

ReConnect – with the Church

1 Corinthians 11-14

MPS God saves people to live as the church, His people bearing faithful witness in the world, serving His redemptive mission.

OBJ Four Purposes that compel a Christian to ReConnect to the church.

INTRO I spoke with a man this week who told me, “My wife and I have not been to church in well over a year, but we’re getting more church now than ever before. We listen to five sermons every week.” His sentiment is all too familiar, but deplorably broken, rooted in the lie of Satan to deceive Christians.

TRANS I’ve mentioned the trend of “deconstructing faith” several times in the last few weeks. This morning I plan to do a bit of deconstruction of my own, not FOR me but for us.

The church once held a central position in American culture. This historical fact has faded over the last half century, likely due largely and directly proportionate to the booming affluence of the last 100 years. We can measure this decline locally in a far shorter time. For many reasons, a culture once defined by the vastness of its religious presence has now become, predominantly, something completely other. I’m not making a value statement about this, but simply saying that we are not unaffected by this cultural reality. *Spiritual perversion arises as much, if not more, from a religious over-indulgence as much as from complete absence.*

That the church has lost its prominence in the “center” of American life is not of great concern for me; I mourn it, but do not fret it. The loss that I do mourn is how so many who claim Christ’s name have removed the priority of the church from their lives. This breaks my heart. I’m not concerned about whether the church will survive; the Biblical conviction of the enduring power of the church is established for me. Making sure people who sit in the church every week are clear for their own lives is one of the great burdens of my life and ministry. I’m not interested in harboring counterfeit Christians. I’m laboring to lead people to be real Christ-followers in life...together, in the face of what’s going on in the world. The world doesn’t make us Christians, and it can’t un-make us.

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27***

ILLUS At times I am told, “Well, I don’t believe in church membership.” Or ‘Covenant Membership’ as we call it at LifePoint. Some argue, “‘Member’ does not mean the same thing in these verses as you use it.” To that I say, “You are right. It doesn’t mean the exact same. It means something far greater and much more. And it is toward that “much more, far greater” that LifePoint’s Covenant Membership aims to lead you for the spiritual wellness and wholeness that the gospel forms in you.”

God saves people to live as the church, His people bearing faithful witness in the world, serving His redemptive mission.

OBJ Four Purposes compel a Christian to ReConnect with the church.

1. Christians honor one another to recognize God’s authority and our identity in Jesus.

³*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

⁷*For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

¹¹*Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. **1 Cor 11:3, 7-9, 11-12***

I point us to these verses not to remove the controversial portions, but for a specific purpose. In calling us to recommit to I aim to show Paul’s teaching about the church. Paul’s teaching is foundational for our pattern of practice and



understanding the church. He is not measuring the value or worth of people or, specifically, genders. Paul explains the order of human relationships from God's design in creation as the foundation of his teaching. His point is that we recognize that we are people under God's authority. This is not about preferential hairstyles, though his point surely DOES impact every aspect of how we present ourselves, but that is secondary to his main point. [Paul teaches that Christians present themselves and relate in a way that demonstrates our recognition that we live under the authority of God.](#)

He rebukes the Corinthians for their lack of consideration for one another. He points out their selfish actions in approaching the Lord's Table, not even considering one another, but acting selfishly to indulge their gluttonous and drunken behavior, "One goes hungry, another gets drunk."^{11:21} Now unless you think more highly of yourself because you've never gotten drunk at church, wait. Paul teaches that Christians honor one another for God's glory by recognizing our common identity in Jesus. This is NOT about how some people are more worthy than others, but how Jesus Christ is worthy above all. The way we humble ourselves in worship of God to honor one another declares Jesus' Lordship over us all. The Church demonstrates the supremacy of God's authority and the unity of our identity in Christ by the way we honor one another and join together in worship of One Lord, Jesus Christ. [The essence of the church is manifested by how Christians honor one another to recognize our authority under and identity in Jesus.](#)

