

Chapter 6: Member: Connected to The Church

The spiritual fellowship that a believer enjoys with his Redeemer, is not a solitary or selfish joy, but one which he cannot possess alone, or except in common with other believers.

– James Bannerman

The truth is, never once—in storm or sunshine—have I ever been alone in the world. And no Christian ever has. Belonging to Christ means we also belong to everyone else who belongs to him. In Christ, we are not simply individuals; we are joined to what Peter calls a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” (1 Peter 2:9).

In Christ, we are part of the church!!

Identity Theft

Four common ways our identity as part of Christ’s church may have been stolen:

Theft # 1: My relationship to God is personal

- Like most untruths there is a kernel of truth
 - o Each of us must repent of sins and trust in Christ (Mark 1:15)
 - o Each of us ought to study God’s word and pray in private (Ps 119:11, Matt 6:6)
 - o We each should rejoice that her name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20)
 - o Our relationship to God is personal, but it isn’t ONLY personal!!
- Many see faith as so personal it can’t be shared or even discussed with others.
- Any time we believe our spiritual condition is better—more authentic, more fruitful, more profound—apart from the church, we’ve allowed our identity as members of the church to be STOLEN.

Theft # 2: My personality isn’t suited to church

- If you have ever allowed yourself to think, I’m an introvert; church is not the place where I do best, your identity has been STOLEN
- Furthermore, whether introverted or extroverted, sensory, or intuitive, rational, or emotional or anything else, only God can authoritatively declare who you are and what you need to be truly happy.

Theft # 3: I’m already part of a community of people with whom I have a lot in common.

- Often, we belong to many types of communities, groups, people we choose for ourselves that share the same interests or circumstances as us. In them we can find great encouragement and help.
 - o BUT—we can get into trouble if we believe our most important relationships are with people WE have selected for ourselves.
- The local church is a community of people God has chosen for us, for His glory and our good.

- Faulty thought—No one at church gets me like the people at my _____ do, you've believed a lie.
- Those other communities might be naturally comfortable, but they're not where your ultimate identity lies.

Theft # 4: I'm focusing on my family.

- It's good to be a part of a natural family and to diligently care for them as God has commanded. We are daughters, mothers, wives, and sisters.
 - o But—they shouldn't overshadow our eternal identity in the family of God.
- As Christian women:
 - o We are the children of God (Gal 4:6)
 - o Mothers and sisters to fellow members of our local church (1 Timothy 5:2, see also Titus 2:3-5)
 - o Part of Christ's beloved bride (Rev 21:9)
- Faulty thought: If you ever say to yourself "I'm the mom of three young kids! I'll get back to church in a few years, you've had your identity STOLEN.

Identity Truth

All of Scripture shows that a Christian is a member of Christ's church.

Old Testament

- God made people to be together.
 - o Made man, and gave him a companion—woman (Gen 2:7, 18, 22)
 - Not just first marriage; it's the first church!!
 - Adam and Eve worked and worshipped together!!
 - o Sin tarnished and broke that relationship they had, and still complicates everything we do together in the local church
- God did not abandon his imperfect church
 - o Adam's family continued to grow!!
 - o Worshippers of God were not solitary individuals
 - Abraham- father of a family
 - Israelites- Redeemed as a gathered people
 - God sent Moses to proclaim His Word, not primarily to individuals, but to his people together.
 - Israel in the OT—we ought to recognize the CHURCH!!

New Testament

- "In the fullness of time"—Christ came to make us part of His church
 - o God was made man for our sake. The glorious purpose of his incarnation, obedience, death, and resurrection was that he might "present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)
 - o When people come to faith—they become part of the church
 - They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers—Acts 2:42

- The church gathers; people are saved; they join the church
- There are NO lone Christians in the NT
- New Testament Epistles—reinforces this identity truth
 - Church is called
 - Plant (Rom 11:17-24, cf. John 15:1-7)
 - A Building (Ephesians 2:18-22)
 - A Body (Rom 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 4:15-16)
 - Our connection to Christ connects us to everyone else connected to Him.
- Our Future Identity
 - God’s people always have been part of the church, and God’s people will always be part of the church. (Rev 21:2-3)

Church is not a human invention. It is established BY CHRIST, protected, and nourished by Christ, governed by Christ, and exists for the glory of Christ!!

Which means . . . church is NOT optional!! The church is fundamental to the identity of everyone who belongs to Christ.

Identity Transformed

Four practical Ways to live out our identity as members of Christ’s church:

- 1) Join the local church!
 - a. Choose an actual, biblical congregation of believers near the place where we live.
 - b. Not based on our personality and preferences!!
 - c. Picking a church:
 - i. Committed to Biblical statement of faith
 - ii. Preaches and teaches the Word of God
 - iii. Organized under Biblical Leadership (Elders and Deacons- rightly functioning and qualified)

Don’t go where it is all fine music and grand talk and beautiful architecture; those things will neither fill anybody’s stomach, nor feed his soul. Go where the gospel is preached, the gospel that really feeds your soul, and go often. - Charles Spurgeon

- d. Having found a good local church:
 - i. Publicly align with it
 - ii. Meet with the Elders, give your Christian testimony, and take membership vows.
 - iii. Join the church
- e. Life as a member:
 - i. Receive all the blessings Christ bestows
 - ii. Under the spiritual care of the church’s leaders
 - iii. Join a community of people invested in each other’s welfare

- iv. We work and worship alongside people mutually committed to the One whom our own souls love best.
 - v. We fully live out our identity!!
- 2) Submit to the leaders of your church
- a. Christ has given a gift to the church in this world: pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:8-11).
 - b. Hebrews 13:17 tells us, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with JOY and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”
 - c. How to Submit to the leaders
 - i. Gladly receive the Word when they preach and teach it!!
 - ii. Seek to put the sermons into practice!
 - iii. Turn to them for biblical counsel
 - iv. Commit ourselves to implementing their vision for the church.
 - d. Under the authority of godly leadership, our souls receive the tender ministry of Christ himself (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
- 3) Pray for your church!!
- a. Nothing will help us love our church more than prayer.
 - b. By God’s design the church is diverse, and we may not all share the same interests or life stages, yet God has called us to love one another.
 - c. In prayer:
 - i. We have a chance to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15)
 - ii. The members of the church “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2)
 - iii. We invest in the good of those who share our identity.
- 4) Support your church in her worship and work
- a. Be present when the church gathers!!
 - i. When God’s people are meeting, we are there adding our voices to the praise, joining our hearts to prayer, and submitting to the Word.
 - b. Use your gifts to serve the church!!
 - i. Not for your own aims, but for the “common good” (1 Cor 12:7)
 - ii. Assist the church’s work however you can!!

Though the world would tell us that church is an option, an irrelevance, or even an obstacle, we know better. Our identity is eternally connected to the people of God. We are EACH a VITAL part of the church, and the church is essential to who we are.