

Grace Membership and Relationships

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[0 : 00] A lot of people don't understand what it's all about. And you've heard me say a number of times that here at Grace Bible Church, we provide membership, but we do not push it.

And the reason we don't push it is because we do not have a mandate to push it. There is no chapter or verse anywhere in the Bible that says, thou shalt be a member of a local church. There just isn't. Now, it is imperative if one is going to be in heaven, if one is going to know the joy of the forgiveness of sins, it is imperative that you be a member of that one true church, which is the body of Christ.

And that is the church of which he is the head. And he has established this dynamic that is made up of believers who have put their faith and trust in Christ.

And it makes no difference what their color is, what their language is, what their race is, or what their ethnicity is. If they have personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ, they have been baptized by the Spirit of God into that spiritual body of Christ.

[1 : 16] This is the baptism.

God does on the inside of the individual. And nobody, including yours truly, has ever figured out yet how he does that. But he does.

He makes us new on the inside. When he forgives us and cleanses us from our sin, he then causes us to be identified with every other person who is a member of the body of Christ into that spiritual body.

And Christ is the head. The body is now in progress. It is being built up. And we don't know when that body is going to be finished. But when it is, the church leaves.

We are gone. We are taken away. We are removed. We are translated from this earth to heaven. We will be caught up with him.

[2 : 37] And so shall we ever be with the Lord. And not a single solitary believer will be left behind. The important thing is to make sure you are in that happy number.

Because if you have placed your faith and trust in Christ, you are. If you haven't, you aren't. It is as simple as that. And by the way, nobody is going to almost go.

Nobody is going to be almost left. You are either in or out. Jesus said, he that is not with me is against me. And I've heard people say things like, well, don't get me wrong.

I don't have anything against Jesus. Because, yes, you do. If you have not put your faith and trust in him, you don't trust him. You don't think he's worthy. You don't think he's capable. And that to your hurt.

So, this church membership thing is something that, as I said, we provide. Because we do so out of a legal necessity, really.

[3 : 36] And I explain this to the people in the membership class. It's that the laws of the state of Ohio stipulate very clearly that if somebody is going to own property, they have to have a name.

You can't just put down a question mark and sign a deed over to a question mark or to a John Doe. It's got to be some person or persons.

So, we own property. We've got 13 acres of property here. Well, who owns this property? Grace Bible Church. Okay. And the state of Ohio says, well, who is Grace Bible Church?

Is it just anybody that happens to wander in off the streets on a Sunday morning? Is that who the church is? Well, no. Grace Bible Church is made up of people who have come together to agree upon a statement of faith.

And they sign off on it. They embrace that. And they are willing to live by the church's bylaws and so on. And then they constitute an official kind of membership. However, at the end of the year, everybody's membership expires.

[4 : 50] That's it. Everybody's membership, including the pastors, ends at the end of the year. And in order to maintain your membership, you have to, well, in the Army we call this re-up.

You have to re-up. You have to re-enlist. And folks ordinarily do that during the month of December for the coming year. And all they have to do to re-enlist, they don't have to take a test.

They don't have to meet with the board or anything. All they have to do is sign their name indicating that they maintain the position that they did when they agreed with the bylaws and with the statement of faith.

And they wish to maintain their membership in Grace Bible Church. And then it's good for one year. At the end of the year, it expires again.

We go all through. You know, if I had to do it over again, I would have recommended in the beginning that we do that every two years. Because now that I've gotten as old as I am, it only takes about five or six months for a year to roll around.

[5 : 54] If you know what I mean. So it really comes around quickly. So that has served us really well. And people ask us, you know, why do you do that? Well, one reason we do that is because we don't want anybody to be a member of this church who doesn't really want to be.

And I know that there are churches that have what they call dead wood on the rolls. And most of that dead wood is still alive. But, you know, as well as I do, there are some churches that you have to die to get off of the rolls.

And even then, they carry you for a couple of years. And if they haven't gotten the words that you've passed on. So we don't have any what you might call dead wood on our rolls.

And we just kind of maintain a warm body of believers who really wants to be here and wants to maintain their membership. And we just enjoy the whole process so very, very much.

So we will be, if folks are interested, and by the way, if you are, just let me know that you are interested in a membership information class.

[7 : 02] And we would be glad to schedule one probably within the next couple of months. And it's only two sessions. And it meets in my office. And it's a very informal time. You don't have to take a test or anything like that.

There is no grilling or questioning. But we just explain what is involved in being a member of the church. And what the benefits and what the blessings are. By the way, I don't know if I told the folks in this last class.

I'm sure I didn't. A couple of other advantages. Free funerals and free weddings. That's just one of the perks, you know, that we provide.

And sometimes people insist on honorariums. And we certainly don't require it. And we don't expect it. But it's just served us very, very well.

