

## **Church Membership**

### **By David Feddes**

Some people are allergic to the very idea of church membership. They say, “I don't need to have my name on some piece of paper, on some membership roll of a church in order to follow Jesus Christ and to be part of his people.” On the other hand, there are other people who really value church membership because they have their name on a piece of paper. They almost never attend. They have no meaningful walk with Jesus, but they're church members.

I want to talk about church membership today, not in the sense of having your name on the church's rolls or on a piece of paper, but in terms of being a real, meaningful member, a part of the body of Jesus in a local place. That might involve having a list of members; some churches keep track of a membership of sorts that way. But what I really want to talk about is membership as regular, faithful, long-term involvement in a church.

That kind of church membership is not very stable in a many congregations. Many people today have reasons for leaving churches, and local churches lose a lot of people who have been attending and have been involved for a while. Some people are droppers. They quit church. They ditch it completely. Others are hoppers. They switch churches often. They do not quit church attendance altogether. They just switch from one church to another to another quite frequently. So you have the droppers who ditch, and the hoppers who switch. Between those two groups, local churches lose quite a few people. There are quite a number of reasons why they might leave.

### **Why droppers ditch**

Let's first think about why droppers would quit church altogether and ditch it. I will give you a number of the reasons that I have come across. It is not any scientific survey. I have read quite a bit in sociology of religion and in studies of why people might leave churches, but today I want to share with you mainly what I have come across in my own experience as a church leader and in conversation with other pastors.

One obvious reason is, “I'm busy and I've got too many things to do, and I don't have time to attend church or be involved in it.” Some people have other things they would rather do on a Sunday morning. They would like to sleep in. They would like to cut the grass. They would like to wash the car. Others have Sunday as their shopping day, and they would rather go shopping than go to church, or they would rather bring their kids to soccer than go to church, or they would rather watch ESPN than go to church. They have a lot of things to do.

Some do not go to church, or they go for a little while and then drop out and stop attending any church at all because they feel out of place there. They feel awkward. They feel uncomfortable. Whatever the reason for that discomfort is, they would rather not be there, and they drop out of church.

Some are wounded. They are angry about something. They have a run-in with somebody in the church or with someone in the church's leadership, and they want nothing to do with church

anymore. They do not leave only that church. They want nothing to do with any church. They are mad, and they are gone.

Some feel guilty. They may have done something they are ashamed of. Maybe not too many other people know about it, but they know it, and they feel it more heavily when they are in church. Dropping out and staying out of church makes them feel their guilt less. Or there are people who feel embarrassed because things they have done are pretty well known among the church people. They think that folks are looking at them funny, and they stay away from church so that they do not have to feel bad.

Some people drop church entirely because they say, "I'm into spirituality, not organized religion." Spirituality might be a feeling they have or some personal private practices they have, but they are not going to be part of any organized group.

Another reason why droppers ditch and quit church altogether is that they do not believe. If they ever did believe anything, they do not believe anymore. Why go to church and play the hypocrite when they are not Christians and they are willing to admit it? Those are some of the reasons why droppers ditch church and stop going altogether.

### **Why hoppers switch**

Then there is a whole different group of people who drop out of a particular church, not to quit church entirely, but to switch churches. Why would hoppers go from one church to another and switch? Oftentimes it is not one switch in a lifetime, but every few months or every few years they are off to another church, even if they have not moved to a new area.

I will give you some of the reasons I have come across. One is a man who thought that projectors in church are evil because projectors are also used to show bad films and other things that are bad. It was corrupt to have any kind of projector in church showing pictures on a screen. His approach for a while was to stay home and watch church on a TV screen. That made a lot of sense to him, and that is what he did.

Another person will say, "I don't feel the Holy Spirit in the music." There might not be enough guitar and drums to get the pulse pounding, and that prevents a person from feeling the Holy Spirit in the music. Or somebody else may say, "I feel the Holy Spirit when the pipe organ and the majestic instruments are playing." You may have opposite tastes in music, but the same kind of reason is given. "I did not feel the Holy Spirit in that particular kind of music."

