

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED SERIES
GOSPELGRACE101

week #7

UNDERSTANDING OUR MINISTRY

Great Expectations (Part 1)

Proverbs 13:12 says, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”* Solomon’s wise words reveal a fundamental key for healthy relationships involving setting proper expectations and meeting them appropriately. Nothing is more discouraging to the soul than unmet expectations. And when unmet expectations are left unaddressed, they can become relationship killers.

Our desire is that when you become a part of the Gospel Grace family, you will find a community of people who, although certainly not perfect, are committed to protecting and enhancing the relational unity of the body by understanding and fulfilling the appropriate expectations set by Christ for His Church and its members. Fulfilling this goal will require both a clear setting forth of what those expectations are on a personal and corporate level as well as a clarification of what those expectations mean for each of us

who are members of Gospel Grace Church. It may also involve the removal or setting aside of certain expectations that individuals may bring with them to Gospel Grace Church when they are not in line with the mission, direction, biblical philosophy, or ministry atmosphere that Gospel Grace Church is committed to maintain.

Membership is a scary word for many people. It is especially scary when it comes to becoming a member of a church. The reason that joining a church is so difficult for some people is that membership implies commitment. And, most of the time, we are afraid of commitments. We live in an age and in a culture where personal independence, individual consumerism, and freedom from responsibility abound on every hand. And because we have to some degree been influenced by our surrounding culture, often we tend to shape our involvement with God's church by these same values. However, commitment is a biblical concept and an important aspect of being a part of any family. For any church to move forward for the Lord and to fulfill the mission He has given, it must be made up of faithful and committed members who want to serve Christ more than they want to be "served" (Matthew 20:28).

Whatever the reason, a failure to understand committed church membership from God's perspective is spiritually unhealthy. God's intent is that the local church be central to the life of his people. Becoming a committed church member is how God intends for his people to live out the faith and experience Christian community.

Church membership means commitment. Church membership begins when we commit to a particular body of believers. It is maintained by that same commitment. It is not simply a record of a box we once checked. It is not a sentimental feeling. It is not an expression of loyalty toward

parents. It should be a reflection of living commitment. Church is not like a gym membership. People join a gym at the beginning of the year when they feel a surge of motivation to “get in shape.” But they soon struggle to stay committed to the club. Year after year, they occasionally attend, always feeling guilty, yet unwilling to change their pattern of un-involvement. Soon the expense is just a hassle and they quit the gym altogether. People do the same with church. They join in a surge of spiritual fervor but soon fall off and then feel guilty. They go once in a while until the expense and hassle seem too much, then they quit altogether. Church memberships require commitment.⁹

Perhaps the best way to make sure we are on the same page when it comes to expectations that you might have of us or we might have of you is to work through a series of questions. And perhaps the best question to start with is one I am sure is at the top of your list.

⁹ Adapted from Mark Dever’s “What is a Healthy Church?” and Thabiti Anyabwile’s “What is a Healthy Church Member?”

What are the major commitments Gospel Grace Church expects of each member?

If Gospel Grace Church is going to succeed in accomplishing the mission God has entrusted to us, there are seven commitments each of our members must faithfully strive to fulfill.

★ COMMITMENT ONE **Doctrinal & Philosophical Agreement**

It is only reasonable that every member be expected to be in full agreement with the major doctrines held and taught by Gospel Grace Church. In our time together, we have clarified there are some areas of doctrine that are taught with less clarity and consequently leave room for charitable disagreement. But when it comes to the major or cardinal doctrines taught in the Scriptures and articulated in our Statement of Faith, there must be committed agreement. Because doctrine must be lived out in life, our practice must be shaped by and should reflect what we say we believe both corporately in our worship and individually in our walk. For this reason, it is important that every member clearly understand and be in agreement with our mission statement as well as our philosophy of ministry as we attempt to fulfill that mission. Both our mission statement and philosophy of ministry were covered in the early sessions of this series.

Perhaps a comment by a pastor of a church that has demonstrated a biblical commitment to truth and obedience might help us to see this point more clearly.