So thank you for your patience and your understanding. And I just wanted to share these things with you and talk a little bit about this relationship thing because it is so very, very critical.

[8 : 08] You know, all around us and all throughout this nation, all throughout the world, relationships are in disarray. We look at the statistics that are offered and we shudder because when we see how many marriages don't make it.

And they end in divorce. And we tell ourselves, well, we're sure glad that the Christian community isn't like that. But it is.

And the embarrassing thing about these statistics is that in all too many instances, Christian marriages are not faring any better than the marriages of a lot of non-Christians.

And I suspect that you folks probably already know that being a Christian, there's no guarantee that you're going to have a great marriage.

But I'll tell you what. Being a Christian is a guarantee that you have every potential for a great marriage.

[9 : 18] Whether or not that potential will be realized depends on a lot of things. And the main things that it depends on has to do with the spiritual values.

And if I may give you a little premarital counseling here, and I know for many of you it's too late for that. You've already taken that plunge.

But I try to emphasize in these young couples that I have opportunity to counsel that marriage is a social institution.

It's an economic institution. It's physical. But more than anything else, marriage is spiritual. This is the most important ingredient in a marriage.

And, sad to say, it is also the most ignored ingredient. And the question that I would ask you is this. [10:21] If what I say is true, if the spiritual really is the most important component in a marriage, and if the most important component of a marriage is ignored or omitted, what chance does it have?

You've left out the thing that really makes it work. That's the spiritual connection. And in connection with the spiritual connection, there are those aspects that are to be implemented, that God has provided, that are designed to restore and repair broken relationships.

And as I've said in the past, I don't know how many times over the last 45 years, there's only one thing, only one thing that causes relationships to come apart.

Just one thing. And that is the offense. The offense. The offense is found in things we say to one another and in things we do to one another that cause an offense.

An offense is a hurt. It is a wound. It's like a stabbing. And I've even characterized the kinds of offenses with weapons, you know.

[12:00] You've seen the little darts. Throw the dart at the dart board and when it sticks, it leaves just a little tiny pinprick. Just a very, very small hole.

That's all the dart does. That's a little offense. And then there is an arrow. Pull back that bow and let it fly.

And when that arrow, that offense, lands in the heart of the one that we hurt, it creates a bigger wound than the dart does.

The hurt is greater. The pain is greater. And then there's the spear. Like a javelin.

Six, eight feet long with a sharp point. And we hurl that at our mate. And it creates an enormous wound.

[13:01] Terribly painful. Really big offense. I've often said, you know, if people, as they go through life, married or unmarried, we are all a collection of these wounds.

Wouldn't it be something if when people walked out in public, they walked out with all of the darts and the arrows and the spears sticking out of them all over?

Some people would really be loaded up. And those darts and arrows and spears are the things we say and the things we do that hurt one another.

And we only have two ways. We only have two ways of injuring another person. That's by what we say and what we do. But they're enough.

We don't need any more. They're adequate, aren't they? And you know, the really difficult thing about about the darts and the arrows and the spears is that the person in whose heart they are lodged, in whose spirit they are lodged, they can't reach in there and pull them out.

[14:34] We'd like to, but you can't do that. It just doesn't work that way. The only person who can pull out the dart and the arrow and the spear is the person that put it there.

and if they don't pull it out, you know what happens? It just stays. And the hurt and the pain goes on and on and on and there can't be any healing because these things are still there in that heart.

How is it that the person who put them there can pull them out? This is where the spiritual reality comes into play. It is on the basis of an apology.

And this is so often not rendered. It's tough to apologize.

You know that? That's why so often people don't do it because it hurts our own ego to apologize.

[15:47] I'm not going to come crawling to so and so. I'm not going to. You know. It makes us feel less of a person. It makes us acknowledge that we were wrong in what we said or in what we did.

And that makes us feel bad and we don't want that feeling. So, we want to protect our ego. We're not going to apologize. I've shared this with you before but it bears repetition.

One of my favorite movie heroes, the Duke, John Wayne, was starring in this western movie called She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.

And this young lieutenant had been assigned some kind of a responsibility by John Wayne who was the colonel or captain in charge. and this young shaved tail lieutenant rode up on his horse and reported to John Wayne and he asked him, did you do this and so or this and so?

And the young man says, well, sir, no, I didn't. He says, I'm sorry, I apologize. And John says, no, don't apologize, mister. It's a sign of weakness.

[17:01] Do you have any idea how many men have adopted that philosophy? To apologize is a sign of weakness.

And men, especially men, I really want you to hear me well on this. Rendering a heartfelt apology is not a sign of weakness.

weakness. It is a sign of strength. And that's why so many men don't do it. They are too weak to apologize.