ILLUS Identifying with Christ and His body A Moroccan man was ready to be baptized, so he asked the missionary, "how will I be brought back to life?" The missionary was confused and asked, "what do you mean?" He clarified, "I am ready to die with Christ, but I am curious how he brings me back to life." Stunned in realizing the man was serious, he responded, "You don't physically die in baptism, but spiritually you die to self by faith." The missionary walked away from the encounter humbled, realizing he was ready to die to Christ to receive His life in Him. [Salvation means we die to self to live for Jesus by living under His authority and identifying with His people in the local church.](#)

2. Christians serve among the church to build unity and care for one another.

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:24b-25

In First Corinthians Twelve Paul addresses spiritual gifts in the church. He teaches extensively on gifts here not just to explain the concept, but to correct the way the Corinthians were perceiving them. They used their gifts to bolster their standing among the church, to make themselves look more spiritual than others. And, as we are all too familiar with in our day as well, the crazier the manifestation obviously the more spiritual the person. Paul says that has nothing to do with God's purpose for spiritual gifts. Holy Spirit apportions gifts to each one for God's purposes, not for self-edification. Building unity by mutual ministry to one another is the purpose of our gifts from God. [God gives gifts to Christians by Holy Spirit to serve among the church for building up and caring for one another.](#)

ILLUS I recently had a conversation about serving in the church. The person mentioned how good it was that "Person A", who was obviously weaker in certain instances, had "Person B", who was strong in those instances. I responded, "Yes, you are right. And it is also good that Person B has Person A, because a gift without a need never produces ministry." This is why there are strong and weak people in the church. AND this is why we are all strong and weak in different instances. Every time we minister, we exercise the strength of our gift. And every time we receive ministry, we demonstrate our need in weakness.

NO ONE in the church is only strong or weak; only those who show one to hide the other or use one to serve self. And before you make the flawed conclusion that it is our strength we defer to, I say to you that when a Christian acts as a consumer only, taking from the church and not serving, you live out of spiritual weakness and confine yourself to the same, neglecting the opportunity for personal growth by a failure to serve. [The church that properly stewards spiritual gifts is not impressed with the greatness of gift manifestation but grateful for the sacrifice made to exercise them for the good of others.](#)

ILLUS The demand of Kevin and Nancy Romine I learned this in one of my youth pastorates. There was a brother and sister, I'll call them Kevin and Nancy, who always came with a high, and often heavy, need. They were poor, lived a good way outside the community where we ministered, their parents never bothered to bring them to church, and often did not fit



well among the “normal” crowd. We would often have to drive out to pick them up and bring them to church or activities. And if we didn’t, we had to find someone who would give them a ride. It was so easy to look at them and think, “Man, they really need our help.” But I tell you, the presence of their weakness has a far more lasting effect for good and godliness in me than I ever had in them. The ministry they demanded of me was typically not the one I was ready to give, but the insignificant sacrifice it required of me has often been a humbling reminder to me of how often I allow such small things to interfere with ministry, usually defaulting to personal preference or comfort instead of loving and serving another.

APPL The next time you get frustrated at someone who always seems to be in need, STOP and thank the Lord for a people among whom we can be needy, and find grace and ministry for the greatness of our need. Ask the Lord to remind you of your weakness, and to remain faithful and joyful in the exercise of your strength. And if you find that you never have need among these people, repent of your blindness and hardness of heart, and invite gospel ministry into your life. [Spiritual self-sufficiency is NOT a Biblical or gospel virtue.](#)

When Paul describes WHAT the church does by defining WHO she is, Christians joined together, it is set within the context teaching on spiritual gifts. The church that fails to serve one another will never know true unity, its members will only remain spiritually weak and immature, but strong in self, lingering in every form of hurt and woundedness. [The church needs the ministry of every Christian to be a church. And every Christian needs the church to minister to one another.](#) By God’s grace, NEVER on my watch for LifePoint Church; never let this be true of you or of us.

