stevens explains that, "The church is composed of believers in Christ, those who have life by faith in him. The church is the congregation or assembly of these faithful ones... When a man believes, he receives the grace of God and is justified; he becomes a child of God by sheer grace. Yet this is not an individual matter, for he becomes part of the assembly of the faithful." Acts 2:44 establishes this by stating, "Now all who believed were together." Studying key passages pertaining to the nature of the church sheds light on God's expectation of attendance, His affection for the church, His authority over the

21

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Stevens, 303.

church, and His intention for the church. By definition of the words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one can see God's strong intent for believers to attend church regularly.

Following is a word study of biblical passages, included in this study's survey to church members, pertaining to the church's role in the life of a believer.

**Hebrews 10:25** "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

"not forsaking": *enkataleipo*: to leave behind, to desert.<sup>2</sup> Vines adds that *enkatasozoleipo* means to leave behind, among, leave surviving, to abandon, leave in straits.<sup>3</sup> Believers are told not to do this.

"assembling of ourselves together": this is a compound phrase *episunagoge* meaning "to gather together, to collect". Thayer adds that it is "the gathering together in one place". Zodhiates explains that "it does not merely denote the worshiping assembly of the church from which some were likely to absent themselves, but the assembling for corporate worship, not as a solitary or occasional act, but as customary action." This same word *episunagoge* is also used in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 describing the rapture of the saints to meet the Lord as "our gathering together to Him".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Greek Parallel* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), citing James Strong in *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament*, 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1971), 1:126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Study of the New Testament with Greek Parallel* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991), 905.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Jospeh H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2000), 244.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Zodhiates, 905.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Vine. 1:83.

"the manner of some": ethos meaning custom or habit.8

"exhorting": parakaleo meaning to call by the side, to call to one's side. Vine's adds that this word means "to admonish, exhort, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct (always prospective, looking to the future, in contrast to the meaning to comfort, which is retrospective, having to do with trial experienced)." There is no way to exhort one another without being together.

The context of this passage is eschatological "see the Day approaching", warning believers not to fall away in apostasy resulting in no longer attending worship together, but rather to stay true to Christ and to encourage one another to stay true to Christ in light of Christ's soon return.

Ephesians 5:25 "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her."

"loved": *agapao* indicating a direction of the will and finding one's joy in something.<sup>11</sup> Thayer says *agapao* is "to have a preference for, wish well to, regard the welfare of."<sup>12</sup> Vines explains that this word describes the attitude of God toward His Son (John 17:26) and His will to His children concerning their attitude toward one another (John 13:34).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), citing James Strong in *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament*, 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study of the New Testament*, 928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Vine, 2:60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study of the New Testament*, 876.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Thayer, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Vine, 3:20.

It is the same word used throughout the New Testament to describe believer's affection for one another.

"church": *ekklesia* meaning "to call out". It is applied to the congregation of the people of Israel (Acts 7:38). It was used among Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of the state (Acts 19:39). Thayer notes that it is properly "a gathering of citizens called out of their homes to a public place". Sodhiates explains, "The term *ekklesia* denotes the New Testament community of the redeemed in its twofold aspect; all who are called by and to Christ in the fellowship of His salvation, the Church worldwide of all times, and only secondarily to an individual church."

"gave": paradidomi meaning to surrender, to yield up. 17

Christ's love for His people must inform individual's love for one another which calls us to the action of giving up ourselves for one another.

**Ephesians 1:22,23** "And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

"under His feet": the word under is *hupo* referring to "subjection, dependence, the being under any person or thing." <sup>18</sup>

**"head"**: *kephale* with range of meaning from the head (Matthew 6:17), the head as the top (Matthew 21:42), to the head as superior (Ephesians 5:23). Vines adds that this word carries the idea of authority. Vines adds that this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibid..1:84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Thayer, 195-196.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study of the New Testament, 901.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., citing James Strong in A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament, 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., The Complete Word Study New Testament, 942.

**"body"**: *soma* used for "the church, in respect to Christ who is the head of this body and supplies its spiritual life and motion."<sup>21</sup>

"fullness": pleroma meaning Christ has filled the church "with all kinds of gifts and dwells in it and walks in it." Thayer says it refers in the New Testament sense to "the body of believers, as that which is filled with the presence, power, agency, and riches of God and of Christ." On the church "with all kinds of gifts and dwells in it and walks in it." Thayer says it refers in the New Testament sense to "the body of believers, as that which is filled with the presence, power, agency, and riches of God and of Christ."

Christ has all authority over every part of His body which is to be under subjection to Him, fulfilling His ministry in the earth.

**Ephesians 3:10** "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church."

"manifold wisdom": sophia meaning "insight into the true nature of things."<sup>24</sup>

"church": ekklesia as noted earlier.

The church has as its God-given role to communicate insight into the true nature of things in the world.

**1 Timothy 3:15** "that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth".

"house of God": oikos meaning "a household, a family dwelling in a house...all who belong to God."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., 915.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Vine, 2:202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study New Testament, 939.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., 931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Thayer, 518.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Vine, 3:221.

"church of the living God": the *ekklesia* is clearly identified as the house/household of God. "Living God", *zao*, denotes "the One who has life independently from anyone and from whom all living beings derive their life and existence." <sup>26</sup>

"pillar and ground of truth": pillar is *stulos*, a stiffened post, style, or support.<sup>27</sup> Ground is *hedrioma* meaning "support or basis with the sense of being settled and unmovable."<sup>28</sup> Truth is *aletheia*, meaning "the reality clearly lying before our eyes as opposite of a mere appearance, without reality." <sup>29</sup>

The Living God has brought into existence His household and established it as the manifestation of God's truth about knowing God, relating to God and to others.

#### Biblical Doctrines and Church Attendance

Faithfulness to attend church is strongly supported by doctrinal teachings in Scripture. Some are so foundational to the Christian faith, such as love and forgiveness, that to not adhere to them would call a person's salvation into question. While the following are in no way an exhaustive treatment of all biblical doctrines pertaining to the life of the church, still this sampling will demonstrate the Lord's clear purpose and intention that His followers would be closely associated with other believers on a regular basis. This survey of biblical doctrines related to regular church attendance makes it next to impossible to justify irregular church attendance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study New Testament, 925.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid., 907.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., citing James Strong in A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament, 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study of the New Testament, 880.

#### Love

Without saying, love is the overriding theme of Christianity. As Vine states, "it is the characteristic word of Christianity."30 It was God's love that sent Christ to die on the cross. It is God's love that draws unbelievers to Christ. It is God's love in us toward other believers that assures our hearts that we are truly saved. 1 John 3:14 states, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." It is God's love in believers toward one another that causes the world to know that we are His disciples. For our subject, love is the key ingredient for a believer to continue to faithfully attend church. Attending church regularly communicates love for God in the act of corporate worship. Attending church regularly communicates love for God's Kingdom in active service to the church. Attending church regularly communicates love for other believers through encouraging others while gathering. This love for the Lord, His Kingdom, and His children is sometimes challenged through strained relationships. It is in these times that the true nature of love is to be seen. In 1 Corinthians 13, "love" is defined as "agape" love, which is the choice to act in another's best interest, irregardless of how the person has behaved or will behave. This "greatest chapter on love" in all the Bible, indicates that because I love others with God's kind of love, I will choose to suffer long (v.4), be kind (v.4), not envy (v.4), not boast (v.4), not be arrogant (v.4), not be rude (v.5), not seek my own way (v.5), not be easily provoked (v.5), not think evil (v.5), not rejoice in iniquity (v.6), rejoice in truth (v.6), bear all things (v.7), believe all things (v.7), hope all things (v.7), endure all things (v.7), and never give up (v.8). This expansive definition of love indicates that a believer who loves as God has commanded would have a hard time

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Vine, 2:20.

justifying how God would approve of their unfaithfulness to gather with other believers regularly.

# **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is fundamental to the work of God in Christ Jesus toward the world and in the heart of the believer. Forgiveness is central to the work of Christ's cross in that we have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" Ephesians 1:7. When Jesus was teaching His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:13, He taught them to pray "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" clearly expressing the expectation that those who would be forgiven by God must be willing to forgive others. Reemphasizing this truth, Jesus continues in Matthew 6:14-15 by stating "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Stagg says, "It is not that God is unwilling to forgive the unforgiving but that the unforgiving is not able to receive forgiveness. Unforgiveness is a condition rendering one unforgiveable."31 These words are sobering and should be taken seriously. Problems are inevitable in any relationship, especially in a group the size of a church. Problems will occur and forgiveness is both needed and commanded. Lack of forgiveness should never be the cause of breaking fellowship with a church. It is forgiveness that will maintain our ongoing obedience to gather together for worship.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Frank Stagg, New Testament Theology (Broadman: Nashville, 1962), 95.

#### **Patience**

Patience assumes gathering regularly with others who are different from us or with whom we have differences with. When people behave in irritating and sometimes surprising ways, I often say to myself, "People are People." Because we are people, we are different in our likes and dislikes. We are designed to look differently, think differently and to perform different kinds of tasks in the world. In addition to our genetic differences, we all behave and react differently as a result of our upbringing, role models, and life experiences. When a group of 100 people get together to spend time together, work together, and grow closer together, sometimes these differences prick like the spines on a porcupine. God knew this when He established the church. He knew that the differences among us would cause "tension", but He never intended for them to cause "tearing". God uses others different from ourselves to shape us and develop us, especially in the area of patience. This is why Paul wrote in Romans 15:1 "bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" and in Ephesians 4:2 "bearing with one another in love". In Romans 5:3,4 we are told that "tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope". God forewarns us that tribulation will come and that we will have opportunity to develop patience. God expects us to be growing in this area of spiritual development through the differences we have with others as we serve the Lord together in the local church.

#### The Lord's Supper

The Lord established this common meal the night He was betrayed (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). On that night, Jesus commanded His followers to

"Do this in remembrance of Me". He established it as a symbol of the death He would die on the cross bringing us into fellowship with God and with one another as the people of God. Stevens says, "the Lord's Supper is as much a symbol of the present vital fellowship of believers with the Lord and with one another as it is a symbol of the past death of Jesus." Erickson rightly states that "The Lord's Supper was never intended to be administered as an individual act. Rather, it was intended as something for the church assembled (Acts 20:7)." He adds that "One must be not only a believer, but a practicing believer, to take of the elements. Anything less is sin." The horizontal dimension of the Lord's Supper (our relationship to other believers) is represented in the one loaf, which is Christ's body. "The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church. It cannot be appropriately practiced by separate individuals in isolation. It is the property of the functioning body of Christ." The command and communion of the Lord's Supper requires church attendance.

# **Baptism**

Baptism, by definition, is "an act of faith and a testimony that one has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, that one has experienced spiritual circumcision. It is a public indication of one's commitment to Christ." Most evangelical believers would agree with this statement. Most have no problem with being identified with Christ.

<sup>32</sup> Stevens, 344.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Erickson, 1111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1112.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Stevens, 336.

However, few understand that baptism identifies them with the body of Christ, the church, as well. Erickson says, "Baptism is not only the means of signifying one's belief in Christ but also of identifying one's self with a particular community of believers."<sup>37</sup> The right to be baptized is reserved for believers, hence the phrase "believer's baptism". It always follows personal faith in Jesus Christ. As Erickson states, "the New Testament nowhere offers a clear case of an individual being baptized before exercising faith."38 In baptism, the believer is outwardly expressing an inward spiritual reality that he belongs to Christ, having died to the old life and raised to walk in the newness of life. But this inward spiritual reality also includes interconnectedness with every other baptized believer in Christ. Stagg says, "Paul's recurrent 'in Christ' concept not only appears as being baptized into Christ; it appears as being baptized into 'one body' apparently 'the body of Christ' 1 Corinthians 12:13. The context makes it clear that he was speaking of the church as the body of Christ. . . To be baptized into Christ is, for Paul, to be baptized into the church as the body of Christ." He continues by stating, "The incorporation into Christ is also incorporation into his people, the larger incarnation."<sup>40</sup> This spiritual baptism is pictured in water baptism, witnessed by other believers as an identifying mark as a believer belonging to Christ and to the body of Christ. Baptism's rich imagery of inclusion in the church demands physical expression through regular involvement in church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Erickson, 1101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Stagg, 225.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 226.

#### Service

According to Scripture, Christ ascended and gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8). These gifts, commonly referred to as spiritual gifts, were not material blessings, but rather spiritual abilities to accomplish Christ's work on earth through the ministries of the church. The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts as needed among the church (1 Corinthians 12:11). Songer states, "Paul used the imagery of the human body to illustrate this unique feature of the church's life, stressing that every Christian has a necessary function and a responsibility to function with an awareness of his or her share in the body of Christ."<sup>41</sup> Erickson rightly states, "No one has all the gifts making each of us dependent on the other to fulfill the work of Christ on earth."42 There are at least three lists of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and Ephesians 4:11). Some would add the short list found in 1 Peter 4:11. These gifts describe activities or ministries administered by believers to other believers. They are given to the church for the good of all according to 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 14:5. If Christ had intended for believers to live in isolation from other believers, why would His Word state that spiritual gifts were for the good of all and for the edification of the church? Why would His Word command that we exercise these gifts toward one another? The answer is that He expects us to live in relationship with His body and do our part in fulfilling His mission on the earth through serving one another in the local church.

<sup>41</sup> Songer, 260.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Erickson, 876.

# The Body

The Bible uses many images of the church, including the people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the body of Christ, among others. Erickson says, "The image of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ's activity now."<sup>43</sup> 1 Corinthians.12:27 reveals this biblical image of the church when it states, "Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it." As a body, the church is seen as connected to both Christ and to other believers, further underlining the principle of God's people being not only in contact, but connected. Christ as the Head of the church nourishes the rest of the body that is connected to Him. Each joint supplies the next through this same connection. One's individual relationship with the Lord is not the extent of the Christian faith. It absolutely extends to other believers. As Erickson says, "There is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life." Believers are interdependent on one another. Robinson states, "The appearance on which Paul's whole faith and apostleship was founded was the revelation of the resurrected body of Christ, not as an individual, but as a Christian community."45 In persecuting Christians, Paul was made to see that he was persecuting Christ (Acts 9:4f; 22:7f; 26:14f.). Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth proclaiming "to divide the church was like dividing Christ". In 1 Corinthians 8:12, Paul writes that sinning against a brother was sinning against Christ. In Colossians 1:24 Paul exclaims that the church is the body of Christ. Paul expresses in Ephesians 2:14-16 that the eternal purpose of God to create "one new man" out of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1036.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1037.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Stagg, 193, quoting John A.T. Robinson in *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952), 58.

estranged people assumes that God's people are intricately connected. These passages make clear that "there is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life." This deep connection is more than a spiritual commonality of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is a reality most clearly evidenced when the body of Christ gathers together and works together to accomplish Christ's work on the earth.

# **Equipping**

Seemingly forgotten by many believers, Christians gather together to be taught God's Word, trained in a sense, to go and effectively live the Christian life. This equipping also is for greater service within the church body toward other believers. What church is not lacking in the number of workers to fulfill its mission in its community? Ephesians 4:11-16 informs us that we are to "grow up in every way into Him who is the head-Christ, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." The Church is less effective in the world as a result of countless believers who do not contribute their ministry to the church by lack of regular attendance, regular equipping, and involvement in the ministry.

#### **Tithing**

Established and practiced throughout biblical history, bringing offerings to the Lord's house is God's intention for His people. Though Jesus warned of wrong motives in public giving in Matthew 6:3-4, the established pattern is still publicly giving on a regular basis.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Erickson, 1037.

While giving is a personal act of worship, it is also a public act of worship. "Bring the tithe into the storehouse." (Malachi 3:10). In 1 Corinthians16:2, Paul instructed the church at Corinth to set aside money on the first day of the week to be given when they gathered for worship. Through Old Testament and New Testament practices, one can see that the act of worship through giving requires that we gather. No doubt many of today's churches receive tithes from non-attendees by mail each month, but how much better and closer to the Scripture it is to "bring" the tithe to the Lord's House on a regular basis. Bringing the tithe and offering demands gathering.

## **Fellowship**

Swindoll says, "The church was never meant to be merely a group of buildings where you come, sit, worship, learn, and leave. The church is a community of believers who demonstrate genuine concern for each other." The fellowship of believers is a form of edifying or building one another up. The English word "fellowship" is *kiononia* in the Greek. It is defined by Stagg as "that which two or more have in common. *Koinonia* has for the Christian two basic dimensions: with God and with man. These may not be divorced. To be brought into *koinonia* with the Father through the Son is also to be brought into *koinonia* with others related to him. The New Testament never gives the option of salvation with the vertical dimension alone." Part of this fellowship involves what Galatians 6:2 describes as "bearing one another's burdens" and "restoring" those who are found to be in sin. Biblical fellowship is never mere social gatherings, but an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Bride: Renewing Our Passion for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Stagg, 197-198.

"intimate feeling for and understanding of one another. There is to be empathy and encouragement. What is experienced by one is to be experienced by all." Fellowship implies togetherness in order to encourage and support that which believers hold in common.

## Unity

The New Testament is replete with references to the unity of the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 is one example: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." Another example is Ephesians 4:4-6 stating, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all". Acts 4:32 commands believers to "endeavor (hard work) to keep the unity of the Spirit". God makes it the personal responsibility of each and every believer in a local church to work hard to keep the "oneness" of the church. If I am not attending, supporting, and serving, I am not working hard to prevent splintering. I am the splinter! The unity of the church, by definition commands togetherness most clearly manifested as the church gathers as a unit.

## **Teaching/Bible Study**

If the Lord did not intend for believers to attend church regularly, then why did He gift and give teachers to the church? Ephesians 4:11 states, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Romans 12:7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Erickson, 1038.

encourages teachers to use the gift given to them by saying "he who teaches, in teaching". 2 Timothy 2:2 is an exhortation to teach and keep on teaching: "And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also". In that the Lord established teachers for the church, it is assumed there would be believers who would need taught and would gather to be taught. Who would teachers teach? Other believers! Erickson says, "In biblical times the church gathered for worship and instruction. Then it when out to evangelize." <sup>50</sup> Teaching assumes a gathering of believers to be taught.

# **Preaching**

Closely associated with teaching is preaching. Preaching assumes a gathering. In 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, Paul states, "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men...He who prophesies edifies the church". What pastor has not experienced the disappointment of having spent hours in sermon preparation only to find a small percentage of his church in attendance to hear it? While respect for the pastor's hard work in preparation is a secondary motivation, it still reflects the individual believer's understanding or lack thereof of their need to hear the Word of God preached on a regular basis.

#### Worship

Worship assumes a gathering. God's people focus on God, together. These activities include prayer together, singing together, studying God's Word together, and sharing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Erickson, 1057.

together, among others. For evangelical Christians, the day set aside for corporate worship is Sunday, the Lord's Day. Stagg explains that "without specific command for it, the followers of Christ made much of this day (first day of the week) because of the resurrection. There is no explicit record of the setting apart of this day. Presumably this was a free and spontaneous act of primitive Christians."<sup>51</sup> He continues "Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week and it was natural that his followers met together when reports of his appearance began to circulate. . . Subsequent meetings on the first day of the week can be understood only as a deliberate memorializing of the resurrection. That Jesus chose to appear on Sunday night one week after his resurrection may be significant. By this act, he may have encouraged the setting apart of the first day of the week for the assembling of his followers." Erickson says, "The early church came together to worship on a regular schedule, a practice commanded and commended by the apostle Paul."52 One only needs to read the New Testament to see the early practice of Christians was to gather on Sundays. Church history, explored later, reveals this practice continued throughout the ages and exists to this day. It is very much a departure from God's Word and church tradition to choose not to attend worship regularly on Sundays.