And when you apologize, you are taking responsibility. You are saying, this thing is on me. It's my fault, my bad, I'm responsible.

evil. And if you think that's easy to do, if any of you women think that's easy for a man to do, you just don't know the male ego. Because it isn't easy.

[18:06] And men, we all know that women have an ego too. But the feminine ego cannot hold a candle to the masculine ego. We can buy and sell them when it comes to egos and have change left over.

There is nothing like the male ego. sometimes it's a cause for downright embarrassment. And it will keep us from apologizing. And you know, the apology is the first step toward healing that relationship.

Because what happens when the offense is occurred and the person has been wounded, the natural thing for that person to do is step back.

They want to get out of range. They want to be wounded again. And this starts creating an emotional distancing between the people.

Nobody said anything, but it's just not like it was before. You start getting a little bit further apart. Maybe the times of silence become increased and there's just less and less to say or to talk about or to fellowship about.

[19:23] And when that is not addressed, when there is no apology and no forgiveness and then another offense comes along and maybe this one's an arrow and then maybe there's a couple more darts and then maybe a spear comes in there somewhere and every time that happens a couple get a little further apart and a little further apart and sometimes sometimes they get so far apart emotionally that they get far apart physically and we call that divorce and that is so sad because those spiritual components were not put in place and that apology that apology and taking responsibility for is received by the one who was offended and along with the apology we need to ask them I'm sorry this is my wrong you didn't deserve that you didn't have it come

I was out of line and by the way guys don't no half hearted apologies they just make the situation worse okay I'm sorry I said what I did but I would have never said that if you hadn't bottom line is actually it's your fault that is not an apology what you need to do is make your apology so genuine and so thorough that you actually end up encouraging them if they had any responsibility in that to make it easy for them to apologize also because you've taken the lead in that and this is where male headship comes in guys this is what being a husband and a head of family is all about the ball is in your court hey don't wait for your wife to do this don't wait or I'll apologize when she does no no no no you are the leader you are the guy in charge buck stopped with you not her with you you take the lead in this and then and then will you will you please forgive me you have just put her in the driver's seat now she's in charge and we men don't like that either because we like to be in control now she's in control you know what she doesn't have to forgive you she doesn't have to forgive you she should but she doesn't have to and she may even say something like well I'll tell you what I'm working on it give me some time because I can't just like that you know forgive you I've got to work through this and you should be willing to give her some time and the meanwhile sleeping on the couch or what you know but that's that's a process you know what this is this is this is spirituality in operation it's what it is this is that really important component of relationship and it works not just in a marriage but it works in families works in schools works in the workplace and in the neighborhood that's the way it is and then when that person says yes I forgive you then reconciliation is realized and that is what it's all about it's not about who's right or who's wrong or who won or who lost it's all about getting back together again in that close loving relationship that was injured and separated because of the offense so the Christian community alone has these spiritual assets available to it but so many of us never apply them and so many believers true believers in Christ don't understand or realize these things and frankly this is why we did that series on marriage on the rock and we've just completed the 11th volume

I think it was so they are all back there and if anybody's interested feel free to take them all of the CDs that are back there they're all free of charge and you're welcome to anything that is of interest to you but this was on my heart this morning and it was just really laid on my heart because of the folks that we were receiving into the fellowship here and I was just thinking you know this this connectedness this is this is God's number one priority and it ought to be our number one priority

too and where there are relationships that are awry that are not what they ought to be we need to work on repairing them we need to get a full restoration underway so that there is not only a willingness to be in each other's presence but an anticipation and an enjoyment of each other that's you know think of it this way and with this comment I want to close Jesus Christ did not die on that cross so that we could have inadequate relationships one with another would you stand please father we can't tell you how grateful we are for all of the assets that you have made available to us through what you accomplished on that cross 2000 years ago there's so many implications ramifications to it that we don't understand and we tend to think that the only thing that was really mattered there is that through the death of Christ and his being made sin for us we have eternal life but help us to realize that's just the beginning there is so much that you want to build into these lives that you have redeemed by way of love and kindness and caring and consideration and enjoyment one of another and of an eagerness to apologize when we offend and an equal eagerness to forgive and to restore oh such a dynamic you've made available to us and we just ask that you will use the time that we have shared together this morning the blessing of the music and the message contained in those songs that we heard from Rachel and the joy of receiving new believers into our fellowship we are just such a grateful and thankful people and we look forward to being able to thank you in some kind of a face-to-face situation which this is only a small token thank you for each one present here this morning and if there should be anyone here who is without that personal relationship with Jesus [27 : 05] Christ that provides the basis for real loving relationships with everyone else we pray that they may see the Lord Jesus as their only possible hope because that's exactly what he is and that's what you intended him to be and in him may we find our all hope in all in his name amen amen and part and then we hope in deme■■■