3. Love that excels above all.

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7***

How we love to talk about love yet get it so wrong so often. Paul teaches on love in the middle of his instruction on how the church must operate because he says that all of who we are and what we do is nothing without love. [Love is greater than all our highest religious activity](#)(.1-3). He defines love both by what it is and is not, and that it will endure forever because it is the greatest. Most interesting of all, his definition and description cites one action after another but never once mentions love the way we principally define, as feeling or emotion. This should stricken Christians to recognize how far away from a Biblical understanding of love we have strayed, and how hard we must labor to recapture. Then, he says that love is the maturing of a person, ultimately to know fully and be fully known. [Love is never its own principal expression but demands an action to be demonstrated, and it matures the person expressing it as that person grows in it.](#)

To understand how love excels to mature a person we must include a verse from Peter. Peter states love’s highest work when he exhorts, *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”*(1 Peter 4:8) So often, we incorrectly accept this verse to mean some manner of overlooking, dismissing, neglecting or simply ignoring sin. NOTHING could be further from the truth. That’s the opposite of what is meant. Love covers a multitude of sin NOT when it ignores, dismisses, or overlooks, but when it confronts and addresses sin by the gospel. Any ‘child’ can ignore a sin, which is exactly what sin beckons us to do. Love chooses to do the opposite, so that its practice, affects, and ultimately, its effect can be covered by God’s love in Jesus Christ. [Christians are committed to excel above the standard of the world to excel in love to the highest extent by applying the greatest love for the glory of God in every situation and circumstance. Church is the people among whom you practice your love to place it where it belongs, first, and to excel above all as the greatest.](#)

4. Speak to Build Up Each Other.

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. **1 Corinthians 14:1-4***

Paul culminates his teaching by clarifying the central conversation among the church. They were arguing over whose showed their “gift” best and most, even celebrating the most outlandish manifestation. The volume of instruction he includes teaches us much about the topic of tongues and prophecy, but that’s not Paul’s main point. Rather, it only validates how



skewed and perverted their understanding of religious practice had truly become. **Christians never exercise spiritual gifts nor devotional practices among the church to exalt self, but to exhort, encourage and edify one another.**

The defining conversation for Christians among the church is to prophecy to build each other up. Prophecy is not some conjured-up telling of the unknown, but the regular, faithful, consistent, and love-lavished reminder of every promise God has already said "Yes!" to in Jesus Christ, so to strengthen one another in heart to believe and obey the commands of Christ in the daily walk of life. **WHO are you speaking to today to build up in Jesus?** **Christians need to the church to fulfill their faithfulness in following Jesus, and the church needs Christians who are following Jesus to fulfill their mission.**

TRANS Four purposes of the church that compel a Christian to ReCommit.

God saves people to live as the church, His people bearing faithful witness in the world, serving His redemptive mission.

APPL Last week I asked if you had considered what affect this season had had on you or your family. Today I tell you that the greatest defense against slow-motion conditioning is regular, faithful participation in personal disciplines of the faith and regular participation in the local church. Today, I ask you some diagnostic questions again to reflect over the last year...

- ? Has this last season deepened and strengthened your understanding of, desire for, and commitment to participate in, or diminished the relevance and importance of, the local church for you / your family?
- ? Over the last year, have you found yourself more desirous of the conversation that builds up and strengthens, hungrier for fellowship with other Christians, or getting by okay with a lessen participation in the church?

CLOSE Today, I cannot escape the heavy reality of our work in the church. Here I stand, pleading with people called Christians to simply commit to the most natural practice, gathering with other saints as the body of believers. All the while, pastors and leaders in Afghanistan recently received letters from the terrorist organization overrunning their country that they know who they are and are coming to kill them, and those who claim the name of Christ will suffer the same cruel persecution and death. Something is horrifically wrong here. Meanwhile, here in the US, we debate the merits of even bothering with gathering as the church. Each one of us must wrestle with this question, **"Am I living as a real Christ-follower or fake?"**