*If we were to lay out everything that constitutes sound teaching, we would reproduce the whole Bible. But in practice, every church decides that matters in which there needs to be complete agreement, can be limited agreement, and can be complete liberty. In the church I serve...we require each person who would be a member to believe in salvation through the work of Jesus Christ alone. We also confess the same (or very similar) understandings of believer's baptism and of church polity. Uniformity on these second two points is not essential for salvation, but agreement on them is both helpful practically and healthy for the life of the church (**an example of complete agreement**). We can allow some disagreement over matters that seem necessary neither for salvation, nor for the practical life of the church. So, for instance, though we all agree that Christ will return, we are not surprised that there may be disagreement among us about the timing of his return (**an example of limited agreement**). We can enjoy entire liberty of matters still less central or clear such as the authorship of Hebrews or the rightness / appropriateness of certain methods of civil **resistance (an example of complete freedom)**. In all of this the principle should be plain: the closer we get to the heart of our faith, the more we expect to see our unity expressed in a shared understanding of the faith. The early church put it this way. In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity.¹⁰*

Two further clarifications are important. First, while it is to be expected that not every member will agree on every interpretation of certain non-central doctrines, it is also to be expected that every member should hold such views charitably and non-divisively when it comes to other members who disagree with them. Because we greatly value the unity of the Church, we are determined to protect the body against divisive teaching and those who promote it. Second, because we value clarity as well as unity, it is to be expected that any person who is entrusted with a teaching ministry of Gospel Grace Church would be in agreement with the doctrinal positions and biblical interpretations of the pastoral leadership and would teach in such a way as to be supportive of those positions.

¹⁰ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*

★ COMMITMENT TWO

Faithful Attendance & Participation

A healthy church is one in which the members are faithful and active in their attendance and participation each time they gather. For this reason, the second major commitment each member should be willing to make is that of faithful participation in our regularly scheduled gatherings. We have two primary gatherings, which take place weekly, **Sunday Morning Corporate Worship** and **mid-week community groups**. Some churches have members on the church roll that have not attended for months or even years and yet are still counted as part of the church. While we understand that there are times and circumstances that may necessitate a prolonged absence or prohibit regular attendance for a time, we expect members to make it a priority to be faithful in their attendance. You should view your attendance as the first and most important ministry in the church. Be present, be known, and be active. This includes quality and quantity time (Heb. 10:24-25). If you are a member, you should strive to faithfully be here. A recent statistic from the SBC revealed that “the typical Southern Baptist Church has 233 members with only 70 attending on Sunday morning.”

Why is it crucial that I participate in
our weekly Sunday Corporate
Worship Gatherings?

We simply make it a priority to gather each Sunday as a church, because we recognize the Scriptural imperatives for the church to gather each week to...

...Proclaim the Word through the public reading and preaching of Scripture.

We want to stress the importance of the Word in church life. Preaching is not an antiquated remnant of traditional high church practice left over from the pre-video, pre-amp, pre-microphone days. Preaching is a God-designed means of declaring his truth to his corporate body (Rom. 10:17): “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” 1 Cor. 1:21: “Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” Sound, expositional preaching is a fountainhead for spiritual growth in the church.

A pastor was teaching a day-long seminar on Puritanism in London. At one point he noted that the Puritan sermons were sometimes two hours long. A member of the class gasped audibly and asked, “What time did that leave for worship?” Clearly, that student assumed that listening to God’s Word preached did not constitute worship. The pastor replied, “Many English Protestants in former centuries believed that the most essential part of their worship was hearing God’s Word in their own language (a freedom purchased by the blood of more than one martyr) and responding to it in their lives. Whether they had time to sing, though not entirely insignificant, was of comparatively little concern to them.”

Pastors should be focused on prayer and ministry of the Word as a core competencies (1 Tim. 5:17): “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” (Acts 6:4, 1 Timothy 3:2, and Titus 2:1.)¹¹

¹¹ Mark Dever, “What is a Healthy Church?”

...Corporately affirm their faith and worship of God through the singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.

There are many examples of God's people singing in the assembly. There are Old Testament roots to congregational singing. The people of Israel sang (Ex. 15:1). There were special people set up over the service of song in the tabernacle (1 Chron. 6:31-32). There were singers in the temple as well. Early Christians sang together (James 5:13): "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, in his letter to Trajan, the Emperor, in A.D. 112 wrote that believers of his province were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and "reciting a hymn antiphonally to Christ as God"¹² Tertullian, toward the end of the second century, tells of the Christian love feast at which "each is invited to sing to God in the presence of the others what he knows of the holy Scripture or from his own heart" (Apology 39). Paul instructed the churches to sing (Col. 3:16): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"; (Eph. 5:19) "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

...Give themselves to prayer.