#### **Church Discipline**

Unheard of in most of today's churches, the exercise of church discipline was given by Christ to the church and is an expression of our accountability and affection for one another as fellow believers. In Matthew 18:15-20, the church is given instructions on how to deal with unrepentant sin in the church. In the final stage of church discipline as laid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Stagg, 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Erickson, 1056.

out in Matthew 18, the church is gathered to hear the complaint against the brother who is unwilling to respond to private confrontations about sin (v.17). The church is to speak as a unit, calling on the brother in the Lord to repent. Refusal to repent is to result in the brother being considered by the church community as no longer a brother but rather a prospect for evangelism due to unrepentance. It is within this context that the oft quoted verse is found "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." The Lord is among His church gathered together to reconcile a straying believer. Out of concern for the brother in sin, church discipline assumes that he will respond to the precepts of biblical Christianity, honoring them with repentance and renewed obedience. When they are not, a church lovingly goes to the believer out of concern for his unwillingness to adhere. 1 Corinthians 5:4,5 is another passage addressing church discipline where Paul states, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Again the ultimate goal is reconciliation through repentance from sin. As all areas of gross negligence are to be addressed, perhaps the church should consider "forsaking the assembling" as gross negligence of a basic Christian tenet. 1 John 2:19 states, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." Church discipline could not be fulfilled if the church was not expected to gather.

These are but a few of the biblical passages and doctrines that are closely associated with believers gathering together on a regular basis. The professed believer would be

hard pressed to explain away, not only the passages that address the Lord's plan for the church, but also all of the doctrines associated with such gatherings. This writer believes there is no escaping the conclusion established by explicit passages and doctrines that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must return to regular church attendance.

#### CHAPTER THREE

#### CHURCH HISTORY AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Church history is replete with examples of believers gathering for worship regularly. The practice appears to be standard and expected from all, by all. To not attend was to call into question that person's loyal to Christ. From explicit New Testament accounts, early historical writings, and formal confessions of faith, regular church attendance was the normal expectation of all believers. While this paper cannot exhaustively explore church attendance in all eras of church history, a few examples will illustrate the consistency of church attendance throughout, especially among Baptists.

Gonzalez says, "Paul's greatest and unique contribution to the shaping of early

Christianity was not so much in the actual founding of churches. Rather, it was in the

epistles that he wrote in connection with that activity." The epistles of Paul gave early

structure to the rapidly growing early church. One might argue that the epistles

themselves being sent and resent to be read at other churches implied and assumed a

gathering of believers to hear the reading of these epistles. Non-attendees would have

missed this important part of early church life, never learning the importance of gathering

together for mutual edification.

41

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Gonzalez, 25.

Erickson states, "It was apparently the standard procedure for the believer to become part of the fellowship (Acts 2:47). We should therefore emphasize the importance of every believer's becoming an integral part of a group of believers, and making a firm commitment to it. Christianity is a corporate matter; and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others."<sup>2</sup>

From the book of Acts forward, one finds the church gathering on the first day of the week for worship. The reason the first day of the week was chosen was because it was the day of Jesus' resurrection. Gonzalez says, "the main purpose of this service of worship was not to call the faithful to repentance, or to make them aware of the magnitude of their sins, but rather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the promises of which that resurrection was the seal." He also states that "the earliest Christians did not reject Judaism, but were convinced that their faith was a fulfillment of the age-long expectation of a Messiah. This is why Christians in Jerusalem continued keeping the Sabbath and attending worship at the Temple. To this, they added the observance of the first day of the week, in which they gathered in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Those early communion services did not center on the Lord's passion, but rather on his victory by which a new age had dawned." So much of what it meant to be part of the resurrected body of Christ was revealed as the epistles were circulated and read in the churches.

Church history reveals that early Christians met in the catacombs (underground cemeteries) of Rome as their gathering places for worship. This was not so much to hide

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Erickson, 1047-48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gonzalez, 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid., 20.

from persecution. The Roman authorities knew well where the catacombs were. Gonzalez explains the reason they gathered there was that many heroes of the faith were buried there. They believed communion joined them, not only with the living, but also with their ancestors of the faith. Regardless of the reason, whether out of fear of the authorities or closeness to the heroes of the faith, the record of the church catacombs illustrate that they gathered together. There was a connection with one another that was believed to go beyond the grave. Gathering together among their ancestor's graves vividly illustrates a perspective of togetherness rarely shared today.

Early Christians also gathered in private homes. This is seen in the New Testament and continued for years to come. A person would make a part of their private home available for a small group of believers to gather in for worship. House churches would have been scattered throughout a city, consisting of the earliest converts to Christianity. As these early Christians evangelized, their numbers grew making a small room in a private home insufficient for the growing number of converts. Gonzalez says, "Later, as congregations grew, some houses were exclusively devoted to divine worship. Thus, the oldest Christian church, found in the excavations of Dura-Europos and built before A.D.256, seems to have been a private dwelling that was converted into a church." This natural progression from using part of a private home to using the entire house for public worship is an early indication that Christians practiced meeting together in a specified location for worship.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Another development of the early church involved the church growing so that it was impossible for all Christians in one city to gather together in one house, regardless of its size. The unity of the church was a high priority for early Christians and was visualized each Sunday when they gathered together. Far from ceasing to gather, they were forced to meet in several locations, i.e. several homes. Though separated by hills, valleys, rivers, neighborhoods, and districts, the early church maintained the concept of the body being one through the act of gathering. Gonzalez indicates that early Christians, in order to preserve and symbolize the unity of the church, would "send a piece of the bread from the communion service in the bishop's church –the 'fragmentum'- to be added to the bread to be used in other churches in the same city." Churches, though unable to all gather in one place, all gathered in their respective meeting houses, while maintaining the perspective of being one church. In addition to Paul's early writings, another early source that gives insight into the early church's structure and order was the *Didache*. It indicated that believers were to gather every Sunday for breaking bread together with thanksgiving.8

Unlike today's American Christian, many believers were threatened with persecution if they gathered for worship. Gonzalez reminds us that in Acts 11:19 there were some "who were scattered because of persecution". 9 Christians weren't scattered because of indifference to the church, but rather due to their lives and property being threatened.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Stuart G. Hall. *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23.

Being a Christian in the first century was much more of a commitment than it is today. To acknowledge and be recognized as a Christian could cost one's life. For example, in A.D. 54, Nero became emperor of Rome. A fire broke out in Rome in A.D. 64, burning ten of fourteen sections of the city. Nero blamed Christians for setting the fire, though many believed Nero himself set the fire to allow him the opportunity to rebuild Rome according to his fancies. When the people began more and more to suspect Nero of setting the fire, he blamed the Christians, seeing as how two of the areas not burned were Jewish and Christian areas of the city. Tacitus (Annals 15.44) writes "first those who confessed [that they were Christians] were arrested, and on the basis of their testimony a great number were condemned." Nero had Christians killed by dogs, crucifixion, and set on fire, while the masses watched in amusement. First, Christians were killed due to the charge of arson. Soon Christians were killed just for being Christians. To have gathered together for worship in Nero's day was a death sentence.

In A.D. 111, Pliny the Younger was governor of Bithynia, on the shores of modern day Turkey. In this region, there were so many Christians that the pagan temples were empty and the sellers of sacrifices for these temples had few customers. <sup>11</sup> During this time, being a Christian was illegal. Pliny had all known Christians brought before him and commanded they pray to the gods and curse Christ. Many did, and were let go. Those who would not were given two more opportunities to recant or face death. Many refused and were executed. Incredibly, the only crime committed by Christians was "that Christians gathered before dawn to sing to Christ 'as to a god', and to join in an oath not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40.

to commit theft, adultery, or any such sins. They also used to gather for a common meal, but had discontinued this practice when the authorities outlawed secret meetings." This indicates that many Christians were willing to go to their deaths rather than deny Christ and forsake assembling together for worship. They were discovered to be Christians by their willingness to meet together for worship, even when these secret meetings became outlawed.

Attendance was not a sporadic activity but was rather a regular activity. Gonzalez notes that, "Christians gathered every week to celebrate what they called a 'love feast.'"

This was done in private, and only the initiates (those who had been baptized) were admitted. Furthermore, Christians called each other 'brother' and 'sister', and there were many who spoke of their spouses as their 'sister' or 'brother'. In the second century, rumors begin to spread that Christian worship was eating and drinking in excess leading to incestuous relationships. Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and others wrote to refute these rumors. These early writings reveal the continued pattern of early Christians gathering together on Sundays for worship and also the close bond between believers in considering one another brothers and sisters in the Lord.

While Erickson points out that "at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention which other doctrines have received, the early church expressed an understanding of the church's authority over believer's lives."<sup>14</sup> This is reflected in the Apostles Creed which affirms the Trinity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Erickson, 1026.

(Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) as well as the firm belief in the power of the church. This understanding grew out of a response to heretical groups like the Gnostics and Marcionites who were claiming authority for themselves. The church underscored its understanding that there is but one "holy church" and it was the church of the Apostles. This concept of church authority and personal accountability to the church is lost in today's society, yet it existed fundamentally in the New Testament and in early church history.

The truth that believers belong to a larger body was not lost after the first century had closed. Irenaeus, pastor and bishop of the church at Lyons, wrote in the second century to refute heresy and instruct believers. Irenaeus understood the Christian life to be one of spiritual growth and enjoying "an ever-growing communion with our creator." He continues, stating the church as a body, "is nourished through worship- particularly communion." This early account provides one with a clear understanding of the emphasis placed on gathering for worship in the second century.

Another example of the high expectations placed upon church members in the early church is during the time of Decius' persecution of the church. Decius was emperor of the Roman Empire from A.D. 249- A.D. 251. Being a traditionalist, he sought to return the Empire to its roots including the worship of the gods. Decius believed that much of Rome's misfortune could be traced back to abandoning ancestral religion. He declared all religions illegal and all violators would be guilty of high treason. Everyone was required to offer sacrifice to the gods and to burn incense before a statue of Decius. Those who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Gonzalez, 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., 70.

followed the orders would be given a certificate indicating they were in compliance. Those who disobeyed were breaking the law and would be punished. Many Christians of this new generation complied, not being prepared for martyrdom like the generation before them. Some complied only after a time of standing firm. Some obtained counterfeit certificates to spare their lives. Still many believers stood firm, refusing to deny Christ. It was under this edict of Decius that Origen was imprisoned and tortured. Until this time of persecution, it was common for most all believers to stand firm and to become martyrs. As previously stated, during this time of persecution, many succumbed to Decius' edict causing a division in the church between those who stood firm and those who succumbed. Those who stood firm were greatly honored and given the title of "confessors". Those who failed were called "lapsers". When the persecution ended, the question before the church was what to do with the lapsers. Were they still considered part of the church? Who would determine this? Many in the church believed the bishops of the churches should decide. Others believed the confessors should decide. For this study, the debate reveals that pastors were given authority in the church and also that the gathered body of faithful believers also had authority to govern in individual matters. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, believed strongly that there was a need to regulate the readmission of the lapsed into the church. For Cyprian, the "church is the body of Christ, and will share in the victory of the Head. Therefore, 'outside the church there is no salvation' and 'no one can have God as Father who does not have the church as mother."18 The church was to be a community of faithful saints and the idolaters and apostates had no place in it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., 89.

From this perspective, one can see that commitment to Christ and His church was an extremely high priority. For a professing believer to wander from this commitment, made one subject to scrutiny as to whether one was actually a believer and whether one would be accepted back into the church. These accounts when compared to Christian commitment today reveal how far church members have fallen from going to their deaths to be identified as belonging to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and how far the faithful have fallen from having high expectations of one another. A return to these levels of commitment and accountability would perhaps change the entire landscape of a local church, local associations, state conventions, and denominations. Though these are only a few select examples of church attendance expectations from early church history, they illustrate a continuity of thought from the New Testament forward, that believers practiced regular church attendance.

## American Baptist History and Church Attendance

A Baptist is by definition "a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, who…has been baptized by immersion, and is a member of a parish church which is identified by the name Baptist." A survey of early Baptist history in America illustrates that church membership and attendance has always been a high priority in Baptist life. From meeting in homes and beneath trees to establishing church buildings, Baptists have seen the benefit of gathering together to worship. As Baptist churches spread from New England through the Middle and Southern colonies, so spread the consistency of Baptists expecting one another to attend church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> William B. Lipphard, "What is a Baptist?" *Religions in America*, ed. Leo Rosten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 15.

What was early Baptist church life like in America? McBeth gives a glimpse into Baptist church life during colonial days. He explains,

"In Colonial America, most Baptist churches were small, often with no more than a dozen members. Few had their own buildings, and they may have gone for years without a pastor. Worship tended to be informal, with great emphasis upon the Bible. The pastors were usually mature men of natural gifts, though what education they had was obtained before coming to America. Most of the pastors would today be called bi-vocational, that is, they earned their livelihood by other business or employment and received little or no salary from their preaching. With some happy exceptions, many of the early churches were so caught up in the struggle for their own survival against doctrinal dissention within and persecution without that they developed little effective witness to the world around them." <sup>20</sup>

Though weak and ineffective evangelistically, those who claimed to be part of the body of Christ gathered for worship and often for debate. Gathering together in a specific place, at a specific time, at specific intervals was common among early Baptists.

Not all churches had buildings and those that did usually had only a plain, one room frame structure. In the 1770's, a 30'x 40' structure appears to be the customary size of Baptist churches. Sometimes school classes were held in the church buildings during the week, all in the large meeting room. No Sunday school rooms were provided because there were no Sunday schools at this time. The pulpit was usually elevated more than is customary today and was reached by stairs. Most of the churches had no musical instruments partly because none were available, were too expensive, had a worldly image, or were considered unscriptural. Baptists outgrew these views just as they outgrew their "no singing" views. Most early Baptist church buildings had neither heating nor lighting, though in a few cities and towns some had both. They usually conducted two

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Leon H. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1987), 150.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid., 249, quoting Morgan Edward, *Customs of Primitive Churches*, no place of publication: N.P., 1774.

services each Sunday in the summer, but only one in the winter. The popularity of the Sunday night service came with the improved lighting of the nineteenth century.

For Baptists, "the church" was made up of baptized members and the congregation which included regular "hearers" who were not members. Today, we might call this the church family. The church family or congregation might be two to three times larger than the church membership. "Hearers" often participated in the calling of a new pastor, but they could not receive communion. Most people who joined the church were adults, but youth were allowed to be baptized and join as early as sixteen years of age. At conversion the person received the right hand of Christian fellowship, but only after baptism would they receive the right hand of Church fellowship.

Some Baptist churches in New England assigned pews according to social status, but most did not. However, they did establish a special seating section for the most fervent and vocal known as the "amen corner". This separated the spiritual elite from the social elite.

Singing was pretty dismal in early Baptist churches. Most of the Baptist hymns centered around baptism and the Lord's Supper and many refuted the doctrines of other denominations. An example of this is found in The Newport Collection of 1766, thought to be the earliest song book in America. One stanza read, "Some call it baptism and think it will stand, a few drops of water dropt from a man's hand, In the face of the infant who's under the curse, But we find no scripture that proves it to us."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., 250, quoting O'Kelly, *The Influence of Separate Baptists on Revivalistic Evangelism and Worship.*" PhD. Dissertation, (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex., 1978) 182.

## New England Colonies, 1600's

McBeth says early Baptists "sought a church composed of 'visible saints', that is, true believers, observing the gospel ordinances and obeying the commands of Christ." He continues that "The church had to be a disciplined body, with members called strictly to account for their sins." This seems to continue in the early church pattern of church authority and accountability of church members. An early General Baptist confession states that "...every church, however small, had complete churchly prerogatives, but that all local congregations together formed but one church. They also cautioned that, 'the members off everie Church or Congregacion ought to knowe one another, so that they may performe all the duties off love towards another both to soule and bodie....And therefore a church ought not to consist off such a multitude as cannot have particular knowledge off one another." Though an argument might be made against churches getting too large, the expectation that a church's members are to be connected, in touch, accountable, and actively serving one another is evident.

Baptists seem to have been off to a biblical start in America, but as with any group of people, not every action or opinion was right. From the early days of Baptist life, the Second London Confession acknowledged that, "the purest Churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error." Though the act of gathering together for worship was being preserved from New Testament days, some early Baptist churches didn't always promote *voluntary* attendance. Early Baptists in New England (militant Puritans) were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid., 75, quoting William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 119.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., 76, quoting William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 285.

characterized by godly zeal and rigid intolerance. There was "harsh persecution for all who dared to differ from the official religion" in an "environment of coercion." This coercion would have included strict adherence to all teachings including the gathering of believers each Lord's Day. Still the high priority of church attendance was emphasized, though perhaps in the wrong way.

The first organized Baptist church in New England was formed at Providence, Rhode Island in 1639 by Roger Williams.<sup>27</sup> This and other early congregations give one a glimpse into many early American church beliefs and practices. For the most part, perhaps in response to the stricter puritan practices, early American Christians were given the freedom to individually decide what was right and/or wrong for them in matters of religion. In the charter of 1663 it was stated that, "no person within said colony (Providence), at any time hereafter shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of said colony; but that all and any persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concernment."<sup>28</sup> Ironically though, Joshua Verlin was exiled from Providence, having been known as "a young man boisterous and desperate" who would not join in the public worship at Providence nor allow his wife to do so. He beat her severely in an effort to prevent her attendance, citing the standard arguments of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid., *The Baptist Heritage*, 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid., 130, quoting Joseph Martin Dawson, *Baptists and the American Republic*, 34.

wifely submission.<sup>29</sup> Early Baptists, like contemporary Baptists, seemed to struggle with the balance between individual conscience and church expectations.

Interestingly, Roger Williams, the pioneer of early American Baptist church life and defender of the "true" church, later questioned the authority of his second baptism and didn't know of any church doing church like the apostles of the first century. He felt that the ordinances of the church must come through unbroken succession from the apostles. He stated that, "If my soul could find rest in joining unto any of the churches professing Christ Jesus now extant, I would readily and gladly do it". McBeth says of Williams, "he never found that assurance and lived out his days as a 'seeker' not in membership of any church." <sup>30</sup>

Church disagreements and splits have been part of Baptist history and heritage from its beginnings. From leaving England in search of the right to practice religion according to one's conscience to the first Baptist church in America at Providence, Rhode Island, the right to worship with others who believe the same has been the standard. When differences arose, Baptists departed ways, establishing new fellowships of those likeminded. In 1652, Thomas Olney urged the Providence Church to abandon the laying on of hands. When the church refused, Olney and a group withdrew and formed a rival church. These two movements became known as the Particular Baptists (no laying on of hands) and the General Baptists (laying on of hands). In 1665, another controversy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., 132 quoting Reuben Aldridge Guild, "A Biographical Introduction to the Writings of Roger Williams" in Miller, 1:37:38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., 139.

divided the Newport Baptists. This time it was over whether to worship on Saturday or Sunday as the Sabbath. Stephen Mumford, the first "Sabbatarian" Baptist in America, held to Saturday worship and plowed his fields on Sunday. In 1671, the Sabbatarians withdrew from the church at Newport.<sup>33</sup> Two factions of the Portsmouth church disagreed over "the authority of the inner light versus the authority of the written Scripture." These two factions split in 1641, the former forming the Quaker church, while the others, led by John Clarke, formed the second Baptist church in America at Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>34</sup> The fact that there was a debate over Saturday vs. Sunday worship gathering indicates early Baptist emphasis on gathering, regardless of the day chosen. Though splits are never desirable, what remained consistent was how early Baptist's valued religious freedom and the gathering together for worship with those of like-mind and practice. This is a far cry from the modern practice of disagreeing with others in a local church and abandoning church attendance all together.

