



Reflection and Resolution; Church Membership by Ryan Reese

We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

As the year ends two types of lists are flooding every form of media and maybe even our own personal notebook: reflections and resolutions. We reflect on what transpired in the year that has ended and resolve to improve ourselves in the year that is beginning. Much of the reflection comes by way of lists. Everyone is eager to share their “top ten” movies watched, books read, albums spun, or what they believe were the most important events to occur in 2011.

Resolutions often morph into lists as well—lists that usually require greater levels of self-discipline in our lives to make us healthier and (hopefully) more holy than we were the year before. I’d like to briefly present for your consideration one of each—a reflection and a resolution for Pinehurst Baptist Church as the year turns.

One of the most significant works done in our church body last year was performed by a special committee assigned to “clean up” our membership roll. In April of last year I preached a short series on ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), in which I lamented the fact that our church had well over 500 official members. Of course, I have no problem with having 500 members in our church—except that we don’t. People were left on the list long after they had

died, moved out of the area, or just quit worshiping with us altogether. The congregation responded to this problem quickly. Don Northrop led a committee that rigorously studied the membership roll, sought out long-lost members, and presented others with the idea that membership was changing at Pinehurst. They sent out letters and, though we didn’t get as many responses as we had hoped, reduced the membership roll to something that reflected a truer sense of who we really are. Their time and effort is to be commended, as it laid the necessary ground work to move forward in how we do membership as a local body of believers.

And now from reflection to resolution: We need to build a healthier practice of church membership this year. This involves both creating a better intake process and maintaining deeper accountability to our brothers and sisters in Christ at Pinehurst. Most groups or clubs that we join don’t require much of us. We simply pay our fee and come and go as we please. We join the group primarily for what we get out of it, thinking very little about how we benefit the club. But a biblical church shouldn’t work that way. Though we do benefit greatly from being a member of the church, belonging should be as much

about what we give as what we get. God calls us together to give, not just receive. What has been labeled “consumer Christianity” has run rampant through the American church in recent decades. Many people move from church to church trying to find a group that meets their needs, rarely pausing to question where and how they could best meet the needs of others. They aren’t looking for a group of people to serve, but for a group of people to serve them. This kind of self-centeredness is something we all fight, but if left unchecked will be toxic to both the soul of the person and the unity and spiritual growth in the church.

In the month ahead we will visit this idea of biblical church membership after our journey through Matthew’s Gospel comes to an end. In a brief series we will examine what the Scriptures say about the local church and how we can carry out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ together. What must we believe together? How must we commit to live together? If you are already a member of Pinehurst Baptist Church, you might prepare your heart by asking yourself this question: What does my membership cost me? Or, said differently, are you serving the church or merely being served?

Evangelism and Apologetics by Brian Watson

Would you describe yourself as an evangelical Christian? Do you ever stop to think what that means? We are evangelical because we know the *evangel*, the gospel, the good news that, though we have rebelled against the holy Creator God, salvation is available through Jesus' death and resurrection. And because we know the importance of this gospel, both for God's glory and for the salvation of human souls, we treasure it and we want to make it known.

The Bible makes it clear that all Christians have a role in evangelism. After his resurrection, Jesus gives his disciples the "Great Commission" to go out into the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Peter tells Christians that they are a "royal priesthood" made to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Paul told all Christians to imitate him (see 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 11:1), and Paul was "not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

Our motivation to share the gospel should be threefold. One, we share the gospel because we love God and want to make him known. God created the world to display his glory, and he created humans in his image to be fruitful and multiply, which, in the course of the Bible, means making disciples who also glorify him. Two, we share the gospel out of obedience to Christ. Three, we share the gospel because we love other people and don't want them to go to hell. There is only way to God the Father, to salvation and eternal life, and that is through Jesus (John 14:6). If we love God, desire to obey him, and care for the souls of other people, we will share the gospel. Any apathy towards evangelism is evidence of a serious heart issue.

We know that we should be sharing the

gospel, but that raises questions: are we sharing the gospel, and how well are we doing that? I suspect that these are not easy or comfortable questions. I think all of us have felt like we wanted to share the gospel, but we weren't equipped to do so. We didn't know how to tell people about Jesus, so we felt embarrassed and awkward, and our failure to share the gospel made us feel guilty. I say "we" because I have felt this way, too.

However, I want us all to be equipped to share the gospel—joyfully, boldly, lovingly, and persuasively. Paul tells us that the role of pastors and teachers is to equip the saints (that's you, Christian!) for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-14). Ryan and I need to do a better job of preparing you to minister to a confused, hurting, and truth-starved world. Therefore, I will be teaching about evangelism on Sunday nights, beginning on January 8. For those who cannot attend on Sunday nights, I will post all my notes on the church website (www.pinehurstbaptist.org), under the "Media" section, and I will also make some hard copies of the notes available for those who do not have Internet access. My goal is to do this throughout 2012.

During this series, we will discuss what evangelism is (and isn't), what the gospel is, and how we can share the gospel in different ways. This will not be a new program of evangelism or a paint-by-the-numbers way of sharing our faith. We will be learning the gospel and different ways of sharing it.

I suppose there is another reason why we don't share the gospel. Those of us who have tried to tell people about Christianity have often been met with many objections. Usually when you tell people about Jesus, there is silence, a series of negative statements, or challenging questions. Most of us don't know how to respond to those statements or answer those questions.

Some of us never share the gospel because we don't know how to do so, and we don't know how to defend the faith.

In order to equip you to defend the Christian faith, I will be teaching about apologetics. Despite the way the word sounds, apologetics does not mean apologizing for having faith. Here are a couple of definitions: "Christian apologetics is the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging."¹ "Apologetics, then, is an activity of the Christian mind which attempts to show that the gospel message is true in what it affirms. An apologist is one who is prepared to defend the message against criticism and distortion, and to give evidences of its credibility."² Essentially, it means defending the Christian faith by demonstrating its truth. Frequently, apologetics covers philosophy, science, history, the reliability of the Bible, and the consistency of the Christian worldview. I will also discuss other religions, so we know what other people believe and have some insight as to how to speak to members of other faiths.

Christians know the truth. In fact, we know the Truth, Jesus (John 14:6). To a world that has given up on truth, a world that is confused and lacking hope, we offer a message that is priceless, compelling, and eternal. Let us sharpen our minds to love God and love others by "being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).

¹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 24.

² C. H. Pinnock, "Apologetics," in Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 36.