One of the reasons God assembled the congregation of believers known as the church was for prayer. One of the

¹² Pliny, "Epistle to Trajan" (x. 96), A.D. 112.

intended purposes of the church was prayer. The first assembly known as the church is mentioned in Acts 2 after Pentecost. Peter had been preaching, and thousands of people were saved and baptized that day. There were about 3,000 souls added to the church that day (v. 41). Notice one of the things they did as a congregation. (v. 42) Not only did they learn doctrine, fellowship, and break bread...It says that they assembled in prayers! In Acts 4 Peter and John had been threatened by the rulers and elders not to preach in Jesus' name any more. Notice what the church did (Acts 4:24-31). They prayed.

Trace the record of the church, and you will find that one of the intended purposes of the gathering of believers was for prayer. Justin Martyr (2nd century – letter to unsaved Emperor) wrote, “On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen;...” [The First Apology by Justin Martyr – 2nd century] God has always intended his people to gather for that purpose. Remember Jesus in the Temple at the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:12-13). In that text, Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:9-11 and Isaiah 56:6-7. He says that the temple was intended to be a “house of prayer.” The church is the spiritual temple of God and it too is meant for prayer.

This is why it is essential that each member make a commitment to not just gather each Sunday but to wholeheartedly participate.

Why is it crucial that I participate in Community Groups?

Though each Christian has a personal relationship with God, that relationship is not individual or private. The Christian faith is not intended to be lived in isolation. We were made for community—relationship with God and with each other. The local church is not merely a place that we attend but a people to whom we belong. The Bible calls us members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) with the expectation that we contribute to the body for the glory of God and the good of His people. Gospel-centered community is a radical call amid a culture of mere attendance and casual involvement. It involves mutual love, care, consistency, and authenticity as we seek to adorn the person and work of Christ with our lives.

Where these elements are lacking, we have moved away from gospel-centered community and into the realm of social clubs. Groups are not perfect, and those who participate in them will find them messy at times. However, our hope is that group members will be radically committed to reform from within. This takes time, prayer, effort, patience, love, trust, and hope.

Beyond these two weekly gatherings, we would expect for you to be present for all members' meetings, including the annual congregational meeting held in December of each year.

★ COMMITMENT THREE

Biblical Stewardship of Resources

God has chosen to supply the financial needs for Gospel Grace Church through the joyful, voluntary, sacrificial, regular giving of its members. As a congregation desiring to follow the teaching of the New Testament, we have adopted the philosophy of “Grace Giving” as modeled and taught by the early Church and her leaders in the New Testament. The biblical basis for “Grace Giving” is found in three chapters all written by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9). These chapters reveal that Grace Giving is based on an Old Testament pattern known as the “tithe,” which involved every Jew living in God’s earthly kingdom, Israel, giving at least ten percent of their income to the temple for God’s use. While we are no longer under the Mosaic Law, which required us to give ten percent of our income to God, we should live in light of God’s New Testament expansion of this Old Testament principle. Simply stated, in most cases, God took Old Testament laws and did two things to them. He internalized them, and He intensified them. For example, the Old Testament Law forbade people from committing adultery. Jesus internalized and intensified this prohibition by telling His disciples that it was wrong to even look on a woman with a lustful heart. Under the Old Testament legal system, murder was forbidden. Jesus internalized and intensified this prohibition by forbidding hatred and hurtful speech against an enemy. Jesus did the same thing for positive commands as well. In Old Testament times, a person was commanded to forgive when certain requirements had been met by the offender. Jesus internalized and intensified this by telling His followers to forgive seventy times seven. Jesus’ followers were not just to give aid to the desperate; they were to double their aid by going two miles instead of the required one mile, to

give their coat as well as monetary aid, and to turn the other cheek when assaulted unjustly. Since the New Testament pattern involved Jesus internalizing and intensifying Old Testament patterns, then, when it comes to financial giving, believers should internalize (God loves a cheerful giver) and intensify (generously and abundantly) their giving. This means that a believer who has experienced God's grace will not be content to remain under the Old Testament tithe but will seek to give regularly and abundantly to God's work.¹³

"[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. [6] Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. [7] But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. [8] I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine." (2 Corinthians 8:5-8)

Implicit in this passage is the call for every believer to not only be willing to give financially but to also surrender their time and labors to the work of God.