I know of quite a number of people in various churches who left a particular church because of a building project. The building project and its design did not go the way they thought it should have, or they were part of a committee and the committee did not get along, or budget issues happened. Whatever the case, building projects are a great way to lose some people.

Another way to lose people is that they thought the drama program was better at a different church. Some want Sunday school, and a church does not offer Sunday school because it is more of a family-integrated church, so they do not have separate Sunday school classes. My church,

for instance, encourages and equips parents to teach their children at home. You may think that our church sounds good for a while, but then you come there and you miss what Sunday school had to offer your kids. So then you go to one that does have Sunday school.

There may be people in a sports program associated with the church where their kids did not get to play as much as the parents wanted, or a coach scolded one of the kids and that made the parents mad. "A church sports program mistreated our kid, and we are out of here."

"Our son was turned down when he asked a girl to be his girlfriend, and he is not comfortable around here anymore, and neither are we, and we do not think that girl should have done that."

"A leader's kids cut in line at potlucks, and if he cannot keep his own kids behaving well, we are going to go to another church where the leader's kids are better behaved."

A mother might say, "My nine-year-old boy was roughed up by another kid, and we are leaving. We are going to go to a church where children are treated right."

"People know about my drunk driving. I am embarrassed because around here people know me and they know about that, and I feel more comfortable if I am somewhere else."

"People around here dress too immodestly. The necklines are too low. The hemlines are too high." Or you might get the opposite opinion, where someone with the low neckline and the high hemline, or somebody who likes to wear blue jeans, says, "I do not feel comfortable in this church. They are too uptight and dress up too formally, and that is not for me."

"The church budget was voted on too soon." I remember one particular case of somebody who objected that the church budget was published and given to the congregation only one week in advance instead of two weeks in advance. "I want to be part of a church that does not do things so fly-by-night when it comes to financial matters."

"Another church is more alive." It is hard to put a finger on what "alive" means. Maybe some churches really are totally dead, but what makes a church seem "alive" depends from person to person. Frequent church hoppers find that a church is really alive for the first few months they are there. Then the novelty wears off, the adrenaline level drops a bit, and that church is not as "alive" as it used to be. It's time for the hoppers to find another church that is more "alive" than the previous one. For the first several months, it seems that way, but then the thrill of the new wears off, and it is once again time to shop and hop.

"I get mad just seeing that person." Somebody in that church who bugs you. In some cases it may be a spouse after a divorce, and they cannot stand being in the same building. It can also be that there has been a major run-in. People are angry with each other, and they do not want to see each other anymore.

"The church stopped giving me money." I know people who have been assisted financially by the church. They received ongoing support from the deacons to help them in tough situations. But when the deacons thought that the support was not being helpful or that it was being

misused, the money stopped flowing, and the people stopped going to that church the minute the money stopped.

“The pastor reminds me of my father.” I have heard that one, and not in a good way, because that was one of the reasons given for leaving the church.

“The sermons are too long and too boring. I want to go someplace where they are shorter and snappier.” Or the opposite thing: “We want more detailed, in-depth, verse-by-verse teaching, not this shallow stuff.”

I could give a much longer list based on my decades of experience in ministry and on conversations with other pastors. At any rate, we have droppers who ditch. We have hoppers who switch, people who continually go from one church to another to another. You might call it "the circulation of the saints."

### **Circulation of the saints**

I think it has something in common with trends in marriage nowadays. A growing number of people are allergic to long-term commitment. It has become more common for people to attend a church but not to join it as committed members. I think that has some parallel to a man and a woman living together without a marriage commitment. That has become more common.