The Providence church had no meeting house until about 1700, meeting first in private homes, and in good weather, under a grove of trees. <sup>35</sup> As stated earlier, the second Baptist church in America was formed by John Clarke in 1644 in Newport, Rhode Island. As early as 1648, a record of membership was found identifying the church as Baptist and listing fifteen male members. <sup>36</sup> These early records indicate a formal joining of oneself to the fellowship of believers of like-faith and practice.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., 138. quoting from C. Edwin Barrows, ed., *The Diary of John Comer*, p.35n.

The earliest Baptist church in Massachusetts was formed at Swansea in 1663 by John Miles. Miles actually migrated with his congregation from Britain, under heavy pressure from the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which put heavy pressure on dissenters from the Church of England. This congregation was made up of both General and Particular Baptists. The church at Swansea is important to this research because it was one of the earliest Baptist churches in America to have its own church building.<sup>37</sup> A building established a place to gather and indicates that Baptist churches in Massachusetts followed the standard of gathering together for worship from their inception. Later, in June of 1665, the First Baptist Church of Boston was formed. This church began in the home of Thomas Gould who had refused to have his infant child baptized in the church of the standing order. He stated, "I told them I durst not do it, for I did not see any rule for it in the word of God." Gould and several friends began to worship in his home and in 1664 formed a Baptist church.<sup>38</sup> In 1679 the Boston Baptists erected their first church building, under co-pastors John Russell and Isaac Hull. It was called by David Benedict, a "commodious sanctuary" meaning spacious, roomy, convenient, or suitable. Here we have a reference to the church moving from a home, crowded and cramped, to a spacious building. Soon after, the authorities sealed off the building so the believers could not enter and in May passed an ex post facto law that "no person should erect or make use of a house for public worship, without license from the authorities upon pain of forfeiting the property. <sup>39</sup> Baptist had to be forced *not* to build or convert meeting houses and *not* to

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid., 143. quoting David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Sheldon, Lamport, and Balkeman, 1855), 388.

gather. One other notable early Baptist congregation was the earliest Baptist church in Maine at Kittery formed in 1682 by William Screven. In 1696, Screven and most of the Kittery church migrated to Charleston, South Carolina and became the earliest Baptist work in the South. 40 Consistently across the New England Colonies, Baptist organized believers into visible churches and began holding regular worship services.

# The Middle Colonies, 1600's

The atmosphere of religious freedom in the Middle Colonies facilitated Baptist growth. The best known colony in this region was Pennsylvania, named after William Penn who established it. It was founded on the principle of religious freedom for all. The first known Baptist preacher in this area was Thomas Dungan, who fled from Ireland to escape persecution. The first surviving Baptist church in the Middle Colonies was formed in 1688 by Elias Keach, at Pennepek with twelve members. It is still active in Lower Dublin, a suburb of Philadelphia. His evangelistic outreach stretched throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The converts "regarded themselves as members of the Pennepek church but because of distance worshiped separately. Due to the distance, outposts were established throughout the region to provide a place for locals to gather together for worship. Each quarter the entire fellowship would assemble at one of these outposts for preaching, fellowship, and receiving the Lord's Supper. These were called Quarterly Meetings, and later became known as the Annual Meeting. These informal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ibid., 146.

meetings became the nucleus of the Philadelphia Baptist Association.<sup>44</sup> These outposts became churches over the years, in Piscataway (1689), Middleton, NJ (1688), and Cohansey, NJ (1687). They formed the first surviving association (1707), adopted a confession of faith (1742), established a Baptist college (1764) and launched aggressive home mission work.<sup>45</sup> These accounts of early Baptist church life in the Middle colonies demonstrate the commonality of converts coming together in worship.

## The Southern Colonies, 1600's

Unlike today, Baptist churches have not always been predominately in the South.

There were only a handful of churches in the South by 1700, after one hundred years of Baptist witness in America. He Anglican Church was the established church in Virginia and South Carolina. Therefore, some of the most severe persecution of Baptists occurred in the South at the hands of the Church of England. The migration further south was a result of such persecution. Most of what we know of early Baptists in the South occurred around Charlestown, South Carolina. Early Baptists from west England migrated to the new colony of South Carolina to a town named "Charles Towne", named for the king. There they experienced greater religious freedom.

As noted earlier, in 1696 William Screven moved his entire church from Kittery,
Maine to Charleston. Upon Screven's church's arrival, the Charleston Baptist and the
Kittery Baptists "began to worship together, and many of the earlier settlers sought

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid., 147.

membership in the new church."<sup>48</sup> The Church secured a lot on Church Street in 1699 and had their own building sometime before January of 1701, a 47 x 37 foot structure.<sup>49</sup>

At the First Baptist Charleston 150-year anniversary in 1832, Pastor Basil Manly called the worship at Charleston church, originating in Piscataqua "only a transfer of the seat of worship." This reveals the Baptist concept of establishing a local seat of worship for Baptist believers to regularly gather. To this day, "Though no formal organization as Baptist, there remains a persistent tradition of Baptist worship in Charleston from the 1680's."

# **Baptists in the Eighteenth Century**

By 1700, there were only 24 Baptist churches in America with 839 members.<sup>52</sup> But in 1730 these numbers were greatly affected by the First Great Awakening. By the end of the century, Baptists had become the largest denomination in America.<sup>53</sup> By 1790, they numbered 979 churches with 67,490 members in about 42 associations. Those being converted were joining Baptist churches as members. Baptists adopted a confession of faith in 1792, formed a Baptist college in 1764, and worked out a moderate evangelical, Calvanistic theology. One would not recognize the Baptists of 1800 as the same group of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid., 148, Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Jr., quoting Basil Manly in *Adventure in Faith: The First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina*, 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibid., 200, quoting Robert G. Gardner, *Baptists of Early America: A Statistical History*, 1639-1790, 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ibid., 200, quoting Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 218.

1700. Gone was the "spiritual lethargy and 'dullness of spirit', often complained of before 1740. Now Baptists were known for new vitality and vigor. Evangelism took the place of quarreling. Their buildings became more attractive, ministers became better trained, and the public image of Baptists was improved as Baptists were true patriots during the American Revolution. By the 1790's, some feared Baptist were going too far with their ornate churches, polished ministers, cushioned pews, elaborate chandeliers, and powdered wigs distracting from spiritual worship."<sup>54</sup> Hudson says the First Great Awakening served "to mold the various denominations to a common pattern", thus imprinting most of American Protestantism with common evangelical beliefs and practices. <sup>55</sup> Part of these common practices continued to be churches regularly gathering together for worship.

It is interesting to note C.C. Goen's observation that, "saints were in short supply" preceding the Awakening. <sup>56</sup> Lack of regular church attendance seems to be symptomatic of spiritual decline. Could this be the condition of non church attendees today? Some Baptists had slipped from their stricter adherence to first century church practices and traditions to more evolved approaches resembling the Church of England. In the midst of this cold pre-awakening spiritual climate of the late 1600's, church members in New England were having their infant children baptized, making them church members. In those days, church membership provided not just a religious benefit, but also social and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Ibid., 201 quoting William H. Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life and Thought: 1600-1980*, 112.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid., 201, quoting Winthrop Hudson, 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid., quoting Clarence C. Goen, Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800, 3.

economic benefits.<sup>57</sup> Children who were baptized as infants became "half way" members awaiting the time these children would make their own personal professions of faith. However, many grew up and never made their own personal professions of faith. This caused the churches to become stagnant and dry. For adults and families, church membership meant little theologically, but much socially and economically for respectability. It was the Great Awakening that shook the Baptist churches out of their complacency and decline. In New England, Theodore Freylinghuysen sought spiritual renewal through fervent preaching, strict church discipline, and personal visitation. There appears to have been a heightening of expectations by the church of its members. In the Middle Colonies, Gilbert Tennent preached his famous sermon, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" whereby he "attacked the churches and ministers for their coldness and indifference to religion, accused them of elevating formality above spirituality, and advocated a more emotional style of preaching."58 Perhaps many Baptist churches and ministers today have slipped into some of these same indifferent patterns resulting in much of the indifference to church attendance seen today.

Jonathan Edwards provided the theological emphasis during the First Great

Awakening while George Whitfield spread the word of the revival throughout the
colonies on five tours of evangelistic preaching, making the colonies aware of the
awakening taking place throughout the colonies. Not everyone was excited about the new
wave of spiritual zeal. Charles Chauncey criticized both Tennent and Whitfield for being
overly emotional and predicted that their preaching would have no lasting effect. Those

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., 202, quoting Robert L. Ferm, ed., *Issues in American Protestantism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), 73f.

who favored the revival split from those who opposed it, forming the New Lights (prorevival) and the Old Lights (anti-revival) respectively. Again, though disagreements resulted in splits, Baptist churches maintained the fellowship and gathering of likeminded believers in a local church. Over one hundred of these New Light churches joined the Baptist ranks, greatly increasing their numbers and influence. <sup>59</sup> Great leaders like Isaac Backus and Shubal Stearns came with the New Lights. Baptist churches that were not in favor of the revival became known as Regular Baptist, mostly urban churches that shied away from the revival emotions. Baptist churches that were in favor of the revival became known as Separate Baptist, who saw the revival as a genuine move of God. 60 One of the churches affected by this type split was the First Baptist Church, Boston. The pastor there, Jeremiah Condy, disapproved of the revival and its emotionalism. Many in his church were in favor of the revival and began to complain that Condy's ministry and messages were "a cold, cadaverous formalism". Those of this opinion formed the Second Baptist Church (Separate) and called Ephraim Bound as pastor and built their own building in 1746. The church increased from 7 members to 120 in seven years. 61 Again, the spiritual renewal caused conversions and membership to increase. Until the joining of the New Lights to the Baptist ranks, Baptists in America had not shown much vitality. New Lights helped to revitalize what one described as "the dormant Baptist denomination."62

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Ibid. 204.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Ibid., 205, quoting William G. McLoughlin, New England Dissent 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State, 1:424.

In 1765 during Hezekiah Smith's (the Baptist Whitfield) preaching tour through Massachusetts, many who preferred the Baptist way withdrew from the New Light Congregationalist church and formed a new church. The church building was right in the center of town, something unusual since Baptist churches were usually located in more remote areas. The pattern of Baptist people forming churches and gathering together continued.

In New Hampshire there were many people with Baptist beliefs but no church was formed until 1755 when Walter Powers formed a small congregation at Newtown. Mrs. Rachel Thurber Scammon was the first known Baptist in the state who without a church to attend, tried to win others to Christ. Hrs. Scammon lacked the opportunity to worship with others due to the lack of other believers to meet with. With no organized local church body, Baptists like Mrs. Scammon still made efforts to convert others to faith in Christ.

In Vermont, the first Baptist church was formed in 1768 at Shaftsbury and led by Bliss Willoughby.<sup>65</sup> In Connecticut, a Baptist church at Groton was formed by Valentine Wightman in 1705 and remained the only Baptist church in Connecticut until another was formed in New London in 1726. By 1790 there were 58 churches and 3,298 members in Connecticut.<sup>66</sup> The progression was more churches with members identifying themselves

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ibid., 207, quoting David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Sheldon, Lamport, and Blakeeman, 1855), 402.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Ibid., 210.

as members, worshipping together. Again, Baptists formed churches to be joined and attended.

In the Middle Colonies, Baptists saw growth in Pennsylvania through the Welch Baptist's evangelistic preaching and love for singing. In New York, Nicholas Eyres started the First Baptist Church of New York in his home in 1714. He registered his home as an "Anabaptist meeting-house within the city" and gave assurances of "good behavior and innocent conversation" to the government officials. <sup>67</sup> In 1745, Jeremiah Dodge held prayer meetings in his home until 1762 when they had "sufficient strength" with help from the Scotch Plains church in New Jersey, to form the first Regular Baptist Church in New York. <sup>68</sup> Its pastor, John Gano, grew the church from twenty seven members to over two hundred over twenty six years of ministry. <sup>69</sup> By 1790, New York had 66 Baptist churches with 4,149 members. <sup>70</sup> The process of starting churches always involved gathering and eventually establishing a church in a formal way once they were strong enough to be self supportive. Again, those who were converted identified themselves with the local church.

There was only one Baptist church in Delaware from 1703 to 1779, the Welch Tract Church, when three Separate Baptist churches were formed. By 1790, Delaware had eight churches. Even with so few, the Welch Tract church led the way for Baptists when in 1710 it adopted a covenant and rules of discipline which would later be the pattern for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Ibid., 213, quoting William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 846.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ibid.

other Baptist churches.<sup>71</sup> The establishment of this covenant and these rules demonstrated a commitment members made to one another and the willingness to hold one another accountable.

The First Great Awakening had less impact in New Jersey, only boasting 30 churches and 2,247 members by 1790. The first church wasn't formed there until 1768 when Thomas Killingsworth formed several Baptist families into a church at Middleton. Killingsworth organized other churches at Piscataway, 1689; Burlington, 1689; and Cohansey, 1690. The Seventh Day Baptists formed a church in New Jersey in 1705 and grew to five additional churches by 1710. In 1712, the Cape May church was formed. The neighboring pastor from Cohansey preached on the nature of the church, defining it as "a society or congregation of persons called out of the world...by the word of God and the Spirit of Christ...unto obedience of faith."<sup>72</sup> Citing their obligation to "give themselves to the Lord and to one another according to the will of God," the minister asked, "Are you willing and desirous to be united in a gospel bond and to be a church of Jesus Christ according to His order?" Another interesting feature was that the minister asked the prospective members if they knew each other well enough to know their mutual needs, to be able to minister to one another. Members agreed to "give up ourselves to the Lord in a church state" and promised to exercise watchcare over each other, to bear one another's burdens, to submit to the discipline of the church, to attend the stated services, and to obey the duly appointed ministers. 73 From this, some churches adopted the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ibid., 215, quoting *Records of the Welsh Tract Baptist Meeting*, 2:4f.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup>Ibid., 215, quoting Norman H. Maring, *Baptists in New Jersey*, p.18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Ibid.

practice of members, as well as the pastor, signing a Baptist confession, usually the Second London Confession.<sup>74</sup>

The Southern colonies experienced spiritual lethargy until the Separatists migrated south in the 1750's with the fires of the Great Awakening. A survey of Baptist churches in the south indicates that establishing churches in new communities was a common practice among Baptists in the Southern colonies during the eighteenth century.

In 1740, there were only five Baptist churches in South Carolina, most of them branches of the Charleston church. Though these churches were still related to the central church, they would erect their own church buildings and call their own pastors. The interestingly, as much as the Charleston church had influence, these churches were still hampered with doctrinal divisions, disputes about ownership/control of the church lot and buildings, and spiritual attitudes toward revival. In 1708, the First Baptist Church of Charleston had 90 members. By 1796 the church listed 248 members, of which most were black. There were 27 churches in the Charleston Baptist Association, though not all churches reported, by 1796.

Virginia religious life was dominated by the Anglican church and dissenters were severely harassed. The first Baptist church was not organized until 1714 in Prince George County, though a Baptist presence was there before 1700. The church was formed by Robert Norden. By 1790, Virginia had the largest Baptist population of any state in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Ibid., 217, quoting from Minutes, Charleston Baptist Association, 1796, 3.

America with 210 churches and 20,861 members.<sup>78</sup> The Separatists activity of the 1760's and the Great Awakening of the 1780's caused an eleven fold growth in one decade.<sup>79</sup>

Baptists have existed in North Carolina since at least 1695. Organized Baptist work began in 1720 when Paul Palmer preached and later formed a church at Chowan in 1727 with 32 members. <sup>80</sup> The second church and the oldest surviving church in the state was formed at Shiloh in 1729. The third church was founded in 1735 at Meherrin by James Parker. Another strong church was started at Kehuckee Creek in 1742 in Halifax County. The Separatist Baptists came in 1755 led by Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall with family and friends who settled in Sandy Creek. <sup>81</sup> North Carolina Baptists continued the practice of starting new churches for believers to gather worship and fellowship.

Georgia Baptists date back to 1733 with the founding of the colony by James Oglethorpe. No organized church was formed until 1759 with the founding of a Seventh Day church. By 1770, even this church died leaving some one hundred Baptists without a church. It was not until 1772 that the Kiokee (or Kioka) Baptist Church was formed by Daniel Marshall. In 1773, the Botsford Baptist church was founded. Black Baptists founded a church near Savannah in 1777. By 1790, Georgia had a total of 53 churches with 3,260 members. <sup>82</sup> Georgia Baptists started new churches, gathered believers, and reached new converts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Ibid., 221, quoting Gardner, 103.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Ibid., 222, quoting C. Edwin Barrows, ed., *The Diary of John Comer*, 84-85.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 224.

The massive migration through the Cumberland Gap in the late 1770's included many Baptists. During 1781, three Baptist churches were established in Kentucky. The earliest was the Severns Valley Church, now located in Elizabethtown, formed in 1781 with eighteen members. The Cedar Creek Church was formed near Bardstown a few weeks later. The third church, known only as the "traveling church" settled on Gilbert's Creek and took the name Gilbert's Creek Church. Immigration caused the rapid growth of churches in Kentucky. By 1790 there were 43 churches with 3,209 members. <sup>83</sup> As population increased, more local fellowships were established to reach and teach the community.

By 1790 Tennessee had 17 Baptist churches with 770 members. The earliest church was formed on the Clinch River in 1765. Mississippi had only one tiny Baptist Church in the eighteenth century, the Cole's Creek Church of 1791. Few members and few churches did not prevent early Baptists in these two states from gathering for mutual edification and exhortation.

### **Religious Persecution and Church Attendance**

Though some might argue that religious freedom gives them the right to stay home from church even though they are members of a church, as Baptists, we must consider what Baptists went through for the right to gather for public worship without harassment. One could argue that in light of what Baptists endured in early American history, Baptists *should* exercise this right regularly. This moves the argument for church attendance from one *must* attend to one *ought* to attend out of gratitude to one's Baptist forefathers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Ibid., 225.

