A Tale of Two Church Members

Introduction (Text: Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:21-33)
We hear a lot of talk today that people love Jesus, but they want no part of his church. They like what Jesus did, but that his church is of no value whatsoever. It is a waste of time. There are even those of us who come to worship the Lord, but by our lifestyle never really give the church and its work much importance.

As we read our text today, I want you to see the value that Jesus place on his church, which is his bride (Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:21-33). The truth is that if we truly value Jesus, we will give value to his body—the church, which he died for.

The problem with the church is that it is made up of human beings and none of us are perfect, we do have our faults and we need to do better in presenting the church to the world as Jesus wants it to be. Still, we need to treasure the Lord’s church and consider it a blessing in our lives. Our attitude toward the church can make a huge difference in the way the church is viewed by the world and even our children as they grow up in the church.

#1: A Tale of Two Church Members
Michael and Liam began meeting for Monday morning breakfast at 6:00 over five months ago. They originally thought it would be a one-time event. They met in a couples’ Bible study group in their church. For many different reasons they hit it off and were becoming good friends. When Michael originally invited Liam to meet him for breakfast on Monday morning several months ago, Liam readily agreed.

The two men enjoyed their time together so much that the one-time event became a weekly event. It was now rare for the two friends to not meet on Monday morning.

Early in their friendship the conversations focused on sports, family, and politics. They had much in common. Michael was forty-one and Liam
was thirty-nine. They each had three kids, and they were both college football fanatics. Each of their teams was in the same football conference, but they were pretty fierce rivals as well. The guys thoroughly enjoyed trash-talking the other’s team in a friendly spirit.

But on this particular Monday morning, the conversation turned serious. Michael and his wife had noticed some changes in the demeanor of Liam in their Bible study group. He no longer seemed as interested in studying and discussing the Bible as he did talking about their church. And his comments were often critical about the congregation where the two families both had their memberships.

Still, Michael was caught off guard on that particular Monday morning. Liam loved the poached eggs in the little restaurant; it was his regular order. But on this Monday morning, he had not touched them. He was barely sipping his coffee.

Liam didn’t take long to get to the point, “Michael,” he began, “Lana and I have decided to leave the church.” The pause seemed to last minutes. Neither of the men seemed to know who should speak next. Michael took the initiative and spoke softly and deliberately.

“You want to tell me about it?” Michael inquired. He honestly didn’t know if Liam wanted to say anymore about it. His friend seemed resolute. Nevertheless, Liam began to explain his feelings and decisions.

“Lana and I went to the church to learn deep truths about the Bible,” Liam offered. “But our minister is just not feeding us. We’re not getting anything out of his messages. Sitting in the service on Sunday morning is just a waste of our time.”

Michael didn’t respond. He could tell Liam had more to say.

“There are several great people in the church,” Liam continued. “You and Karen are the best, and there are a few more like you.”
He paused and his facial expression became even more serious. “But, honestly, Michael, our church is full of hypocrites. Did you hear Jim at the kids’ basketball game? He embarrassed me the way he was screaming at the refs. What kind of testimony is that for a Christian? And of course, everyone knows about Neal. He was supposedly this pillar of the church, and we find out he’s been cheating on his wife for over a year. What kind of church is this with these kinds of people?”

Liam was angry, but controlled as he continued to vent. “Look, the minister acts like he cares for us, but I’m not so sure he does. I told him that Lana’s dad was in the hospital for hernia surgery, and he never visited him.”

Michael knew that Lana’s father was not a church member and he lived 50 miles away. He also knew that the minister called him and had prayer with him. But he also knew that any rebuttal would not be appreciated at the moment. Michael held his tongue.

Now it seemed that Liam’s mild rant was winding down. Liam seemed exhausted, ready to bring the conversation to a close. He did, however, offer a few pointed comments and two insightful questions.

“Michael,” Liam began softly. “I really like you and Karen and your kids. All of you are a class act.” He paused briefly. “But you seem enthused about the church. You keep serving and contributing. Don’t take me wrong, but I wonder at times if you are blind to all the problems in the church.”

Then Liam offered a closing that really spoke more than he realized.

“We are really two different types of church members,’ he stated. “Why is that? Why do we have such different perspectives?”

#2: The Difference
Based on our research of 557 churches from 2004 to 2010, nine out of ten churches in America are declining or growing at a pace that is slower than that of their communities. Simply stated, churches are losing ground in their own backyards.

Another way of looking at it is generationally. About two-thirds of the Builder generation, those born before 1946 are Christians. But only 15% of the Millennials are Christians. The Millennials are the largest generation in America’s history with almost 80,000,000 members. They were born between 1980 and 2000. And we have all but lost that generation.

We can blame it on the secular culture. And we often do.

We can blame it on the godless politics of our nation. We do that as well.

We can even blame it on the churches, the hypocritical members, and the uncaring shepherds and ministers. Lots of Christians are doing that.

But I am proposing that we who are church members need to look in the mirror. I am suggesting that congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ.

We come to our churches expecting others to serve us, to feed us, and to care for us.

We don’t like hypocrites in the church, but we fail to see our own hypocrisies.

God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privilege and perks.
He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel.

Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down. It’s time to get it right. **It’s time to become a church member as God intended. It’s time to give instead of being entitled.**

#3: *The Journey*
Join me on this journey of discovering or rediscovering the privilege and the joy of church membership. Let us then take six steps carefully and prayerfully. And at the end of each step, let us be willing to make a commitment, a real commitment to our congregation.

When this journey is over for you, two things will likely take place. **First, you will likely have a new or renewed attitude about your church.** You will learn the joy of being last instead of seeking to be first. Instead of being a whiner complaining about what’s wrong with your church, you will be a unifier seeking what’s best for your church.

**Second, your church will begin to change.** It will become healthier because one of its members is healthier. And as the church gets healthier, it will have a great impact on its community and the world.

**We may just discover that the reason our nation is in such bad shape is because our churches are so unhealthy. That lack of health is evident when nine out of ten churches are no longer reaching their communities.**

But that can change. With you. Beginning now.

I am a church member.
In the next few lessons, you can discover what that really means. Get ready for your life to change. Get ready for your church to change. And watch what an impact your church can have on the community and, indeed, the entire world.