I am not saying that church involvement is the same as marriage. The Bible commands that we remain committed to the same spouse for life. Scripture does not command that we remain in the same congregation for life. I am saying that there is a similarity in not wanting to commit and stick with it even when you are not really feeling like it very much, and in a reluctance to make any commitment in the first place. I have known a number of people who said very specifically that they did not want to become a church member, even though they were quite involved in the church, because they did not want that commitment, that accountability, the sense that they could not leave at the snap of a finger or the drop of a hat.

It has also become common for people to join a church and then leave and join another, and then leave and join another, and leave and join another. They may join as members, but it means very little. I think there is some parallel to serial divorce in our culture. People make promises at the altar. They may make marriage promises six or seven times with six or seven different people. Those promises, “till death do us part,” did not seem to mean much. Similarly, there may be people who make a strong commitment, at least in words, to a church, and then make that same commitment at the next church they join, and the next church they move to, and so on.

You get this circulation of the saints. It has some parallel with marriage in our culture, with live-in lovers instead of making a commitment in the first place, and with more frequent divorce, where commitment means "until I get tired of this or until something better comes along."

## Why stick with church?

When we ask why people leave church, the basic answer is that almost any reason is good enough to leave if you do not have a solid reason to stay. I have given a lot of reasons why people will either ditch or switch. The fact of the matter is that almost any reason is good enough to leave if you do not have clear, solid reasons to stay put. So we need to think about why to stick with church.

One reason is that the church is Christ's **bride**. I am not yet talking about sticking with this congregation as compared to that congregation, but simply being part of a congregation. You need to be part of a church because it is Christ's bride.

Suppose you are married to a wife whom you love very much and prize very much, and someone comes up to you and says, "You know, I like you. You are a pretty good pal. I would like to hang out with you, but I cannot stand that stinking wife of yours. I do not want anything to do with her." Are you going to be good friends with someone who cannot stand your wife and speaks ill of her?

Do you think you can ditch the bride of Christ altogether, ignore church completely, and yet think things are just fine between you and Jesus? It does not work that way.

Another picture in the Bible is the church as a **building**, as God's temple, as God's building founded on Jesus Christ. It is hard to stand on a building's foundation without being in that building. If Jesus is the foundation of the church and you want Jesus to be your foundation without being in the church, that is hard to do.

Here's another biblical picture: the church is Christ's **body**. It would be odd to go around carrying someone's head under your arm all the time and saying, "I am really friends with this head." Some people try that in relation to Jesus. They want to hug Jesus the head, but they do not want that church body hanging around. You cannot connect to the head if you want nothing to do with the body and do not want to be part of Jesus' body.

These are three very important pictures in the Bible of the church in relation to Jesus. It seems very difficult to have a living, healthy relationship with Jesus and to have none with his church.

In the Bible we see why it is important to be involved in church. In the early church portrayed in the book of Acts, we read, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). There is a lot of activity in churches, and not all of it is very important, to be honest. But there are certain simple, core things that are vital to the life of every church, and they are vital to your life as a Christian and to why you need to be part of that church. Those of us who are Christians need to be part of a body that has these elements of simple church, and those of us who are church leaders need to make it clear why it is so important to be included in a body and to be members of a body rather than going it alone.

One thing we see here is **the apostles' teaching**. You go to church to be taught, to hear God's Word preached, to hear the Scriptures read and then explained by someone who has a calling and a gifting to bring that Word to others and to apply it to their lives. This is not in place of reading the Bible at home. It is very important to study the Bible on your own, to hear God's Word yourself, and to talk with other people about it. But the Lord also gives those who are called to be leaders and expounders of the holy Scriptures to help us understand things that are hard to understand on our own, to help us see things we might not see on our own, and to apply those things to our lives. It is not merely their own human opinion, but the apostles' teaching as we find it in the New Testament, along with the teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament, that we hear when we go to church and hear God's Word expounded. You cannot get that only from reading excellent sermons or from watching excellent preaching on TV, although that can be valuable and helpful. In a local situation, God has a local pastor with a word he has given for you and for a particular group of people.