¹³ Sam Horn, content adapted from "Grace Giving"

✪ COMMITMENT FOUR

Joyful Submission

When you read the New Testament, you can't get away from the call to submission. You are called to submit as a Christian in the context of the church.

- ✓ **You submit to God** (James 4:7).
- ✓ **You also must submit to one another** (Eph. 5:21) in the church.
- ✓ **You must submit to church leaders** (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). God set the church up as the highest authority in our lives here on earth (also note 1 Cor. 6:1-2; Matt. 18), and we are called to submit.

✪ COMMITMENT FIVE

Peaceful Conflict Resolution

It is a fact that all churches will face conflict at some point. The measure of a church's health is by no means the absence of conflict but the manner in which its members handle that conflict peacefully as they submit to God's plan for conflict resolution.

You make a commitment to seek peace (Rom. 14:19; James 3:18). You shouldn't be a contentious, self-seeking, argumentative, un-teachable, stubborn, and unbending person. Seek peace with others.

You make a commitment to deal with problems God's way. You should be a good forgiver (Eph. 4:32). You should pursue reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Matt. 5:23-24). Having been reconciled to God through Christ, Christians have been given the ministry of reconciliation. A

committed believer strives to repair breaches and problems as soon as possible.

★ COMMITMENT SIX **Joyful Service**

A fourth area of commitment for the members of Gospel Grace Church is to invest their time and the use of their spiritual gifts in service to God in some area of the ministry. There are many areas of ministry where opportunities to serve abound. God has equipped every believer with a gift to be employed for the benefit of the entire church body.

"[8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. [10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:8-11)

★ COMMITMENT SEVEN **Christlike Testimony**

A final commitment and one that is no less important than the others is the expectation we have as a church that each member will live in such a way as to be a good testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and of Gospel Grace Church. Jesus instructed His disciples to live in such a way so that when others saw their good deeds they would glorify the Father who is in Heaven (Matthew 5:16). Our desire as a congregation is to live authentic, loving, and obedient lives so that we can represent the Lord Jesus

Christ accurately and attractively to a watching world. This means that we must be committed to living pure lives in the midst of an impure world (Philippians 2:15) this means that we must do all we can to model righteousness both morally and ethically in every relationship both in our homes as well as in the marketplace of life. This means that we must strive to guard our testimony so that we don't give unbelievers occasion to mock our faith or our claim to be followers of Christ. We must do all we can with the Spirit's help and guidance to avoid letting our good be evil spoken of by unbelievers (Romans 14:16).

Church Covenant

By way of reminding us of our commitment as followers and ambassadors of Christ and members of Gospel Grace Church, we have adopted a church covenant that we ask each member to embrace and strive to live by. We intend to remind ourselves of our commitments by affirming this covenant regularly as a church family.

The church covenant of Gospel Grace Church describes a member's commitment to the body. By signing it upon membership and affirming it regularly, we express our commitment to live out our faith. It reminds us that we cannot live in isolated individualism or unrepentant sin. It provides a biblical standard of behavior and reminds us of the obligations that membership entails for our lifestyles and interactions with each other. Living out the spirit of this covenant reduces nominalism and enhances accountability and growth in the church.

GOSPEL GRACE

CHURCH

Having been brought by the grace of God to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and having been baptized by immersion upon our profession of faith in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God and this assembly solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

By God's gracious aid, we will walk together in Christian love, working and praying for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We will seek to promote the affectionate care and watchfulness over each other, and faithfully admonish and entreat one another, as occasion requires. We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows. We will aid one another in sickness and distress and cultivate Christian compassion toward the needy and downtrodden. We will be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others. We will seek to sustain the church's worship, community, ordinances, doctrines and discipline. We will contribute of ourselves and our resources cheerfully, sacrificially, and regularly to the support of the ministry, expenses of the church, relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel throughout the world.

We will endeavor to bring up those that are under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example seek the salvation of our family and friends. We will pursue a living relationship with God through the reading and application of His word. We will walk wisely in the world, be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct. We will seek to pursue peace with men and holiness before God.

To these and all other Christian duties we humbly and cheerfully submit ourselves, striving to faithfully perform them in the strength of our Lord. We will, when we move from this place, 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. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.