Though no Baptist is known to have been executed for religion in America, "many were severely whipped, forced to pay taxes to support the state church, had property confiscated, paid fines, and suffered lingering imprisonments. They also faced public harassment, mockery, disruptions, and things thrown at them while walking down the street.<sup>84</sup>

Baptists sought freedom *from* religion for those who did not desire religious affiliation, but also freedom *for* religion for those who desired to practice their faith. Baptists sought freedom to worship, preach and practice according to the dictates of the conscience. The American Revolution created freedoms never experienced by people once controlled by England. This new freedom, along with the Enlightenment, created moral concerns among Christians as it brought about a "disregard for Sabbath observance, declining church attendance, and heightened disrespect for the clergy." <sup>85</sup> These were days of fascination with the individual. Freedom to choose for oneself was championed. Baptist helped champion freedom to choose, not so much as a product of the Enlightenment, which expressed a desire for individuals to search and decide issues for themselves based on logic and reason, but rather of an understanding of the biblical doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and free will.

Some specific examples of religious persecution related to church attendance in American Baptist history are as follows: In 1679, the doors of the First Baptist Church of Boston were nailed shut and a sign posted forbidding them to use the building. In 1752, Elizabeth Backus, widow and mother of Isaac Backus, was imprisoned for not paying

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Ibid., 252-53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Mark A. Noll, A *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 155.

taxes to the state church. Beginning in 1727, Exemption Laws allowed New Englanders to file for exemption from church taxes by proving they regularly attended and supported their own church, lived within five miles of their church, and that three other churches would verify that their home church was in good standing in the denomination. Baptists feared that some might be tempted to join the church to avoid taxes or as Backus put it, they might be tempted "to come under the water when they have not been under the blood."

The Middle and Southern colonies differed in the area of religious persecution in that the Middle colonies had religious freedom from the first and provided safe haven for those fleeing persecution in other areas of the colonies. This freedom was not experienced by Baptists in the South, who were under the restrictions of the Anglican Church. They were required to register their meeting houses, had their marriages performed by Baptist clergy rejected, and were required to pay a tithe in tobacco and other crops to the Anglican Church. 88 "Whippings, fines, and bodily mutilation were prescribed for those who failed to attend church or spoke against its doctrines." In Virginia a minister that did not conform to the Church of England was not to be recognized. A tithe of tobacco was required of every head of household to pay the clergy of the Anglican Church. Every church had to meet uniformity codes with the Church of England. Those who refused to have their children baptized by Anglican ministers were to be charged a fine of two thousand pounds of tobacco; half to the informer and half to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> McBeth, 258.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

the public. 90 Beginning in the 1760's, Baptists in Virginia were whipped, fined, beaten by mobs, jailed, and/or exiled in an attempt to control their dissention and resentment. Between 1768 and 1777, at least thirty Baptist preachers in Virginia were imprisoned, whipped, and stoned. 91 Virginia Baptist David Thomas was nearly assassinated for preaching. David Benedict writes: "Outrageous mobs and individuals frequently assaulted and disturbed him. Once he was pulled down as he was preaching, and dragged out of doors in a barbarous manner. At another time a malevolent fellow attempted to shoot him, but a by-stander wrenched the gun from him, and thereby prevented the execution of his wicked purpose."92 Those who allowed Baptist preaching on their property were levied heavy fines. Jamie Ireland was arrested and made to promise not to teach, preach, or exhort for twelve months and a day or go to jail. He chose jail. From jail, Ireland preached through the bars. Sometimes black slaves were beaten until the preacher agreed to cease preaching. 93 These accounts illustrate Baptist's resolve to continue meeting together for worship, even under threat of severe punishment. In this way, early Baptist greatly resembled believers of the first and second century church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Ibid., 270, quoting David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*, 2 vols. (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1813), 2:30-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Ibid., 271.

## **Baptists in the Nineteenth Century**

By 1812, there were nearly 200,000 Baptists in the United States, with half of them in the states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Kentucky. <sup>94</sup> By 1850, the number had risen to over 1,000,000 with three fourths of them participating in missionary endeavors. Though staunchly independent and "intensely localists", Baptist found ways to cooperate together for mission efforts. <sup>95</sup> It was in the nineteenth century that Baptists and particularly Southern Baptists, organized to reach the world for Christ.

## **Baptist Associations and Church Attendance**

The existence of associations in early Baptist life indicates church membership and involvement extended beyond individual life and beyond local church life. To have an association of churches, there must be local church bodies whose members faithfully gather together in worship. Associations of local churches existed for fellowship and missions. By 1800, Baptists in America had over 42 associations, most originating after 1780 during post-Revolutionary Baptist growth. The leading three were the Philadelphia Association (1707), the Charleston Association (1751), and the Warren Association (1767). Associational life is a strong indication of active member participation in local churches and participation of local churches together.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Noll, 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ibid., 239.

## The Southern Baptist Convention and Church Attendance

By its very nature as a convention, the voluntary cooperation of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention illustrates believers in fellowship with one another on local, state, and national levels. A brief history of how Southern Baptist churches originated and organized for missions together is helpful.

The first Baptist organization in America to coordinate missions abroad was formed on May 18, 1814 as the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions. Though the name includes the word 'convention', it operated more like a missions 'society'. 97 With such a cumbersome name, many shortened it to the General Convention or the Triennial Convention since it met every three years. Though organized for missions, many disagreed on the best method for conducting missions abroad. Many Baptists, especially in the North, were in favor of mission societies made up of independent, unconnected churches. Southerners preferred an 'association' or 'convention' approach based on churches "which send messengers and contributions to a central body to plan and carry out Christian ministries beyond the local church."98 McBeth explains that a convention covers a specific geographical area, sponsors multiple ministries such as foreign missions, home missions, Sunday school publications, and Christian education. A society is based on voluntary participation of interested individuals and membership is determined by financial contributions. A society is cause-centered, developing a separate society for each new cause. 99 The adopted

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> McBeth, 344.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Ibid., 348.

constitution of the Triennial Convention included a compromise between the two approaches. By 1823, the Triennial Convention functioned more like a convention with many ministries at home and abroad (making Southerners content), only to revert back to operating more as a society focused only on foreign missions by 1826 (making Northerners more content). Examples of other societies developed during this time with simple structures and singular focus were the American Baptist Missionary Union, the American Baptist Publication Society, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and by 1888, the American Baptist Education Society. Differing views between Southerners and Northerners over theology, organized missions, problems in home missions work (lack of home missionaries sent to the South), distance to and lack of Southern representation at meetings, and slavery were all issues that led Baptists in the South to call a meeting in Augusta, Georgia in 1845 to discuss "the formation of separate mission agencies for Baptists in the South." From this meeting, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, establishing mission boards to begin work immediately. From it's founding, churches of the Southern Baptist Convention strongly emphasized the autonomy of the local church, but also the cooperation of local churches together to do more than they could do alone. For Baptist churches in the South, the convention approach was the best approach for reaching people for Christ, incorporating them into the local body of Christ, and working together to reach more people for Christ. On May 10, 1845, the Foreign Mission Board and the Board of Domestic Missions (Home Mission Board, 1874) were established to reach people at home and abroad for Christ. In 1891, the Sunday School Board was established providing Convention churches with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Ibid., 381.

their own publications for teaching the Bible to church members. The scope of Southern Baptist missions is too broad to be addressed by this research. However, this overview of the Southern Baptist Convention's roots and structure informs the reader of how Southern Baptist churches reach unbelievers, incorporate them into churches through baptism, teach them the Bible, and then cooperate together to reach more people for Christ. To be a member of a Southern Baptist Convention church is to be part of an organization that assumes the faithful participation of its members in the local church and the cooperation of local churches together for the cause of Christ.

#### **Baptist Individualism and Church Attendance**

A brief word on Baptist individualism is in order. According to George, people now serve a new mythology of Baptist identity which runs something like this: "Baptists are not essentially a doctrinal people. We have no creed but the Bible, which everyone should be left to interpret according to his or her personal predilection. The basic criterion of theology is individual experience. The right of private judgment in matters religious supremely overrides specific norms of belief. Baptist means freedom, freedom to think, believe, and teach without restraints." Perhaps this "new mythology" of Baptist belief contributes to individual believer's decision not to attend a local church.

From Baptist beginnings in colonial America, the spirit of individualism molded Baptist church life into what we know to be Baptists today. As documented earlier, Baptist history is replete with schisms. Newman, writing of Roger William's soon departure from the Providence Church over uncertainty of his "re-baptism", said, "The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ibid., 88.

principle of individualism was so emphasized in the Providence community that complete harmony among the members of the church could hardly be expected."<sup>102</sup> Eventually in 1652, under the leadership of Thomas Olney, differences led to the schism of America's first Baptist church.<sup>103</sup>

While individualism is one of Baptist's greatest strengths as it elevates each believer to priesthood and personal accountability before God, it can also be the greatest weakness when it comes to solving conflict or formulating our views on how a believer is to relate to the local church. Leonard says that the Baptist faith places its first priority on the personal and direct "encounter with God (which). . .leads to a chaotic splintering where, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, every man is his own church." In the 1700's, Baptist church life in Southwest Virginia was greatly influenced by Shubal Stearns of Sandy Creek (N.C.) who was "disposed to lay more stress on the interdependence than the independence of the numerous and widely spread churches." Though pointed in the right direction of interdependence, rugged individualism prevails in the mountains of Southwest Virginia and perhaps is a determining factor in efforts to convince people of their need for other believers and for resolving conflict and differences rather than abandoning the local church.

<sup>102</sup> A.H.Newman, "Baptists", *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., vol.1, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 468.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Bill Leonard. "Baptist Churches", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol.2, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 785.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Newman, 472.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### **CONFESSIONS AND COVENANTS**

## Baptist Confessions and Church Attendance

Baptists are not creedal people. They hold firmly that the Bible is the only source for understanding the life and work of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy, 1978, Article Two states strongly that, "the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture. We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible." As George states it, "the Bible alone remains the *norma normans* for all teaching and instruction, 'the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinion should be tried." Baptist's commitment to religious liberty and soul competency further illustrates that no creed can express what all Baptist believe. While it is true that Baptists do not advocate creedalism, it is just as true that Baptists have set forth in formal documents what they have believed as individual churches. These documents have traditionally been adhered to voluntarily as each person's conscience dictated. Leonard adds that Baptists held to the strong belief that "the covenant of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> George, 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3.

believers to work and to worship together was a private agreement with which the state had nothing to do, for conscience must be left free." Andrew Fuller, a leading Baptist theologian in England and America in the early eighteen hundreds stated:

It has been very common among a certain class of writers, to exclaim against creeds or systems in religion as inconsistent with Christian liberty and the rights of conscience; but every well-informed and consistent believer must have a creed, a system which he supposes to contain the leading principles of divine revelation . . . If the articles of faith be opposed to the authority of Scripture, or substituted in the place of such authority, they become objectionable and injurious; but if they simply express the united judgment of those who voluntarily subscribe them, they are incapable of any such imputation. <sup>4</sup>

Leonard adds, "creeds are to emerge from below and not be handed down from above; covenants are ideally arrived at by the local congregations and periodically reviewed." 5

After the Reformation, many religious bodies issued confessions, defining who they were and what they believed. This era was known as the "Age of Confessions". In 1 Timothy 6:13, Paul told Timothy to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." George explains that in church history, a "confessor" was "one who had been tested by persecution to the point of a willingness to undergo martyrdom." It later became a title of great honor. The truths rediscovered in the Reformation were formally placed in doctrinal statements of Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, English Baptist and eventually American Baptist churches.

It could be argued from historical Baptist documents that Baptists understood the central role of gathering together for worship as part of being a believer in the Lord Jesus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Leonard, 782.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> George, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Leonard, 785.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> George, 5.

Christ. How would our Baptist forefathers feel about today's indifference to the doctrine of church attendance when so many suffered for our right to gather? An overview of early and contemporary Baptist confessions and covenants will demonstrate the clear views Baptists held regarding church attendance.

# The Schleitheim Confession: Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles (1527)

This confession predates Baptist life in England by a few years but demonstrates many of the doctrines later embraced by English Baptists. The author of this document, Michael Sattler, was an Anabaptist leader of the Swiss Brethren. Three months after its composition, Sattler was burned at the stake for his religious beliefs. This further emphasizes the price paid for religious beliefs which included church attendance. George states, "The Schleitheim Confession is an important document for contemporary Baptists because it recalls the legacy of the 'church of the cross.'"

In Article Four: Separation from the Abomination, Sattler wrote, "From this we should learn that everything that is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than an abomination which we should shun and flee from. By this is meant all popish and antipopish works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the commitments made in unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on with all the unrighteousness which is in the world. From all these things we shall be separated and have no part with them."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., 25.

Here, the opinion that gathering in a church service that has become ritualistic and a mere formality, such as the "popish" Catholic church services, should be rejected. It is this author's assumption that the transverse of this argument is also the case. Reformed believers should gather and worship God in the New Testament sense of one faith, one baptism, one Spirit, one body "with all the children of God's church" as stated in Article Three: Breaking of the Bread.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Short Confession of Faith in Twenty Articles by John Smyth (1609)

Differing with other Separatists in England over infant baptism, John Smyth, having studied the Scriptures, re-baptized himself in 1609, by pouring water over his head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. He then re-baptized his entire congregation at Amsterdam. He became known as "John the Se-Baptist" (self-baptized). As "Early Baptist" as this may sound, Smyth was criticized by many for rejecting the Reformation doctrines of justification, original sin, and election. <sup>11</sup> Though contemporary Baptists may disagree with much of the short confession of his beliefs, one could easily concur with his position on church life for the believer.

In Article Twelve, Smyth states, "That the church of Christ is a company of the faithful; baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ." He continues in Article Thirteen "That the church of Christ has power delegated to themselves of announcing the Word, administering the sacraments, appointing ministers,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., 6.

disclaiming them, and also excommunicating, but the last appeal is to the brethren or the body of the church."<sup>12</sup>

Of interest in these two articles is Smyth's use of the words "company", "brethren", and "body". By using the word "company", one understands the connected and cooperative nature of the church. The church was understood to be together. The word "brethren" demonstrates the concept of family, namely the family of God and the household of faith. The term "body" is one derived directly from Scripture where Christ is the head of the church and all believers are His body. Being a body, one understands the close knitting of every part and the interdependency of each part. One of the phrases in Article Thirteen is noteworthy, "the sacraments". As demonstrated earlier, the Lord's Supper requires that the believer be in attendance to partake as well as being in good standing with the church. Smyth's choice of words illustrates a consistent understanding among precursors of Baptist theologies of expected church attendance.

## The London Confession (1644)

Written in the midst of civil war in England, the *London Confession* affirmed the classic doctrines of grace as set forth in the teachings of John Calvin and the Synod of Dort (1618-19). It was written to answer Anabaptist accusations that some Particular Baptists (Calvinistic, as opposed to General Baptists which were more Armenian) held "free will, falling from grace, denying origin sin, disclaiming of Magistracy, denying to assist them either in persons or purse in any of their lawful commands, doing acts unseemly in the dispensing of the ordinance of baptism, not to be named among

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., 33.

Christians."<sup>13</sup> Though early Baptists of the time would differ with the *London Confession* of 1644 regarding issues of predestination, it is consistent with Baptist theology regarding church life and practice.<sup>14</sup>

Of interest for this research is a statement made in the preamble regarding the fact that though seven churches agreed and signed the confession, each church individually met together in one place. It reads, "And because it may be conceived, that what is here published, may be but the judgment of some one particular congregation, more refined than the rest; we do therefore here subscribe it, some of each body in the name, and by the appointment of seven congregations, who though we be distinct in respect of our particular bodies, for convenience sake, being as many as can well meet together in one place, yet are all one in communion, holding Jesus Christ to be our head and Lord." <sup>15</sup>

Perhaps clearly evident to the reader, these early Baptists understood that each congregation though individually autonomous was part of a larger church made up of other congregations. Due to space, they were unable to meet in one place as one church, but meet they did, though it was in separate locations. This document is important as it sets forth yet again that Baptists had a clear and early pattern of meeting together for worship. They knew nothing of professed believers existing apart from the "congregation".

In Article Thirty-three, the *London Confession* states, "That Christ hath here on earth a spiritual kingdom which is the Church, which He hath purchased and redeemed to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

Himself as a particular inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible saints, called and separated from the world, by the Word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith and joined to the Lord and each other by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King."<sup>16</sup>

Important to notice is the number of times the authors used the word "visible". The writers paid special attention to note that though the church is a spiritual kingdom, it is visible. There were outward actions that demonstrated the spiritual, inward reality of true believers. One of those outward actions would have been church attendance as seen in the phrase "joined to the Lord and each other by mutual agreement". Those belonging to "the company of visible saints" would agree to be together with others of like faith and practice.

The *London Confession* continues its statement on the church in Article Thirty-four stating, "To this Church...ought all men to come, of all estates, that acknowledge Him to be their Prophet, Priest, and King, to be enrolled amongst His household servants, to be under His heavenly conduct and government, to lead their lives in His walled sheepfold and watered garden, to have communion here with the saints, that they may be made to be partakers of their inheritance in the kingdom of God." To this author, it is clear that these English Baptists understood professing believers ("that acknowledge Him"), rich or poor ("of all estates"), were to formally join ("to be enrolled") the fellowship of a local church, be present in worship ("ought all men to come"), to enjoy God and one another

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid.

("to have communion here with the saints"), and to be accountable to one another ("to be under His heavenly conduct").

The richness of the *London Confession* regarding church life and practice continues in Article Forty-two where it is stated, "Christ has likewise given power to His whole Church to receive in and cast out, by way of excommunication, any member; and this power is given to every particular congregation." Article Forty-three continues, "And every particular member of each Church, how excellent, great, or learned soever, ought to be subject to this censure and judgment of Christ; and the Church ought with great care and tenderness, with due advice to proceed against her members." 18 It can be seen in many early church confessions and covenants that church membership and accountability were commonplace. These two articles are further reinforced by Article Forty-six which states, "Thus being rightly gathered, established, and still proceeding in Christian communion and obedience of the Gospel of Christ, none ought to separate for faults and corruptions." <sup>19</sup> Many issues are covered by this confession that challenge Baptist churches today. Here one finds that even when conflict comes, members should stay and work it out, not drop out. This Article admits that the church is made up of fallen men and is subject to offenses. But when offenses come, a resolution should be reached in order to stay together.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47.

## The Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742)

In 1707, the first Baptist association was founded in America at Philadelphia. Until the time that this confession was written, Baptists in the New World referred to the London Confession of 1689 to settle theological disputes.<sup>20</sup> When the association gathered in 1742, they ordered a rewriting of the London Confession, known on this side of the Atlantic as the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*. Two new articles were added, that of "singing psalms" and "laying on of hands." Worthy to be noted is that this confession was written in the midst of the First Great Awakening when spiritual fervor was at a peak. The Philadelphia Confession became "the most widely accepted, definitive confession among Baptists in America."22 To understand the place this confession eventually played in Southern Baptist life, it is noteworthy that most of the congregations and associations that would make up the Southern Baptist Convention at its founding in 1845 used this confession as their own. When James P. Boyce was considering a confessional statement for the Southern Baptist's first seminary, he considered adopting the *Philadelphia Confession* in its entirety, but instead opted for a shorter Abstract of Principles based upon the *Philadelphia Confession*. So, Southern Baptists can see the importance the contents of this document played in stating our doctrinal beliefs.

Chapter Twenty-two "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day" is of special interest for the present research as it describes at length the primary role the church should play in the life of professing Baptist believers. In the first article of this chapter,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

one reads "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." Here early American Baptists set forth that the guidelines for Baptist worship were to be directed by Scripture and that man cannot establish his own ways of worship, such as worshipping God alone in one's home or in nature while camping, fishing, etc. which is a popular view among contemporary Baptists.