**Fellowship** is very important, the building up of each other in love. I need others, and they need me. The way we interact at church, in love, in holding each other accountable, in building each other up, and in providing for each other's needs, is a vital part of being part of a church. If you are trying to start a charcoal fire and you have only one piece of charcoal, it goes out. If you have them together, firing each other up, they all get hot together. Fellowship plays that role.

There are also crises in life where you do not want to be on your own. I have known sad situations where people left their church body, found themselves part of no church body, and then when a loved one died, they came to me and asked me to do the funeral. In a sense, we were the only people who had any connection with them, yet they had severed that connection. I mentioned earlier the person who stopped going to church because he did not like screens. A sad aftermath of that was that his son was killed in a car accident. It was not the TV screen that came and visited him. It was those of us who had been his pastors and those who had been part of his church. He did end up coming back into the fellowship of believers at that point as well, but it was a very sad situation. Fellowship is very important.

Another element is the **breaking of bread**, the sharing of common meals. That is part of fellowship, but also the breaking of bread at the Lord's Supper. Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper, the celebration of his giving of his body and his blood for our salvation. The regular celebration of holy communion strengthens our faith, and that happens when people are together worshipping as church.

Prayers are vital, including praying together in church. Pray to the Lord anytime. Pray to the Lord on your own. Pray to him at home with your family. But also, when God's people are joined together at church in prayer with each other, for each other, and for the wider needs of their community, nation, and the world, those prayers take on added power as the Spirit moves among them.

Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers. That is simple, basic, absolutely necessary, and essential. Those are reasons why we need to be members of a local church, and why those of us who are already leaders need to be cultivating a sense of the importance of church and evaluating our own church. Do we have a lot of extras going on here that are not all

that important, things that are distracting from what is really important? Let's get back to basics. Let's make sure we are teaching what the apostles taught. Let's make sure we have a living, healthy fellowship. Let's celebrate communion often and build people up in it. Let's be people of prayer."

### **Why stick with a particular church?**

Here is another question—not just why you need a church, but why stick with a particular church. Why stick with it once you are part of it? Why not switch whenever it suits you?

Let me say that there may be times when it is best to switch from one church to another. If one church is teaching falsehood, or if it has become a catastrophe where everybody is at each other's throats and the Spirit of love and the Holy Spirit's power seems to have completely left the place, there may be a time to leave. Or if you have gotten stuck in a rut and the Lord has a new direction for you, or there are reasons like going off to plant another congregation or to carry out God's mission and a vision he has given you, there may be reasons not to stick with a particular church.

But I want to talk now about why you would stick with a particular congregation. One major reason is vision. A healthy church centers on God, and it shapes disciples to grow more and more like Jesus Christ. This kind of vision is not a quick fix. It is not something that happens in a week or two, or in a month or two. It is the result of a long pursuit of maturity in Christ together. Part of that is getting to know each other better, sharing that vision, and encouraging each other in that vision for walking with the Lord.

Closely related to that is love. Fellow members of this body that you have become part of are increasingly dear to you, and you are increasingly dear to them. We are committed to each other. Even though there may be fourteen other good churches within driving distance, I am staying with this church because it is my church. It is the place where I know people, they know me, and we love each other. We do not have disposable relationships. We love each other, and we stick together. So there you have it. Why this particular church? Because we have a shared vision and a shared love.

### **Maturity in unity**

Now I want to look with you in a little more detail at Ephesians chapter 4 and some of the ways that love and shared vision can mature in unity within a local body of believers. The apostle Paul speaks of doing things "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2–3).

How do you grow in patience with people? By getting upset with them and immediately bailing out on them at the first sign of trouble? No. You grow in patience when you have to put up with something. The only way you ever grow more patient, the only way you ever become better at bearing with others, is when there is something to bear with. You grow in maturity when you have to put up with some things you don't like. When you hop from one church to another every

few months, you never learn to become patient. You never learn to bear with one another in love, and you certainly do not learn to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The purpose of authority in the church is to equip for that kind of maturity. Why did God give apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers? Paul says it is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12–13). As a pastor, that is my primary calling, to help others become more mature in Jesus Christ. As an elder, that is the responsibility of elders. That is why it is so important that we have leaders to be accountable to, so that we can grow in maturity and be led toward a fuller measure of the stature of the fullness of Jesus Christ.

You might say, “I can grow that way on my own.” That is what you say, but what does God say? God says he gave these leaders for that purpose. It is foolish for any of us to say that we do not need anybody else. Even as a pastor, I cannot say, “I am a pastor. My job is studying the Bible. I will grow in Christ and then help everybody else grow up in Christ.” The fact is, I need the elders of my church and the deacons of my church to hold me accountable and help me grow in maturity so that I am not simply pushing my own way on everyone else. I need the rest of the body as well. The point of this passage is that authority is given to equip others for maturity, and you are not going to grow to full maturity in Christ if you ignore the authority of a particular congregation.

Maturity involves stability. Paul says that we grow more like Christ “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14). There are parts of the Bible that encourage being childlike, childlike in our trust, in our sense of wonder, in our humility, in our lack of pretense. In those areas, it is good to be childlike, but do not be childish. Children are easily excited, easily bored, easily upset, easily fooled.

As mature believers, we are not to get too easily excited. The latest piece of music makes us think we are full of the Holy Spirit because our emotions are easily swayed by music. Or we are easily bored. We are hearing the word of God being expounded, but there are not enough bells and whistles. We get riled up very quickly. Grown-ups are not supposed to be changing their mood or their mind as quickly as little kids do. Paul says we are to grow up so that we are not tossed about by every wind of doctrine, so that we are not unstable, but instead are mature and stable people.

Speaking the truth in love unifies us and grows us up in Christ. Paul says, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Stay part of the same body of believers over the long haul, because when you get long-term relationships, you dare to speak the truth to each other even when it is not always pleasant, and yet you love each other. You are not necessarily speaking those truths to hurt people’s feelings.

There are times when the truth builds up and makes us feel better. There are times when the truth hurts for a while. Part of being in a body over a long period of time is having honest relationships. In a new situation, people are impressed with each other, excited to get to know each other, and there is something fun about that. But when you have known each other for about five years and you no longer have illusions about each other, you know what you do not like about each other, you know what you love about each other, and you keep building each other up.

By the way, it is when you forgive, when you deal with things that make you mad, that you get your triumphs over Satan. "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). You say, "I do not want to be a member of a church." Sorry about that. If you belong to Jesus Christ, you are a member. You are a member with others. "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26–27). Here is where you get to win your victories over Satan. Your victories over Satan do not come when everything is going great and smoothly. Some of your greatest victories over Satan come when you are furious, maybe even rightly furious, about something that has happened or that someone has done, and yet you do not hold a grudge. You do not let the sun go down on your anger. You talk honestly and lovingly together, and you convey forgiveness. It is in forgiving and showing grace that we defeat Satan. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

When we are defeating Satan, we are also getting opportunities to live by the Spirit and display grace. Again, the Spirit's greatest work is not when you are having a warm fuzzy feeling during your favorite moment of a worship service. Those may be from the Spirit, and they may be wonderful things, but that is not the Spirit's greatest work. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). You are really in tune with the Spirit when you are dealing with bitterness. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Your biggest opportunity to be like Jesus and to express the grace of God working through the Holy Spirit in you is when you forgive. When you leave a church the moment someone offends you, when you don't pursue forgiveness, you have blown your greatest chance to be like Jesus Christ, and you are not growing in grace. When you stay in your church and stick with people you need to forgive, and sometimes they need to forgive you, then you grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Growing up as Christ's Body**

Sometimes people say there is a contrast between discipleship, helping believers become more mature, and evangelism. But Dallas Willard says, "The way to get as many people into heaven as you can is to get heaven into as many people as you can--that is, to follow the path of genuine spiritual transformation or full-throttle discipleship to Jesus Christ. When we are counting up results we also need to keep in mind the multitudes of people who will not be in heaven because they have never... seen the reality of Christ in a living human being."