Article Five spells out the content of worship in early American Baptist churches. It reads, "The reading of Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner."<sup>24</sup>

Of special interest to this research is the fact that all these things require the believer to come together, to assemble for the practice of such acts of worship. Church attendance was evidently expected for believers to worship.

Article Six states, "Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the Gospel, tied unto, or made more acceptable by, any place in which it is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid., 81.

performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped every where in Spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself, so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly, nor willfully, to be neglected or forsaken, when God by His Word or providence calleth thereunto."<sup>25</sup>

While acknowledging the fact that we are to worship God when alone and with our families in our homes as well as everywhere, it was important for early Baptists to declare that even more significant was the gathering together with other believers for public worship of God. The reason for the importance is stated as being the command of God and thus should not be "neglected or forsaken".

Article Seven continues the development of early American Baptist thought on gathering for worship as it addresses the day set apart for weekly worship. It reads:

As it is of the law of nature, that in general a portion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by His Word, in a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages. He hath particularly appointed one day out of seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto Him, which from the beginning of the world, to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed to the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's day; and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath; the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.<sup>26</sup>

This article represents that Sundays are historically sacred to Baptists and set aside for the purpose of gathering with other believers for worship. Article Eight of this chapter reinforces this thought by stating that in addition to resting, the balance of this special day is to be taken up "in public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." Unlike today's society, Sunday's were not viewed as a personal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., 82.

day off, but rather a day of personal devotion to the Lord through public and private worship.

The *Philadelphia Confession's* Chapter Twenty-three addresses the singing of praise to God in public worship. It reads "that the whole church in their public assemblies, as well as private Christians, ought to (Heb. 2:12, Jam. 5:13) sing God's praises according to the best light they have received."<sup>28</sup> This makes evident that church attendance was expected of Baptists who could not otherwise sing to other Baptists without gathering for public worship.

Chapter Twenty-seven of the *Philadelphia Confession* is entitled "Of the Church". Article Five of this chapter states, "Those thus called, He commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which He requireth of them in the world."<sup>29</sup> These early American Baptists understood public worship and participation in the local church as a requirement of God. There was no indication of discussions of how to divide church roles into active and inactive members. Believers were expected to be members and members were expected to be present to worship as required by God. Article Twelve of this same chapter states, "As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do."<sup>30</sup>

Article Six of Chapter Twenty-seven states, "The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., 87.

their obedience unto the call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves to the Lord and to one another, by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinance of the Gospel."<sup>31</sup>

Interesting to point out is the reference to "members" indicating a formal joining of one's self to the local church, "visibly" indicating the fact that believers are seen worshipping together, and "giving themselves up...to one another" indicating more than a ritual of gathering together, but the relationship of gathering together. In case one missed the gathering emphasis, Article Eight uses the phrases "A particular Church gathered" and "the Church (so called and gathered)". Few could miss the understanding of the expectation of church attendance.

How committed should church members be to their local church during conflict according to the *Philadelphia Confession*? Article Thirteen of Chapter Twenty-seven indicates that a church member should resolve conflict and remain together. It reads, "No church members, upon any offense taken by them, having performed their duty required of them towards the person they are offended at, ought to disturb any church order, or absent themselves from the assemblies of the Church or administration of any ordinances, upon the account of such offense at any of their fellow members, but to wait upon Christ, in the further proceeding of the Church."<sup>32</sup> This is a significant statement. Beyond the obvious that offended church members should never drop out of church due to offenses, this article goes deeper by describing the action of the church in the matter as "waiting upon Christ". This elevates the role of the church family in resolving church disputes and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., 87.

calls for patience on the part of the offended. The width and depth of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742* is enormous for informing Baptists of their heritage of church attendance and conduct.

An Orthodox Creed or A Protestant Confession of Faith, Being an Essay to Unite and Confirm All True Protestants in the Fundamental Articles of the Christian Religion (1679)

Written by General Baptists in 1679 from the Midlands counties of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Oxford, this confession set forth the doctrines that Protestants agreed upon. Its middle of the road language can be seen in its statements on predestination and election, the church, and many of the earlier creeds of the church. One must turn to Article Thirty of this document to understand its statement on the nature of the church. Entitled "Of the Catholic Church as Visible", it states:

We believe the visible church of Christ on earth is made up of several distinct congregations, which make up that one catholic church or mystical body of Christ. And the marks by which she is known to be the true spouse of Christ are these: Where the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments truly administered, according to Christ's institution and the practice of the primitive church; having discipline and government duly executed, by ministers or pastors of God's appointing, and the church's election, that is a true constituted church; to which church and not elsewhere, all persons that seek for eternal life should gladly join themselves.

While admitting that the church is far from perfect, the article concludes by stating, "from such a visible church or congregations, no man ought, by any pretense whatsoever, schismatically to separate." Evident to the reader is the concept of all true believers belonging to a local church. Implied in this belonging is regular attendance as stressed in the later part of the article by the terms "visible", "congregation", and "separate". One

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ibid., 114.

was expected to gladly join, not to become an "invisible" member, and not to leave the local body.

Article Thirty-five informs the reader of early Baptist's understanding of the importance of fellowship of believers in Christ. It reads:

All Christians that have been baptized into one faith and united in one true visible way of worshipping the true God, by Christ Jesus our Lord, should keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, seeing there is but one mystical body of Christ and should have fellowship and communion in each other's sufferings, or afflictions, for if one member suffer, all are pained with it. Hence it is also they partake of each other's gifts in great variety, which makes the harmony of dependency on each other, seeing a need of every member, for the public use and common profit of the whole, both in private as well as more public and solemn worship of God's house.<sup>34</sup>

One can see that this article covers many important facets of church life from baptism, to the exercise of spiritual gifts, to the dependence of each believer on one another. Of special interest to this author is the statement "united in one true visible way of worshipping". By "united", this researcher takes it to mean, once baptized the believer then is united with the church and is visibly present for worship. Also stressed is the participation of each member in the "more public and solemn worship of God's house". This statement identifies the believer as actively serving others within the context of the church building. This illustrates a strong heritage of church attendance and church involvement by Baptists.

Another significant article within the *Orthodox Creed* is Article Forty "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day". It states, "Yet the assembly of the church ought not to be neglected by any."<sup>35</sup> This is a strong statement that Baptists understand that all Baptists should regularly assemble themselves for worship. The article goes on to state that on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 118-19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Ibid., 125.

Sabbath day, Baptists should "frequent the solemn assemblies of the church and in all public and private duties of religion as hearing, meditating, and conferring, and reading in, or of the Holy Scriptures, to gather with prayer, public and private, and in the duties of necessity, charity, and mercy." Interestingly, the writers utilized the word "frequent" when describing the believer's habit of attending worship.

## The New Hampshire Confession (1833)

In order to create more defined theological perimeters and consensus among Baptists, a new confession was written in 1833 called the *New Hampshire Confession*.<sup>37</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention adopted this confession, slightly revised, as its own in 1925.<sup>38</sup> This action demonstrates the importance of this document regarding Baptist life over the last 100 years.

Article Eleven states, "That a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws; and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word; that its only proper officers are bishops or pastors, and deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the epistles to Timothy and Titus." <sup>39</sup>

The careful wording of this confession emphasizes total church life by describing it as "visible", consistent with previous confessions; a "congregation", emphasizing the

<sup>37</sup> McBeth, 344.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 571.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> George, 134.

gathering aspect of believers; "baptized", indicating the day the believer identified his or herself as part of the body of Christ; "associated by covenant", the promise to participate fully as a member; "fellowship", illustrating the connection one has with the church, "observing the ordinances", indicating a good standing as an active member of the church; "governed", eluding to the Lordship of Christ over one's life; and "exercising the gifts", demonstrating the believer's active role of service within the church. These are important concepts for today's Baptists to understand. Founded on Scripture, membership in a church is anything but a loose connection.

#### The Baptist Faith and Message (1963)

Adopted at the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in San Francisco, this document was developed to further define Southern Baptist doctrines for the present generation. The Preamble reads, "A living faith must experience a growing understanding of truth and must be continually interpreted and related to the needs of each new generation". "In no case has it sought to delete from or to add to the basic contents of the 1925 Statement", states the Preamble.<sup>40</sup>

Of special interest to this researcher is Article VI, "The Church". It reads much like the New Hampshire Confession of 1833 with a few exceptions.

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believes who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the world. . .This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. The New

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 138.

Testament speaks also of the church as a body of Christ which includes all the redeemed of all the ages."<sup>41</sup>

The church is "committed to His teachings" and is "seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth." The similarity to earlier Baptist statements emphasizes the unchanging Baptist belief in the believer's involvement in the church. Even though similar to previous statements, the 1963 Statement stresses in a new way that church life is part of Christ's commands, not personal preference. This 1963 statement also defines the Lord's Day as "a Christian institution for regular observance...and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion." There is no shadow of turning in the Baptist position of Christ's expectation of regular church attendance.

## The Presidential Theological Study Committee (1994)

In 1992, Southern Baptist Convention President H. Edwin Young commissioned the Theological Study Committee to examine those biblical truths which are most surely held among the people of God called Southern Baptists and to reaffirm those commitments. This was not a new confession of faith, but rather a reaffirmation of doctrinal positions set forth in the Baptist Faith and Message of 1963.

Of interest to this researcher is Article Four: The Church. Here, the study states, "The person who despises the church despises Christ, for 'Christ…loved the church, and gave Himself for it' (Eph. 5:25). In the New Testament the word 'church' sometimes refers to all of the redeemed of all ages but, more often, to a local assembly of baptized believers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Herschel Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, rev. ed., (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971; reprint 1996), 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> George, 142.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ibid., 143.

Until Jesus comes again, the local church is 'a colony of heaven' (Phil. 3:20), a 'sounding board' of the gospel (1 Thess.1:8), and a fellowship through which God's people carry out the Great Commission of their Lord."<sup>44</sup>

This is no small statement. It strongly sets forth that believers are to love the church, the church defined as the local visible church. So many believers grow to despise the church due to lack of interest or offenses of the past. The kind of love Christ had for the church is one that "covered a multitude of sins". Surely the believer's love must cover the sins of other believers rather than write the church off as insignificant or unlovable.

Article Four, Section Two "The Priesthood of the Believer", explains that "the priesthood of all believers is exercised within a committed community of fellow believers." Priests did not operate in isolation within the temple service, nor do believers operate as isolated individuals in their spiritual service to Christ.

In Article Four, Section Three "The Autonomy of the Local Church", the study states, "A New Testament church is a gathered congregation of baptized believers who have entered into covenant with Christ and with one another to fulfill, according to the Scriptures, their mutual obligations."<sup>45</sup> The double-layered language of "a gathered congregation" serves to emphasize to Southern Baptists that baptized believers come together as a group and are committed to the Lord and to each other in fulfilling Christ's mission for the church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ibid., 156-57.

#### Baptist Church Covenants and Church Attendance

Following are samples of Baptist church covenants throughout Baptist history that demonstrate the importance placed on church attendance by local churches. Particular sections are extracted from each covenant that illustrate the individual church's view of church life, consistent with this research. Most appreciated by this researcher is the concept that is implied in these documents of making a promise, taking an oath, and entering into a covenant with one another.

# The Covenant of Middleborough Baptist Church, Middleborough, Massachusetts (1756)

"And we also give up ourselves to one another in covenant, promising to act towards each other as brethren in Christ; watching over on another in love of God....Promising to hold communion together in the worship of God, and in the ordinances and discipline of His church according as we are or shall be guided by the Spirit of God in His world."

These few lines indicate that, early in American Baptist life, Baptist churches in the New England colonies held one another as family, "brethren in Christ", established by a covenant of mutual care and concern out of love and worship of God. These conditions exist as believers meet and share one another's needs and hold each other accountable. The Lord's Supper has been historically central to Baptist worship with its emphasis on regularly meeting together, confession, and good standing in the church.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid., 200.

#### Covenant of Grassy Creek Baptist Church, Grassy Creek, North Carolina (1757)

Article Three. "We promise to bear one another's infirmities and weaknesses, with much tenderness."

Article Four. "Promising by the grace of God to act towards one another as brethren in Christ, watching over one another in the love of God...and that we will seek the good of each other, and the church universally, for God's glory; and hold communion together in the worship of God, in the ordinances and discipline of this church of God, according to Christ's visible kingdom, so far as the providence of God admits of the same: 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is', but submitting ourselves unto the discipline of the church, as a part of Christ's mystical body."

This covenant of a Middle colony Baptist church represents many of the characteristics of her neighbors to the north such as a perspective of church as a family (brethren), watching out for one another, and holding communion together. Additionally in this covenant, is the word "visible", seen so often in the confessions reviewed earlier. Baptist churches consistently insist on a church wherein its members are seen, attending and active. While recognizing the body of Christ as invisible, it is yet visible, emphasized by the quoting of Hebrews 10:25 "Forsaking not the assembling of ourselves together" within the covenant. Also noteworthy is this church's willingness to be accountable to one another "submitting unto the discipline of the church". This is so foreign to modern day concepts of church life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid., 202-203.

#### Covenant of Kiokee Baptist Church, Kiokee, Georgia (1771; Revised, 1826)

Article Two. "We believe that believers should attend to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and should any neglect or refuse to attend, they may be required to give a reason of their conduct."

#### Article Four:

We do also promise as much as in our power to give all due attendance to the public worship of God on the Lord's Day, and all other days, as we may have opportunity, also on such days as are appointed to transact the business of the church, and when met with calmly and faithfully give our opinions, avoiding clamorous disputations and whispering during discussion, and to do all in our power to maintain peace and good order among us- and whoever fails attending our regular meetings, three times in succession without sending or rendering a sufficient excuse, the church shall appoint some person or persons to cite and require such delinquent person to attend, and should he or she neglect or refuse yet to attend, he shall be dealt with as a disorderly member and for the better observance of this rule, the clerk shall be required at the conclusion of each conference to note down, and call for such absentees who shall be required at the next conference to give the reason of absence. <sup>50</sup>

Article Seven. "All persons desiring to become members of this church shall be received into our fellowship only by the unanimous agreement of this church present." <sup>51</sup>

A cursory reading of these articles indicates that this Southern colony Baptist church held higher expectations of its members than many of like faith and practice. Some common themes are seen, such as the concept of the church as family ("brethren"), the element of promise ingrained in covenants, and the Lord's Supper celebration as a requirement of church members. What is unique about Kiokee Baptist Church, compared to other church covenants, is its strong attendance requirements for the Lord's Supper, regular worship, and business meetings. An excuse for being absent is required in all

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid., 207.

cases and a plan for dealing with the "disorderly member" is set forth in order to reconcile the straying believer and set an example to others who are not attending "for the better observance of this rule". Church attendance compliance was a matter of church discipline for Kiokee Baptist Church.

## Covenant of Meherrin Baptist Church, Lunenburg County, Virginia (1779)

Preamble. "We therefore solemnly in the presence of God, covenant to and with each other under an humble sense of our own unworthiness and give up ourselves to the Lord and to each other in a church state...that we may be a spiritual house built up together by His divine grace." 52

Article One. "We agree solemnly in the presence of God to give up ourselves to God and to each other in a spiritual union and fellowship, humbly submitting to the gospel discipline and to engage in all religious duties required of the people to each other in such a spiritual connection, and to stir up each other to love and good works, to warn, reprove, rebuke, exhort and admonish each other in meekness." <sup>53</sup>

Article Two. "We agree and do promise, God assisting, to strive together for the faith of the gospel...and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and that we shall bear one another's burdens, weaknesses and infirmities, with much tenderness and conduct ourselves in such cases as to divulging or secreting agreeable to the plain rule given us in Matthew 18:15-17."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibid., 209-210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Article Three. "We agree and do promise, God assisting, to meet together on the Lord's Day and at other times, as the Lord shall give opportunity (agreeable to the divine injunction, Hebrews 24 and 25) to receive instruction from the Word preached, to comfort and edify each other, to promote godliness and do service to the church of Christ."

Common themes are found in this Middle colony Baptist church of togetherness, promises and agreement, submission to church discipline, and the oath taken in the presence of God. Other similarities with other covenants include the promise to watch out for one another, bear with one another, and to hold each other accountable. For the purpose of this research, Article Three is significant. They agree and promise to meet together on the Lord's Day, a clear indication of the expectation that believers would attend worship on Sundays. Hebrews 24 and 25 are cited (Hebrews 10:25) as the church's basis for this expectation. Again, a church member is closely connected with other believers and meets regularly to worship and serve with them.

Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church, Washington County, North Carolina (1783)

Article One. "To attend our respective meetings and especially church meetings unless providentially hindered and the reason to be given to the church if called for."

Article Two. "To hold communion together in the worship of God, in the celebration of His ordinances."

Article Three. "To bear with each others infirmities with tenderness."

Article Four. "To bear reproof and admonition from each other patiently."

5

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Article Eight. "Not to remove our abode out of the bounds of this church without informing and consulting the church."56

This covenant bears the marks of other church covenants regarding church life such as celebrating the Lord's Supper together, bearing with one another, and holding each other accountable. It is strong like the Kiokee Baptist Church Covenant in Kiokee, Georgia as it promises one another that they will attend worship and meetings unless God decides differently (providentially hindered) and that an excuse will be given should the church ask for one. The benefit of this understanding up front is that each member expects the church to hold them accountable for attendance. Another beneficial element is added to this covenant in Article Eight, that being to let each other know when and why they may leave the church. This gives the church the opportunity to remedy any problems and reduces rumors as to why they may have left. What is ruled out is a member being absent regularly or leaving the church without being noticed.

#### Covenant of Peter Philanthropos Roots (1806), Verse Edition

In this covenant model, the author writes in verse the conditions of church membership. Verse six is pertinent to this discussion. It reads, "The church appointments we'll attend, The Lord's Day too in worship spend; To discipline we will submit. O may we never these vows forget."57

This simple approach to covenant writing makes the expectation of church attendance by church members clear. It is a vow that when the church meets, the members will be there.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid., 214-215. <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 218.

## Covenant of the New Hampshire Baptist Convention (1833)

"We do now solemnly and joyfully covenant with each other, to walk together in Him with brotherly love...That we will exercise mutual care as members one of another to promote growth of the whole body in Christian knowledge, holiness, and comfort...we will uphold the public worship of God and the ordinances of His house; and hold constant communion with each other therein."

There are common elements with this covenant to others, such as the solemnity of the promise, the agreement to walk in love and care for one another, and to support one another's spiritual growth. The importance of the Convention's understanding of the place of church attendance is found in the phrase "we will uphold the public worship of God and the ordinances of His house". There would be no misinterpreting this as anything other than an expectation of Convention members to be in church on a regular basis.