If we do not concentrate on helping people grow to maturity and greater Christlikeness, we may have a lot of people in the seats of our churches, we may have big crowds, but if none of them are growing toward Christlike maturity, it will start seeming like a sham after a while. When people are growing more and more like Jesus, there will be a greater attraction in their lives for others who are still looking for the genuine reality of Jesus Christ. Evangelism, yes, but also the discipleship of believers to make them more Christlike. When that discipleship and greater Christlikeness are seen, it makes our message more credible as well.

That is all part of being part of the body of Christ and of being part of a growing, healthy, and mature body of Christ. We need to grow up as Christ's body, so we cannot simply drop out of church. The Bible says, "Do not neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). It is a direct command from God. We have an obligation from God not to drop church completely and ditch it.

We should not be hopping around and switching churches for flimsy reasons, and we should not encourage others to hop around. If you are planting a church and working with people, find out why they want to leave their previous church and join yours, and find out whether it is a good reason. Talk with them about the issues they have. Do not get into that church hopping mentality yourself, and do not foster it in others.

Do not expect a perfect church, at least not until heaven. As a leader, sometimes you can get starry-eyed and think, "I am angry and upset because the church has not become what I thought it should be." If you want a perfect church, you should not join it, because the moment you join it, it will not be perfect anymore, because you are not perfect. For Christians looking for a church, do not expect to find a perfect one yet. If you are a leader, do not expect to start a perfect one. You will be dealing with a group of sinful people in whose lives the Lord God is working, but whom he has not yet perfected. There is coming a day when Christ's bride is made perfect, when his body is spotless and pure. That day has not arrived yet.

Do expect and commit to a church with a vision for new birth leading to maturity in Christ, a church that knows people need to be born again and need to grow up in Jesus, where God's truth is spoken and God's love is shown. That is a place where we can grow together in Christ, where church membership is not a piece of paper but a living reality, a joyous commitment, an opportunity to grow in grace and to show each other the grace that God has shown us.

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**Why hoppers switch**

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### **Circulation of the saints**

- It has become common for people to “attend” a church but not join as committed members (much as “living together” without a marriage commitment has become common).
- It has become common for people to join a church, but then leave and join another, and then leave and join another (much as serial divorce has become common).

### **Why stick with church?**

*If there's no solid reason to stay, then almost any reason is enough to leave.*

- Church is Christ's **bride**. Will a man be your friend if you reject his wife?
- Church is **building** founded on Christ. You can't stand on a foundation without being part of the structure.
- Church is Christ's **body**. Outside the body, you can't connect to the head.

## **Simple Church**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

- Apostles' teaching
- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread
- Prayers

## **Why stick with a particular church?**

- **Vision:** A healthy church centers on God and shapes disciples to grow more like Christ. This vision not a quick fix but a long pursuit of maturity in Christ.
- **Love:** Fellow members of this body are increasingly dear to you, and you to them. We are committed to each other.

## **Maturity in unity**

Eph 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

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## **Speaking truth in love unifies and grows us up in Christ**

Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

## **Opportunities to beat Satan**

Eph 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil... 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

## **Opportunities to live by the Spirit and display' grace**

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

## **Discipleship vs. Evangelism?**

The way to get as many people into heaven as you can is to get heaven into as many people as you can—that is, to follow the path of genuine spiritual transformation or full-throttle discipleship to Jesus Christ. When we are counting up results we also need to keep in mind the multitudes of people who will *not* be in heaven because they have never ... seen the reality of Christ in a living human being. (Dallas Willard)

## **Growing up as Christ's Body**

- Don't be a dropper/ditcher.
- Don't be a hopper/switcher.
- Don't expect a perfect church (yet).
- Do expect and commit to a church with a vision for new birth leading to maturity in Christ, where God's truth is spoken and God's love is shown.