### Covenant of James Allen, Avery Briggs, and E.C. Messinger (Massachusetts, 1838)

Written as one who would be accepting the terms of a contract, this covenant model states:

You do now cordially join yourselves to this church of Christ, engaging to strive earnestly for its peace, edification, and purity, and to walk with its members in love, faithfulness, circumspection, meekness, and sobriety, and contribute your proportion as God shall prosper you. We, the members of this church, affectionately receive you to our communion, and in the name of Christ declare you entitled to all its privileges. We welcome you to this fellowship with us in the blessings of the Gospel, and on our part engage to watch over you and seek your edification as long as you shall continue with us. And hereafter you can never withdraw from the watch and communion of saints,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., 219.

without a breach of covenant...You have unalterably committed yourselves, and henceforth you must be the servants of God.<sup>59</sup>

Common elements of this covenant include walking together in love, making a solemn promise, and the guarantee of privileges as a member. What is unique about this church covenant model is its permanent nature of commitment. The oath to become a church member is unalterable and one can never withdraw from the watch and communion of the saints. This takes church covenants to a different level and perhaps would be impractical in today's mobile society.

#### Covenant of J. Newton Brown's The Baptist Church Manual (1853)

A church covenant commonly found in today's Baptist churches, this covenant reads:

We do now...most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ...We engage, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry...We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant, and the principles of God's Word. <sup>60</sup>

Intertwined throughout this common Baptist covenant are elements of connection. From the phrases "one another, as one body" and "to walk together in Christian love" to the objectives of striving "together for the advancement of the church" and "promoting its prosperity and spirituality", this covenant is about church life "together". Right in the midst of the covenant stands the phrase "to sustain its worship". Baptists are consistent in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Ibid., 223-224.

understanding that church is about coming together for mutual edification and worship.

All members who accept this covenant enter into agreement to attend church regularly.

These covenants are representative of local Baptist church thought on what is expected of members, particularly church attendance. They demonstrate that from early days in American Baptist church life, being a member meant being present when the church met.

The Bible, Baptist history and heritage, Baptist organizational structure, and Baptist historical documents all argue strongly that all who claim to be of the Baptist faith and members of a local Baptist church should also regularly attend their local church. To desert the practice of regular church attendance would be to essentially disassociate with what it means to be a Christian of the Baptist faith. It would be to deny Scripture, always held to be the final authority in Baptist church life. It would to depart from a long heritage of gathering with other believers of like faith and practice on a regular basis. It would be to forsake what historically distinguished Baptists from other denominations, the local church being made up of baptized believers who have joined themselves to Christ and to one another.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

#### **RESULTS AND APPLICATIONS**

## **Statistical Results**

Sixty-three churches/pastors in Southwest Virginia were contacted requesting they participate in the study, by submitting names and addresses of inactive members in their churches. Each church/pastor was given a cover letter explaining the nature of the study and a copy of the letter and survey that would be mailed to each inactive church member. Six Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia churches, all located in the Southwest corner of the state, participated in this study contributing names of inactive members from their churches. A total of 182 names were submitted, all of which received a cover letter from this author explaining the nature of the survey and requesting they return the completed survey in the addressed, stamped envelope provided, as well as the completed survey. A total of 32 surveys were completed and returned. This amounted to 18% of all surveys mailed. A total of 23 surveys were returned unopened due to incorrect addresses, which amounted to 13% of all surveys mailed. Eighteen or 78% of these were "unable to be forwarded" and five or 22% were "unable to deliver as addressed".

Responses to the survey were typical with a few surprises. Eighty-one percent said they were born again believers, while six percent said they were not. Sixty-nine percent said they were indeed members of a church that was a member of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, while 22% said they were not. As for frequency of church attendance, 19% replied they attend church every Sunday (40 or more Sundays each year). Nine percent replied they attend church about every Sunday (20 to 39 Sundays each year). Nineteen percent said they attend about one Sunday each month (6 to 19 Sundays each year). Thirteen percent said they attend holidays and special Sundays (5 or fewer Sundays each year). Thirty-one percent said they have not attended church for one year or more.

Regarding reasons for not frequently attending, 34% said they've gotten out of the habit, 25% due to health, 16% cited hobbies, and 22% said they had been hurt by the church or pastor. Six percent said they attend infrequently due to feeling neglected by the church or pastor, nine due to having no friends/connections, six percent due to the style of music, 16% due to being too busy, 22% due to work, and 28% due to other reasons. These included not believing one has to go to church to worship and to have a relationship with God, family members being unwilling to attend with them, difficulty of getting everyone up early after a long, busy week, hypocrites in the church, having moved away, family obligations, and school/college obligations. None cited the church's lack of programs/ministries, lack of leadership, direction, organization, lack of application to daily life, or style of preaching.

Regarding the biblical passages addressing the church's place in God's plan, 47% believe Hebrews 10:25 commands one to attend church, while 38% do not. Eighty-four percent agree this verse speaks of why we attend church, while three percent disagree.

As for Ephesians 5:25, 78% said it speaks of who established the church, while 13% said it does not. Ninety-one percent responded that this verse describes how Christ feels about the church, while none responded that it does not. Seventy-two percent said it teaches how one should feel about the church, while 13% say it does not.

Regarding Ephesians 1:22-23, 84% replied that these verses teach who is in charge of the church, while three percent replied they do not. Seventy-five percent said these verses teach the church is people, not a building, while 13% said they do not. Ephesians 3:10, which speaks of the church making known the manifold wisdom of God, was believed to teach the important role of the church by 84% of responders and that it does not by three percent.

The last verse of Scripture on the survey, 1 Timothy 3:15 which speaks of the church as the pillar and ground of truth, was responded to as follows: 50% said it speaks of the church as a building, while 34% said it did not. Eighty-four percent said this verse speaks of the important role of the church, while three percent said it does not.

Next, the survey asked what actions would help the inactive member to attend more frequently. As for a letter being written to them, 22% said a letter by the pastor would help, 16% said a letter from a church leader would help, and 19% said a letter from a church member would help. As for a phone call, nine percent said a call from the pastor would help, nine percent said a call from a leader would be helpful, and 22% said a call from a fellow church member would help. As for a visit, 13% said a visit from the pastor would help, six percent said a visit from a church leader would help, and 22% said a visit from a church member would be helpful. The last category was as follows including the percentage who said this would be helpful: change/improvement 0%, admit

wrong/apology 3%, nothing would encourage 13%, and other 25%. Other things which would help increase attendance included the following comments: 1) I attend and nothing will make me increase, 2) health improvement 3) I have my own relationship with God. I don't need others, 4) unsure of the best way, 5) I will return when I find a pastor, not a preacher, and 6) email would help.

The last question asked who they had shared these views with. Six percent had shared them with the pastor, nine percent had shared them with a church leader, 13% had shared them with another church member, 84% had shared them with family, and 19% had shared them with other than the previous choices. These responses included significant others, God, and nobody.

Seven surveys were mailed in with additional comments included. One stated, "I've gone back to the United Methodist. I am going to rejoin with my family. Please cancel my membership." Another said, "Currently attending another church. Will probably switch membership." Another replied, "I am listed as a member at one local Baptist church, but I currently attend church at a sister church. I plan on switching my membership in the near future. I have barely heard from any of the members at the church where I am a member. I miss some of the people there, but I do not miss the drama and the gossip." Another communicated, "As of two weeks ago, I feel much better and with God's love and help, I have returned to my church, joined the choir and I praise God for giving me another chance to show Him how much I love Him." Yet another commented, "I don't need others to be able to worship. I will be judged alone." Still another said, "I have been Episcopal since 1963. I no longer live in Virginia. While I

lived in Virginia, I attended the Episcopal or Methodist Church. Where I live now, I attend the Catholic or Methodist Church."

Three letters were mailed in with hand written responses. One stated, "Do what you have to do." Another said, "I am disabled." Yet another asked, "Do you take the time out of your day to visit the elderly and shut in that cannot attend church although they are members of the church? How long has it been since you visited members of your church that are elderly and cannot get to church services?"

#### **Observations**

Much can be gleaned from the preceding survey results. Right or wrong, nonattending church members give a perspective that is useful in developing strategies for reclaiming them to active participation. Following are some of what this author considers to be the more significant insights revealed from the study. Due to the small percentage of surveys returned/completed, the survey reflects probability, rather than certainties.

First, it was striking how many surveys were returned unopened due to incorrect addresses. Though this author read words like "careless", "embarrassing", "horrendous", and "atrocious" in describing church record keeping systems, these results verify the unacceptable condition of our record keeping systems. It reflects the low priority churches place on reclaiming inactive church members. There is a tremendous opportunity for the church that makes tracking church absentees a priority.

Secondly, it was interesting to see how many church dropouts share their reasons and concerns with family, but few others. This informs churches to educate and train active family members in the church how to respond to church dropout complaints and concerns

of family members in a way that steers them back toward the church. The next group most informed about the non-attendee's concerns was friends. This certainly results in bad public relations for the church attempting to reach its community. Churches would do well to reach the non-attendee early to prevent such sharing with others outside their immediate families.

Next, it appears that the power to reclaim inactive church members lies predominantly in the hands of fellow church members. A majority of responders indicated that a phone call or visit from a fellow church member would encourage them to attend more frequently, even more so than a phone call or visit from the pastor. Perhaps this is due to the low trust level of non-attendees of the church leadership or perhaps due to the embarrassment of answering a leader's questions as to why they no longer attend frequently. The pastor's initial role in reclamation apparently would be a letter from him which was slightly preferred in the study over a letter from a fellow church member.

According to the survey, many non-attendees do not think very highly of church leaders other than the pastor. Of the choices given, letter, phone call, or visit, few indicated that contact by a church leader other than the pastor would encourage them to attend more frequently. Perhaps this is due to the stereotype of Baptist deacons in many Baptist churches of being less spiritual and more managerial. Or perhaps it is an indication that church leaders need to be more involved in the nurturing and caring ministry of the flock and trained in conflict management, so that when problems occur, they can be called upon to assist in reclamation efforts.

Another observation is that most non-attendees believe strongly in the teachings of the Bible, but do not obey its teachings. The majority agreed that the verses examined in the

survey spoke of the importance of church in the life of the believer, but most did not follow these teachings. Perhaps some who believe the Bible do not know how to apply it to their own situation. This instructs churches to teach the importance of the church to new converts as well as those who have attended for some time, as well as attempting to reeducate and convince church dropouts that the church is important in God's plan for their lives. Perhaps many missed these opportunities to learn due to non-attendance.

Another intriguing observation was that many who are members of Southern Baptist Churches who cooperate within the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia state convention have no familiarity with that affiliation. Nearly a quarter of all responders indicated they were not members of a church with this affiliation. Perhaps this is due to the convention being just ten years old. Some inactive members may have been away from church for more years than the new convention has existed. Churches have much work to do in teaching the cooperative efforts of Baptist churches within the state of Virginia.

Perhaps the most striking of all survey responses, though making up only a small percentage, were those who indicated "yes" I am a member of a Baptist church, but "no" I do not consider myself to be a born again believer in Jesus Christ. One is reminded again of the essential task of making a clear Gospel presentation to those active and inactive in the churches. Rainer reminds the church, "inactive members may not be Christians. Church membership is not the final certification for the Lamb's book of life." <sup>1</sup>

Finally, it was interesting to learn that the most likely reason for people having dropped out of church was simply getting out of the habit. Though it sounds simple, there

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 286.

may have been other factors leading to their getting out of the habit. Yet, still, it teaches churches the importance of developing systematic strategies which track and ensure that church members maintain a consistent pattern of church involvement. Getting out of the habit was followed closely by "other" reasons, some typical like hypocrisy in the church and worshiping God on one's own, to the busyness of life and the demands of family. Churches would do well to develop ministry opportunities that respect, accommodate, and invests in today's family lifestyles, while at the same time provide spiritual growth while maintaining high expectations for involvement. Health was the third most cited reason for non-attendance reminding churches of their obligation to minister to and nurture those whose health has failed.

## **Practical Applications**

Understanding the reasons for non-attendance is only the beginning of a longer process of reclaiming church members to active participation in the church. It must be the desire of those who are active to lovingly and patiently reach out to those who've become irregular in attendance. "Reclamation", the formal term for reclaiming inactive members, is a complex and difficult process. Many times what led a person to drop out of church activity didn't happen overnight and cannot be solved overnight. As Jones says, "If you're not willing to invest time and energy, your success at reclamation will be limited." Complicating matters is the fact that the longer a church waits to begin the process with an inactive member, the more difficult it is to reclaim them. Jones explains, "To wait twelve months before deciding that a member is inactive is too long. It has been

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jones, 17.

found that persons who have been inactive for more than six to eight weeks are increasingly difficult to reclaim." Urgency is placed on churches to become more aware and better organized to identify changes in attendance patterns and respond promptly.

Byrne and Jones agree that increasing active member awareness and response training would include understanding three broad reasons for inactivity. There are theological, sociological, and psychological reasons for inactivity. Byrne defines the three factors as follows: Theological factors focus on doctrine, belief and experience. Sociological factors include the loss or lack of close friends, low social status, lack of personal acquaintances, little or no involvement in the church programs, and coolness of active members toward inactive ones. Psychological factors emphasize personal factors such as attitudes, motivation, and emotion.<sup>4</sup> Psychologically, most people drop out of church because a situation has made them uncomfortable or anxious. This is sometimes the most difficult aspect for the church member and church seeking to reclaim to overcome. Jones says, "Up to 90 percent of inactive church members can recall a specific event that lead to their inactivity." He explains, "Conflict is by far the most encompassing category of inactivity. As many as 50% of inactive members may fall into this category." Members often recoil from conflict with the pastor, finances, doctrine, relationships, etc. Some may be legitimate while some may be misconceived.

Sociological factors reflect how people relate to one another in the church setting.

Sociologically, "people are not sardines". An overcrowded church can lead to dropouts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Herbert W. Byrne, *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*, (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing), 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Jones, 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19.

Speaking of sanctuary seating, Jones says of church members, "They may tolerate it for sixty seconds on an elevator, but they won't tolerate it for sixty minutes in a sanctuary."

Other sociological factors contributing to church inactivity include the need for services that meet a person's needs, such as the need for close and ever increasing fellowship. A person can only connect with thirty-five to eighty people at any one time. A deeper level of intimacy is needed, usually provided in smaller groups of eight to twelve. This is especially essential in a growing congregation as more and more people can feel lost in the crowd. Though it may sound strange as a reason for becoming inactive, Jones explains there is a sociological need of some members to advance in responsibility and leadership. Without this opportunity, some will drop out. McIntosh agrees, "When a Christian exercises his or her spiritual gift in a role or task within the church, there is a much greater potential for assimilation."

Theologically, inactivity is communicating at least three messages, according to Jones. First, inactivity speaks of the pain of sins effect. The pain of broken relationships results in anxiety, resulting in inactivity. This pain drives them away from the church. Secondly, inactivity speaks of a denial of discipleship. Jones says, "Inactivity is indicative of a spiritual condition inconsistent with the Christian profession and mission." <sup>11</sup> It is a contradiction of terms to be an "inactive" "member". However, people often choose

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Jones, 55.

avoidance rather than reconciliation. Thirdly, inactive members are expressing their need for more from their religious experience. Jones explains that often times, their longings "were not being met at the local church, either because of their inordinate needs or a spiritually shallow church ministry or fellowship." <sup>12</sup> Churches would do well to regularly evaluate ministry effectiveness and adjust accordingly.

The approaches for reclaiming inactive members are as numerous as the reasons given for inactivity. Three programs of reclamation are discussed below.

C. Kirk Hadaway, in his book "What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?", offers categories of church dropouts that are helpful in developing strategies to reach them. A summary of these are best illustrated in the following chart:<sup>13</sup>

General Type	Specific Type	Church Identity as a Child	Present Church Identity	Key Characteristics
Mental Member	Estranged	Most	Yes	Very Negative toward the church. Substantial private expressions of religiosity, but no public religiosity.
	Indifferent	Most	Yes	Some private religiosity, but do not see themselves as religious and do not attend church. Liberal social values; lower levels of life satisfaction.
	Nominal	Most	Yes	No traditional religious beliefs or expressions of religious behavior. Liberal social values; lower levels of life satisfaction; many are males in high-status denominations.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway, What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?, Creative Leadership Series, Lyle E. Schaller, Ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press) 1990, 124-125.

True Dropouts	Successful Swinging Singles	Yes	No	Young; single; doing very well financially; fairly happy; active life-style; very liberal social values; irreligious beliefs. Many live in the West.
	Sidetracked Singles	Yes	No	Young; single; not doing well financially; unhappy and pessimistic; very liberal social values; irreligious beliefs. Most are males.
	Young Settled Liberals	Yes	No	Young; married; doing well financially; very positive outlook on life; liberal social values; irreligious beliefs.
	Young Libertarians	Yes	No	Young; more libertarian than liberal; resist constraints; politically independent; not irreligious in belief; urban; socially active. Many are former Catholics; most are males.
	Irreligious Traditionalists	Yes	No	Older (39 and over); conservative social values; married or widowed; very irreligious beliefs. Many are females, many have been geographically mobile, and many live in the West.
Second Generation Nones	Second Generation Nones	No	No	Most are young. Liberal social values; irreligious family background. Many grew up in broken homes. Probably several distinct groups.

Understanding each of these groups and subgroups of unchurched Americans provides a church the opportunity to develop strategies for each specific group. Hadaway explains that Mental Members "view Sunday morning worship and Sunday School activities that

deduct from available family time, not as fulfilling as family activities." <sup>14</sup> To reclaim Estranged Mental Members, Hadaway suggests a low pressure visit to discover the barrier or "beef" that has separated them from the church. Those who are angry with the church will require additional visits. <sup>15</sup> Those who stopped attending due to lack of connecting with other members may resume activity when the problem is remedied. To prevent creating the Estranged, Hadaway suggests churches focus on the positive, on the need of today, and not so much on condemnation of all that's wrong in the world. Additionally, churches should be careful not to overwork the willing members, work hard to build relationships among members, and have a follow-up plan for those who leave church upset. <sup>16</sup>

Hadaway explains that the Indifferent drift away from church activity because they believe the church has nothing to offer. He suggests focusing on ministry to children to reach the Indifferent parents. Other ideas include providing support groups and classes that teach on practical subjects like car tune-ups, gardening, etc. Hadaway explains, "The key is to get unchurched persons involved in non-threatening, non-judgmental relationships with Christians so that they can see the fruits of a strong commitment to Christ and of active church involvement." To prevent creating Indifferent members, churches must maintain a strong sense of belonging and keep members focused on the ultimate meaning of church life and work, sharing Christ with others. 18

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Hadaway, 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., 64.

The next category, called True Dropouts, consist of Successful Swinging Singles, Sidetracked Singles, Young Settled Singles, and Young Libertarians. Reaching young dropouts is an area of great opportunity for churches because there are so many of them. Seventy-three percent of all who say they have no religious affiliation are forty two years of age or younger. <sup>19</sup> Most in this category dropped out in their late teens to early twenties. Getting them back or better yet, preventing them from getting away poses a challenge for most churches. As for the Successful Swinging Singles, they have no perceived need for the church or its ministries due to financial security and an active lifestyle that has no room for church. Sidetracked Singles differ from Successful Swinging Single in that they are not financially advancing and have little or no satisfaction with family life. Their pessimistic attitudes about life are generalized to the church, as well as any other institution that is part of the "system" that has treated them badly. This makes it very difficult to convince them that the church has anything to offer to help improve their lives. Young Settled Liberals have "drifted away from the church because of lack of interest, lack of common ground in the area of values, and the pull of other activities."<sup>20</sup> A satisfying family life fills the void of fulfillment experienced by other dropouts. They see themselves as getting along just fine without the church, though they do not mind their children attending if they desire. Young Libertarians reject being told what to do and any labels. They reject fixed religious views, though they are not without religious beliefs. In their view, the church and other institutions restrict freedom and are to be avoided. As Hadaway puts it, "Young Libertarians want to be their own persons, to live

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., 74.

by their own rules, and to have a good time."<sup>21</sup> Religious views are acceptable but belonging to a church is not.

To reclaim young dropouts, churches must capitalize on their characteristics. One of these is their transitional nature. Their moving around so much from region to region might create a change in lifestyle, opening their minds to church involvement. Hadaway points out that "moving to a new residence in a different state is related to conversion and to disaffiliation."<sup>22</sup> Some young dropouts find their way back to church when they marry spouses who are actively involved in church. Churches must be prepared for this new opportunity to express the Christian faith and show its relevance to everyday life. Since some, especially Successful Swinging Singles, indicate they are less than satisfied with family life, it may be possible to reach them through their kids. 23 Most want their children exposed to church and churches can capitalize on this by offering backyard Bible clubs, vacation Bible school, summer camps, retreats, etc. Churches can reach the unmarried young dropouts through active singles ministries that offer parties, concerts, and outings. Another avenue of reaching young dropouts is through involvement in social causes. By cooperating with other community agencies, Hadaway suggests churches address needs such as homelessness, drug addiction, and literacy. 24 Still another avenue for churches is in providing informational seminars on non-religious topics common to Christians and non-Christians, such as parenting, money management, weight loss, career

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83, quoting Hadaway and Roof, "Those Who Stay Religious 'Nones' and Those Who Don't," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.18 (1979), 197-98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Hadaway, 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid., 86.

planning, and divorce. Hadaway also suggests churches take a hard look at themselves and determine whether changes are needed in order to attract young dropouts. He states, "some of the things we love about church actually repel others." Suggested areas of adjustment are being accepting rather than condemning, finding out what young dropouts need from churches, and providing application of biblical principles for everyday life.

Completely preventing young dropouts is impossible due to their desire for independence that naturally accompanies growing up. Hadaway says, "the church may come to symbolize the heavy hand of parental authority." He continues that the problem churches face is "how to keep the flow of teenagers out of the church to a minimum, and how to keep those who are disengaging from the church from rejecting the religion of their youth altogether…"<sup>26</sup>

One way Hadaway suggests preventing young dropouts is to lead by example.

Religious parents generally rear religious children. Research seems to indicate that mothers and fathers have equal influence in the religiosity of their children later in life. 27

The influence of peers is also of great importance in preventing young dropouts. When a teen has close friends in church, the teen is more likely to stay connected. When the teen has no close friends in the church, the teen is more likely to dropout. 28 Involvement by youth in what Hadaway calls a "church-related youth subculture", plays a significant role in preventing young dropouts. Churches that have a lot of activities for the youth, such as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., 93-94, quoting Search Institute, *Project Overview for the Effective Christian Education Project*, part II, pp. 84, 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid., 95.

Sunday school, youth choir, before-school prayer breakfasts, pizza outings, bowling excursions, trips to away high school football games, trips to state youth conferences, trips to amusement parks, trips to Christian concerts, weekly home Bible studies, counseling time with the Youth Minister, and evangelism activities do much better at retaining youth as they age.<sup>29</sup> To summarize, Hadaway states, "In order to slow the stream of dropouts, churches must be able to teach children Christian values, to show youth that it is possible to have a good time without engaging in immoral or illegal activities, to show both children and youth the reality of God, and to demonstrate the relevance to the church to their lives and to the world."<sup>30</sup>

Two other True Dropouts subcategories include Irreligious Traditionalists and Second Generation Nones. These two describe a smaller group of middle-aged and older adults who reject a religious label altogether. The Irreligious Traditionalists "have many of the social characteristics that are usually associated with church affiliation" but "left behind their religious roots and found themselves in an environment in which a religious identity was deemed unnecessary." Second Generation Nones were raised outside of church and religion. Hadaway says, "Eighty-six percent of their fathers and 80 percent of their mothers either never attended church or attended church less than once a year." In summary, Second Generation Nones appear to be divided into three groups. One is "less educated, rural, low-income social isolates who were reared in families that lost contact with the church long ago." A second is "liberal, well-educated young singles reared in

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., 106.

secular families." A third, also referred to as Second Generation Estranged, is made up of those who "inherited a mistrust of the church, but not for the personal expression of identity" such as belief in God, prayer, and Bible reading. Additionally, there is a small group of true atheists and agnostics. Nones should not be considered unreachable, though they may be found to be resistant to the gospel. Hadaway states it well when he says, "All we can do is ensure that the unchurched are confronted with a clear presentation of the gospel in a situation that allows them to seriously consider a relationship with Christ." In his research describing this group, Rainer adds that many believe Jesus existed, but they need "clarification on Jesus". He continues that they have "much confusion over who Jesus really is" and since they do not reject the Scripture, "might be receptive to seeing the passages of the Bible that deal with Christ as the Son of God and as God himself." Interestingly, Rainer says six out of ten in this subcategory would go to church if invited.

To prevent producing more Irreligious Traditionalists, Hadaway suggests: 1) keeping track of members who move; 2) making concerted efforts to reactivate church members who rarely participate; 3) reaching new community residents; and 4) making sure that the message of the church is not only meaningful from a religious perspective but is also relevant to other areas of life.<sup>37</sup> All of these efforts must be within the context of relationships, involving unchurched people with Christians and offering special-interest

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 239-240.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Hadaway, 112.

groups in a setting outside the church. Hadaway suggests that Second Generation Nones will be responsive to the gospel as long as it is presented through relationships.<sup>38</sup> He recommends being aware of new residents in the community, developing a strong singles ministry, and training active church members to develop relationships with these individuals.

In his book, "*Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*", Herbert W. Byrne lists twenty common reasons for inactivity: illness, dissatisfaction, guilt, failure to meet needs, marriage conflicts, too busy, lack of spiritual life, non-participation, worship styles, preaching, irrelevancy, issues, too high expectations, outside activities, family situations, fatigue, outside pressures, cultural factors, disruptive events, and other factors such as weekend pleasure, old age, indifference, discouragement, failure, immorality, divorce, separation, loss of jobs, retirement, estrangement, loss of loved ones, and fear.<sup>39</sup>

Byrne gives principles to follow for reclaiming inactive members, that include consistent effort, a person-centered approach, developing different approaches for different type drop-outs, and involving church leadership, especially the pastor. Efforts must be consistent because any member presently active is vulnerable to becoming inactive due to life circumstances and misunderstandings. Since, an important function of the church is to grow believers, a person-centered approach to reclaiming church members keeps the focus on love and concern for people rather than to increase attendance, which would be church-centered. The motive must be concern for the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Byrne, 15-17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

person's personal relationship to and current fellowship with Jesus Christ. The church must be prepared to address life issues that may hinder that growth. Byrne's approach is customized not only for the church but also for the type of drop-out. Every church's approach though it may share some principles will be unique to its setting and the needs of those who have fallen away from church involvement. Love and concern must gain and grip the attention of the church leadership especially the pastor if the church body is going to develop this passion. Involvement by the pastor would include teaching the church the importance of reclaiming inactive members through bible studies and printed materials as well as training in how to reach inactive members.

The program Byrne describes involves first gathering information. <sup>41</sup> Each church must determine the criteria for who is "active" and who is "inactive". Information gathering will usually start with the church membership and Sunday school rolls. Financial and worship attendance records are good sources for identifying the inactive, as well. Byrne suggests another method for determining who is inactive is to place a card in the pew and ask the congregation to share information about who they know that is inactive. Helpful information about church member satisfaction can be attained through church surveys, allowing the church to address many concerns before they become an issue for someone to leave the church. This amount of information can mount up. There are many choices in church software today that can be used to retrieve current information that is stored on computer attendance rolls, greatly reducing the manpower for gathering data. For churches with less technology, a computer system would need to be purchased and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., 35ff.

data entered. Byrne recommends software by Shelby Systems, which can be contacted at www.shelbyinc.com.

Byrne's approach begins with prayer. This is appropriate since church inactivity is a spiritual problem at its root. He suggests special days of prayer for inactive members once a month, following a fellowship meal. Byrne's next phase is planning. Questions to answer when planning are "who is inactive", "why do people go to church", "what should be the goal of reclamation", "how current are the records", "when will the church begin the plan", and "what will be the policies and procedures for the reclamation ministry". In the planning stage, Byrne suggests establishing goals for inactive members such as 1) reconciliation, 2) restoring a sense of fellowship, 3) reclaiming interest and energy, 4) renewing responsibility to God for actions and attitudes, and 5) providing a basis for a continuing ministry of concern by the entire church. A ministry goal for active members would be to impress on them that to be on mission with God in the world also involves reaching inactive church members. Byrne suggests a systematic approach to reclaiming church members that extends over at least one church year. This will demonstrate that the ministry of reclamation is a regular program in the church.

Next, Byrne explains that every goal needs a method to achieve it.<sup>44</sup> These methods are determined by the church setting and church goal for reaching inactive members. Communication methods might include letters from the pastor reminding inactive members of their value and their need for the church. For members who've moved to other areas, letters could be written to other churches encouraging them to visit the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 43.

inactive member. Monthly news letters are also helpful, keeping the inactive member aware of church news and events. This continued connection is important. News of the church's reclamation ministry can be included. Personal telephone calls to inactive members are another avenue of communicating that they are missed. Some churches use pre-taped messages from the pastor to call inactive members. Personal visits from the pastor should never be overlooked as one of the most important ways of communicating the church's concern for church dropouts. The pastor may also want to prepare sermons teaching on the biblical and theological basis of church activity and the responsibility of the active to reach out to the inactive. The goal is to motivate the active members to reach out in reconciliation to those who've fallen back. Bryne suggests sermon topics such as "The Meaning of Church Membership", "The Church Member as Evangelist", and "The Mission of the Church". 45 The enthusiastic pastor must be reminded that the sermons are a means of grace to be used by the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of God's people toward God's heart for inactive members. It's not only important to get the facts across, but also to let God's Word change hearts.

The Sunday school is a very valuable tool in reaching inactive members. These small groups can reach out like no other ministry in the church when trained in the importance of contacting and encouraging inactive members. Sunday school attendance campaigns are effective in making the overall Sunday school aware of who is and who is not there. Class members can be paired with an inactive participant to seek and restore a relationship with them. Topics which cause people to dropout, such as family pressures

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ibid., 45.

or deeper spiritual growth, might be planned for special Sunday emphases throughout the Sunday school program.

This author appreciates Byrne including the need for ongoing visitation of those who are active as a means of preventing church dropouts. 46 Cards, letters, calls, and personal visits go a long way in maintaining active participation. This is best accomplished through the Sunday school as it is organized to emphasize visiting through outreach leaders for each class. This visitation emphasis should also be shared and embraced by the whole church as well. Visitors who will reach out to non-attendees should be trained recruits, not volunteers. Visitors must be recruited because of the volatile nature of some visits. In his book, Reclaiming Inactive Church Members, Jones agrees with Byrne that members recruited for this type ministry must "be non-defensive in the face of antagonism. They must have the self confidence and courage to initiate ministry with persons who feel alienated from and perhaps even hostile toward the church." They must have the ability to listen, not lecture. Listening skills are more important than visitation skills. Jones says, "In the case of reclamation ministry, the church needs to be 'all ears'". <sup>48</sup> Two helpful resources for developing listening skills are: *Helping Skills: A* Basic Training Program, by Stephen J. Danish and Allen L. Hauer (New York: Human Science Press, 1977), and *The Helping Interview*, by Alfred Benjamin (Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974). Byrne suggests training would include such topics as 1) biblical and theological basis of outreach, 2) the need for visitation evangelism, 3) the need for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Jones, 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13.

informal discussion by the participants, 4) careful review and discussion of the materials involved in the reclamation program, 5) overcoming fear of evangelism, 6) an overview of goals, possible outcomes, and schedules, 7) study of conflict in the church, 8) study of why people dropout, 9) study of solutions, and 10) practical principals for visitation.<sup>49</sup> Jones' approach recommends a formal ministry agreement be signed by those who will minister to inactive members. It is included below.

# **Ministry Agreement**<sup>50</sup>

I agree to the following conditions in making a commitment to minister to the inactive members of our church.

- 1. Attend all training and report sessions for the quarter.
- 2. Complete all assignments on date due.
- 3. Learn a special interview process for communicating with inactive members.
- 4. Participate in group discussions and seek to contribute creative ideas for ministry to inactive members.
- 5. Survey by phone several inactive members.
- 6. Make approximately four to six visits each to several inactive members.
- 7. Time required will be approximately two to four hours a week.

Signed	·
Date	

Byrne recommends that the first visit be made by the pastor, sharing information on current church activities and encouraging reactivation.<sup>51</sup> The point is to befriend the inactive member. Additional visits are best done in teams of at least two, determined by the visitor's relationship to the absentee. Two elements must be included in these visits:

1) Encouragement to become active again because they are missed, and 2) prayer in the home with the inactive member. Visits should be under girded with prayer prior to the

<sup>50</sup> Jones, 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Byrne, 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Byrne, 47.

visit. Follow up and evaluation is important to plan the next step in reaching the person(s). These evaluations are an opportunity to share the information with the appropriate ministry or people to continue outreach efforts. A follow-up visit can be made about a month later. Jones agrees, "Several contacts will need to be made...for results are seldom immediate." <sup>52</sup>

Jones prefers an intensive three month approach to reaching inactive members, though an ongoing ministry will continue.<sup>53</sup> With the pastor leading the way, Jones's phase one includes enlistment and orientation, covering the first two weeks (including an open invitation through announcements, inviting members to participate in the reclamation project and then the orientation held on week two). By the third week, Jones's phase two begins with the first of three teaching sessions. The first session addresses the issues of defining inactivity, an analysis of how well the church reaches inactive members, the strategy of the project, and categories of inactivity (conflict, unmet expectations, lack of affinity, and inability to relate). Week four consists of teaching the psychological, spiritual, and social aspects of inactivity, while week five covers methods for reclamation. 54 Jones's phase three, discovery of inactive members, covers weeks six and seven and involves identifying and surveying inactive members. Also part of this phase is planning for how the inactive church member will be contacted and time is spent looking over the membership roll. The survey is conducted in week seven and results lead to applying the appropriate approach, depending on survey responses. Jones's phase four

<sup>52</sup> Jones, 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Ibid., 106.

covers weeks eight through eleven as members make visits and other contacts, data is gathered, and presented at the end of week eleven. Jones recommends the resource *Ingathering: Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*, for a project approach to reclamation, though currently out of print. United Methodist John Savage's company, LEAD Consultants, is also a recommended resource.<sup>55</sup>

While there is no guarantee that these or other reclamation efforts will succeed, the effort must be made. What caused inactivity to begin with must be identified, addressed and in some cases apologized for, and a solution sought. Jones says "trying to get inactive members active again without addressing their needs is a waste of time—yours and theirs. It just won't work." Churches must find the heart, the time, the inactive member, and then solutions to their problems.

This study revealed the need for church leaders and members in Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia churches to develop and maintain better tracking systems of those who once were active and have suddenly or gradually become inactive. Hemphill and Taylor put it plainly, "You can't provide excellence in ministry if you don't keep good records." Records, which warn a church that a member is losing interest, are vital to the church that wants to improve its retention rate of active church members.

The condition of some church's record keeping systems reveals at best unawareness of inactivity and at worst a disinterest in restoring members to active participation in the church. Many of the inactive member's addresses given were out of date or incorrect. If

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Ken Hemphill and Bill Taylor, *Ten Best Practices to Make Your Sunday School Work*, (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2001), 164.

one genuinely cares about every member's spiritual growth and involvement in the local church, one must be more diligent in obtaining and keeping accurate information on one's members. This would require better record keeping systems whether from a publisher or computerized, persons assigned the task of monitoring records, and persons trained and assigned to responding to church members falling back in attendance.

Churches must get away from collecting data for data's sake. Churches must only collect information that will be used. Hemphill and Taylor remind churches, "Asking for and recording information that no one uses creates needless work and may raise questions about the relevancy of the whole process." 58

In Matthew 25:36, Jesus teaches the importance of maintaining awareness of the needs and condition of others. When addressing sickness, Jesus said, "I was sick and you visited Me." Churches must realize that maintaining awareness of someone's absence resulting in a ministry visit is equivalent to visiting Christ. The responsibility for obtaining accurate information is ultimately the church clerk's, but is also shared by a church's administrative staff. The responsibility of maintaining current information is also shared by the church family at large, as well as small groups which are more familiar with individual circumstances. In smaller churches tracking and addressing the concerns or needs of non-attending members will be the responsibility of the congregation, Sunday school classes, and church leaders. In larger churches, the Sunday school will be the primary resource for contacting the sick, with follow up by the deacons and pastors. Sunday schools must be organized with care group leaders to provide this ministry. Classes can also be organized to have a leader that ensures the class has class greeters and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid, 165.

name tags, produces class newsletters, organizes get-acquainted activities, celebrations of special occasions and social events. <sup>59</sup> There must be a standard process for communicating between the Sunday school care group leader and the church leadership so that needs are communicated regularly. While some may say that some responsibility also falls to the inactive church member to contact the local church when problems, sickness, or relocation occurs, Jones says, "The bottom line of ministry is that two people must get together and have some kind of meaningful communication. Ideas must be exchanged and relationships established. In order for this to occur, someone has to take the initiative—and it won't be the inactive member!" <sup>60</sup>

This research revealed that many inactive members do not tell anyone beyond their immediate family of the real causes of their inactivity. While it may be true what Jones says about inactive member's unwillingness to contact the church when problems arise, it should be stated that this unwillingness or oversight of the inactive member to contact someone with their needs/concerns is directly opposed to James 5:16, where we are commanded to "Confess our faults one to another." Matthew 18:15 is more pointed when Jesus said, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault." Solutions to problems can only be found when problems are communicated and addressed. Though many people drop-out and then complain that when they left no one came to see them, it is this author's position that the responsibility lies partially if not equally on the shoulders of the one who was offended.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 163-165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Jones, 67.

Perhaps an area of weakness for many churches is in assimilating new members into the church with clear and high expectations set forth at the front end of membership. Rainer boldly states, "If churches effectively integrated all new members, reclamation would not need to be addressed. In a given year a church will lose up to two percent of its attendance due to death, three percent to transfer, and six percent to reversion." Warren defines assimilation as "the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church."62 He explains, "The manner in which people join your church will determine their effectiveness as members for years to come." Hemphill and Taylor add, "The goal of assimilation is to help people feel they are wanted, that they belong, and that they are needed."64 Giving particular attention to new members soon after joining will increase a church's retention rate since most who dropout, dropout early. Making membership more important starts when a person or family joins the church. Expectations must be clearly understood when they join. Rainer shares how one church used high expectations in establishing requirements for membership. 65 Every new member would 1) Attend a ten week membership class; 2) Attend a four hour session on understanding and discovering spiritual gifts; and 3) Be placed in some level of ministry. Schaller agrees, "From a longterm perspective the most influential single approach to increasing church attendance is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 284, quoting McIntosh and Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 309.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Hemphill and Taylor, 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Rainer, Effective Evangelistic Churches, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 172.

to raise the level of expectations."66 Low expectations always result in low commitment levels. Byrne suggests displaying pictures of new members, new member packets filled with information about church life such as a directory, church brochures, ministries, programs, lists of officers, teachers and workers.<sup>67</sup> High expectations can be addressed through new member classes or, in a smaller setting, with a discussion between the pastor and the family or individual joining. New member classes were the second most mentioned methodology used by effective evangelistic churches in Rainer's study of effective evangelistic churches. <sup>68</sup> These classes include doctrinal instructions, church orientation, ministry opportunities awareness, and the purpose and vision of the church.<sup>69</sup> Byrne states, it is "very likely those who attend classes for new members will more likely avoid inactivity later on." He suggests the class include teaching the danger signs of becoming inactive such as anger, coldness, tardiness, absenteeism, criticism, and neglect of worship. Many churches are fearful of setting high expectations, fearing they will "run people off". However, Kelley reminds the church of a very important principle: "What costs nothing, accomplishes nothing. If it cost nothing to belong to such a community, it can't be worth very much." This present studies survey of church covenants revealed that a deeper commitment to the church should be a prerequisite to membership, as it was in the past. Though many areas of church life might be included, a greater emphasis on

<sup>66</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, 44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Byrne, 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Rainer, Effective Evangelistic Churches, 178-179.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Byrne, 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a New Preface for the ROSE edition*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 53.

the formal promise to work out differences, to guard the unity, and to forgive one another would go a long way in maintaining church involvement before problems arise.

Another area of assimilation that must be strengthened is in building and maintaining friendships. Warren says, "people are not looking for a friendly church as much as they are looking for friends."<sup>72</sup> One way of establishing friendships early is to develop a brief questionnaire to be completed by all new members. Include questions like: When is your birthday? What do you enjoy doing most? What are your hobbies? Do you have children? What are their ages? Where do you work? What are the things you most like to do as a family? Hemphill and Jones suggest photocopying them and placing them in a notebook in each Sunday school class and department to be used by members to get to know each other. 73 Yeakley says that statistically each of us needs at least seven friends if we are to stay in church. 74 This can be accomplished intentionally by churches that are committed to preventing inactivity through assimilation. A good approach for developing friendships is called "First Friends", a ministry developed out of Carmel Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. 75 This program matches a *first friend* to every new family seeking to join the church, including referring people to appropriate Bible study classes and ministry opportunities. More information on this approach can be found by clicking the resource tab at www.discipleshipnetwork.com.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Warren, 312.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Ken Hemphill and R. Wayne Jones, *Growing an Evangelistic Sunday School*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> McIntosh and Martin, 81, quoting Win Arn and Charles Arn in , *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Monrovia, Calif.: Church Growth Press, 1982), 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Jay Hancock, *First Friends Ministry to New Members*" <u>http://www.discipleshipnetwork.com/</u> (22 February 2006).

McIntosh and Martin suggest six foundational pillars for assimilating through friendships. The first pillar is that of being fun to be with. Being together brings joy. The church is wonderfully positioned to provide opportunities for people with common interests to come together and have fun. The second pillar is a deepening relationship. McIntosh says, "We all need a circle of friends who know the real us and love us anyway. They accept us and they trust us." Sunday school is perhaps the best place to cultivate such relationships. The third pillar is an inspiring relationship. This is where each person motivates the other to change and grow. The fourth pillar is encouragement. This is letting one another know they are thought of and are believed in. The fifth pillar is nurture. This is the giving nature of friendship where continued investment in one another to see each other grow and thrive. The last pillar is devotion based on the good of one another, not what one's own self can get from it.

The importance of small groups cannot be overlooked when it comes to reaching the unchurched, assimilating new members, and to retention. McIntosh and Martin say small groups must be small (less than fifteen people), must meet regularly (at least once a month), and must create a sense of accountability (people will be missed if they aren't there). They explain that small groups provide individuals the opportunity to study the bible together leading to moral and mental change, to be supported through building one another up, and to serve through caring ministries. Warren believes, "Small groups are the most effective way of closing the back door to your church."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> McIntosh and Martin, *Finding Them Keeping Them.* 78-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Ibid., 95-102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Warren, 327.

back to the practice of inviting people to Bible study/Sunday school. Rainer states, "One of the reasons Sunday school has declined in many churches is the failure of church members to invite and accompany the unchurched to a Sunday school class...The problem is not that Sunday school is not working; the problem is that most churches are not working Sunday school." Every member of Sunday School must realize that they are the ones responsible for reaching out to others, be it in evangelism or reclamation. In his book, *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Rainer asked effective churches, "What specific measures do you take to ensure that the people baptized remain involved in the church?" He states, "Hundreds of churches told us that their specific measure for assimilation was the Sunday school." Far from being a dinosaur of the past, Sunday school is an effective, contemporary tool for preventing church dropouts. In Rainer's study, over 90 percent of the assimilation and discipleship methodologies were directly or indirectly related to Sunday school.

On the opposite end of new member assimilation is when a member chooses to leave a fellowship to join another. Though these circumstances are regrettable, they are unavoidable. Churches may prevent transferring members from becoming church dropouts by placing more emphasis on what a member should do when the Lord leads them from one fellowship to another. Though it may seem odd, this topic can be discussed in new member classes. Helpful material to include in this discussion can be found in Wayne Kiser's book *Getting More Out of Church*. 82 Chapter twelve is devoted to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Rainer, The Unchurched Next Door, 245.

<sup>81</sup> Rainer, Effective Evangelistic Churches, 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Wayne Kiser. *Getting More Out of Church: You Can Find More Meaningful Involvement* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986) 157ff.

subject of "Knowing When to Change Churches" including when to leave, when not to leave, and how to leave. Some churches use exit interviews as well as reminding the person of one's promises in the membership covenant of joining a new fellowship as soon as possible. The dangers of dropping out of fellowship altogether should be thoroughly discussed and strong encouragement should be given to diligently seek out another fellowship and formally join oneself to that local body.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

Though the present study examined many issues surrounding non-attendance, it does not cover all aspects of the subject. The studies limitations might include the following:

Inactive church members often have low trust levels of church and church leaders.

This can be due to perceived inadequacies in the church and its leadership. Perhaps one of the limitations of this study was requesting inactive members to complete a survey from an unknown pastor of a sister church. Naturally, the inactive member of another church would have a lower trust level of a sister church's pastor. Jones says, "members will not share real reasons for their inactivity until you've earned the right to be trusted...

Until you convince the member that you truly are interested in him, excuses are probably all you will hear." Recently, this low trust level was evident when on a visitation assignment, an inactive member of this author's own church informed the visitation team that she didn't feel like she knew her pastor well enough to fill out the survey and send it back.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Jones, 18-19.

Another limitation of the study might include the fact that though 63 churches were approached to participate in the study, only six agreed. Again, this resulted in the survey reflecting probabilities rather than certainties. Some cited the concern over how church members would respond to having their information distributed to another pastor. Others claimed not to have a non-attendance problem due to recently purging their rolls. Still others communicated they were not interested either by stating so or by not responding to the request letter mailed to all pastors or not returning phone calls placed to all pastors. Certainly broader participation by churches would have strengthened the statistical results of the study.

Perhaps additional studies might examine the impact of worship styles, worship times, youth ministry, new ministry development, the degree of involvement in serving, church discipline, conflict management training, preaching styles, sermon topic/content, and church/community partnerships on church attendance. Other areas of future research might include the growing influence of the house church, emerging church, and cyber church movements, as well as the influence of the secularization of American society on church attendance.

#### Conclusion

As human beings, one often feels justified if reasons can be found for one's choice to be uninvolved in church. However, this study has sought to demonstrate that Scripture, Doctrine, Church History, and current research bear strong witness against the independent spirit of resisting church attendance. This study has sought to further equip pastors, church leaders, and church members in Southwest Virginia and beyond with

knowledge of the reasons people give for not attending regularly and a variety of reclamation strategies attempted by others. Knowing inactive member's reasons is only the beginning. Developing a strategy and the stamina for reclamation must be birthed out a heart that is convinced that, regardless of the reason for leaving, the Lord wants the inactive reconciled with Himself and His church. Pastors and other church leaders are faced with the difficult task of acknowledging the need of reclamation, researching the topic of reclamation, developing a strategy for both reclaiming inactive members while retaining the active, convincing their congregations of the high priority of reclamation, training their congregations in the ministry of reclamation, and perhaps most difficult, convincing the absentee that returning to church is the right thing to do. Church members also have a large role to play in praying for the inactive, being trained to reach out, and participating in personally contacted them.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave to His church the marvelous privilege and responsibility of bearing witness to the world of His love and forgiveness. He could have couched this message in many formats, but He chose to put this treasure in earthen vessels, knowing there would be conflicts to work out and crises to solve. This means the Lord intended for believers to bear with one another, love one another, and forgive one another, for the sake of the mission. He offered no alternate plan for providing salt and light in the world. It is His church, His Body, which must demonstrate to the world what it means to be made new creatures by saving faith and to have fellowship with God and with one another.

In their book, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church*, Mack and Sweeney summarize this author's position precisely. They ask:

Is it possible to have a vibrant spiritual life and successfully nurture our relationship with God apart from a local church? Is it just 'conventional wisdom' that tells us we

must be a part of one? Is it possible to move closer to God and farther away from the church? Are there 'lots of alternatives' to the church when it comes to our spiritual growth? And are those who forsake all church involvement truly blameless for that choice? The answer to all those questions, according to Scripture, is a resounding no!<sup>84</sup>

May the Lord help His church know His heart for those who are astray and cause Her to diligently, intelligently, and compassionately pursue them until all who will are reclaimed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church*, (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P and R Publishing, 1996), 6.

# APPENDIX 1 Letter to Pastors

Dear Fellow SBCV Pastor,

Greetings in the Name that is Above Every Name! I hope this letter finds you well and your congregation blessed. I'm Pastor Alan McCullough of First Baptist Church of Damascus, Virginia. I am in the process of writing my thesis for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Liberty University. I've chosen a topic that I believe will be helpful to us as pastors, to our congregations, and to our state convention. I am studying the reasons why believers in our local area, who are members of our SBCV churches, no longer attend church. I would like to accomplish this by using a survey that explores the possible reasons why they do not attend. A copy of the cover letter and survey is enclosed.

I would be grateful if you and your church would agree to participate in this study. The survey *results* would be *completely anonymous*. All the answers of all the churches will be grouped together and only the answers will be shared. To accomplish this study, I would ask several of our SBCV churches for a list of *20 or more names and addresses* of non-attending church members to mail the survey to.

I believe this study will help us understand the hearts and minds of those who no longer attend and also help us more effectively reach out to them again. I am convinced we must "go after the lost sheep" of our area and bring them back into the fold.

Thank you for your consideration. I understand if you would like to talk this over with your church leadership and congregation before replying. If it will be okay, I will call you within the month to inquire of your church's decision whether or not to participate. If you'd like to call me sooner, I can be reached at the following numbers:

#276-475-3002 church #276-475-5564 home #276-492-6240 cell

By His Grace

Alan C. McCullough

# APPENDIX 2 Letter to Church Members

Dear Church Member,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Allow me to introduce myself. I am Alan McCullough, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Damascus, Virginia. Like your church, my church is part of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV). I got your name and address from a Baptist Church that is a member of the SBCV and considers you a church member.

I am also a doctoral student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. For my thesis project, I am currently researching the reasons why many born again Christians do not frequently attend church. It is generally recognized that on any given Sunday, only about 1/3 to 1/2 of church members actually are in attendance at church. I hope to find out why, and help to develop strategies to increase the church attendance of church members. Your information can help me and churches.

As a way to better understand the reasons why many believers do not frequently attend church, I'm asking that you assist me in this research by completing **a short survey** and mailing it back to me in the postage paid envelope enclosed. **Your identity will remain absolutely anonymous**. **Only your responses will be included in the study**. Your perspectives are very important and will help pastors and churches all across America provide more effective ministry. Again, thank you for your time completing the survey and returning it, as soon a possible, in the postage paid envelope provided. May God bless you and yours.

In Christ,

Alan C. McCullough Pastor, First Baptist Church Damascus, Virginia pastor@firstbaptistdamascus.org

# APPENDIX 3 **Survey of Church Attendance**

1.	I am a born again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Check your answer.)
	o Yes
	o No
2.	I consider myself a member of a local Baptist church that is a member of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia Denomination.  (Check your answer.)  O Yes O No
3.	I attend church
	(Check your answer.)
	<ul> <li>Almost every Sunday (40 or more Sundays each year)</li> <li>About every other Sunday (20 to 39 Sundays each year)</li> <li>About one Sunday each month (6 to 19 Sundays each year)</li> <li>Holidays and Special Sundays (5 or fewer Sundays each year)</li> <li>Have not attended for one year or more</li> </ul>
4.	If you attend less than 20 Sundays, what are the top three reasons you do not frequently attend church?
	• If there is more than one reason that you do not attend church frequently, <b>place a number</b> (#1, #2, #3, etc.) <b>in the blank</b> beside the reasons you do not attend.
	• #1 being the most important reason to you, #2 = second most important reason to you, #3 = third most important reason to you, etc.
	Got out of the Habit
	Health
	Hobbies
	Hurt by Church or Pastor
	Lacks Programs/Ministries
	Lacks Leadership, Direction, Organization
	Neglected Need by the Church or Pastor
	No Application to Daily Life
	No Friends, Connections
	<ul><li>Style of Music</li><li>Style of Preaching</li></ul>
	Too Busy
	Work
	Other (Describe)
	Go to Bac.



5. What do you think the following biblical passages are teaching and does it relate to church attendance?

#### (Circle "Y" for Yes and "N" for No)

**Hebrews 10:25** "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

0	Does this verse command that we attend church?	Y or N
0	Does this verse speak of why we attend church?	Y or N

**Ephesians 5:25** "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her."

0	Does this verse teach who established the church?	Y or N
0	Does this verse teach how Christ feels about the church?	Y or N
0	Does this verse teach how we should feel about the church	Y or N

**Ephesians 1:22,23** "And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

- O Does this verse teach who is in charge of the church? Y or N
- O Does this verse teach that the church is people, not a building? Y or N

**Ephesians 3:10** "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church."

O Does this verse teach an important role of the church? Y or N

**1 Timothy 3:15** "that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth".

- o Does this verse speak of the church as a building? Y or N
- o Does this verse speak of the church's important role? Y or N

6. Would any of the following **actions** by the church encourage you to attend more frequently?

# (Check all that apply)

- Letter
  - o From Pastor
  - o From Church Leader
  - o From Church Member
- Phone Call
  - o From Pastor
  - o From Church Leader
  - o From Church Member
- Visit
  - o From Pastor
  - o From Church Leader
  - o From Church Member
  - Change/Improvement
  - o Admit Wrong/Apology
  - o Nothing can be done.
  - o Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Who have you shared these views with?

### (Check all that apply)

- o Pastor
- Church Leader
- o Church Member
- o Family
- o No One
- o Other \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in this survey. It will help me complete the research for my degree and will benefit many churches.

Please mail this survey back to me in the postage paid envelope provided at your nearest convenience. Again, thank you and may God bless you.

# Bibliography

- BP Press, *Sept.11 Attacks Hardly Influenced Americans' Spirituality*, Database online, n.d., Available from <<u>http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article\_main\_page/0,1703</u>, A%253D1501772526M%253D50011,00.html.
- Barna, George A. "How America's Faith Has Changed Since 9-11". *The Barna Group, Ltd.*, November 26, 2001. Database online. Available from <a href="http://barna.org/FlexPage.aspx? Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=102">http://barna.org/FlexPage.aspx? Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=102</a>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "New Book Describes the State of the Church in 2002". *The Barna Group, Ltd.*, June 4, 2002. Database on-line. Available from <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=114">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Barna Update&BarnaUpdateID=114</a>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991". *The Barna Group, Ltd.*, May 4, 2004. Database on-line. Available from <a href="http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?PAge=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=163">http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?PAge=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=163</a>.
- Bettenson, Henry, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*. 2d. ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Byrne, Herbert W. *Reclaiming Inactive Church Members*. Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2003.
- Carrigan, Cky J. *Believer's Church and Believer's Baptism: A Current Concern in Southern Baptist Churches?* Database on-line. March 13, 2005. Available from <a href="http://ontruth.com/believersbaptism.html">http://ontruth.com/believersbaptism.html</a>.
- Coenen, Lothar. "Church", in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown.Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975, vol. 1, 291; quoted by Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Criswell, W.A. *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Vol. 3 Ecclesiology. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.
- Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.

- George, Timothy and Denise, eds. *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 1996.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day.* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. What Can We Do about Church Dropouts? Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart G. *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991.
- Hancock, Jay. *First Friends Ministry to New Members*. Database online February 22, 2006. Available from <a href="http://www.discipleshipnetwork.com">http://www.discipleshipnetwork.com</a>.
- Hemphill, Ken and Bill Taylor. *Ten Best Practices to Make Your Sunday School Work.* Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2003.
- Hemphill, Ken and R. Wayne Jones. *Growing an Evangelistic Sunday School*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989.
- Hobbs, Herschel H. *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Revised Edition. Nashville: Convention Press, 1998.
- Jones, Mark S. Reclaiming Inactive Church Members. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988.
- Kelley, Dean M. Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a New Preface for the ROSE Edition. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986.
- Kiser, Wayne. Getting More Out of Church: You Can Find More Meaningful Involvement. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986.
- Leonard, Bill. "Baptist Churches", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol.2, ed. Lindsay Jones. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.
- Lipphard, William B. "What is a Baptist?" *Religions in America*, ed. Leo Rosten. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.
- Mack, Wayne A. and David Swaverly. *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996.
- McBeth, H. Leon. The Baptist Heritage. Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1987.

- McIntosh, Gary and Glen. Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- Newman, A.H. "Baptists", *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., vol.1, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969.
- Noll, Mark A. A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992.
- Rainer, Thom S. Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Who Reveal What Works and What Doesn't. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Surprising *Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages As Keys to Sharing Your Faith. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003.
- Schaller, Lyle E. *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Schmidt, Karl L. "ekklesia", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; quoted by Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Songer, Harold S. "Church", in *Holman Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Trent C. Butler. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991.
- Stagg, Frank. New Testament Theology. Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1962.
- Stevens, William W. *Doctrines of the Christian Religion*. Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1967.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *The Bride: Renewing Our Passion for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Thayer, Jospeh H. *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2000.
- The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000. Nashville: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2000.

- *The Holy Bible, New King James Version.* Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1988.
- Vine, W.E. and F.F.Bruce, eds. *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995.
- Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Greek Parallel*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992.

#### **VITA**

## Alan C. McCullough

#### **PERSONAL**

Born: October 10, 1969

Married: Roben G. McCullough

Children: Dean Garrett Austin, born October 23, 1986.

Taylor Alana McCullough, born November 26, 1991.

### **EDUCATION**

Bachelor of Science, Mississippi College, 1992.

Master of Counseling Psychology, Mississippi College, 1995.

Master of Divinity, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000.

## **MINISTERIAL**

Licensed and Ordained: January, 1999, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Minister of Music, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Wake Forest, North Carolina, 1998-2000.

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Damascus, Virginia, 2000-Present.