

## Statement on Regular Church Attendance

The New Testament pattern of church life is that believers come together on the first day of the week to worship and serve the Lord, and that they regularly sit together at the Lord's Table to remember His death on their behalf (1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 10:24-26). Consistent with that established pattern, the members of the Del Ray Baptist Church (DRBC) voluntarily commit to regularly attend services at the church, a responsibility and privilege clearly specified in both the church covenant and the DRBC Constitution and Bylaws. Faithful church attendance does not earn salvation, nor does it act as a measure to rate spiritual greatness over and against other people. It does, however, reflect a growing commitment to the gospel, the good of the church community, and spiritual health.

We understand this commitment to mean that members will make every effort to be present to worship and serve on more Sundays than not. We also understand it to mean that members would encourage one another in this privilege, and that they should expect and welcome spiritual accountability as part of their membership commitment. We recognize, of course, that some members are unable to fulfill these responsibilities for unavoidable reasons, such as mandatory military service, education, or a prolonged illness. However, apart from those circumstances, we understand that any member who neglects regular attendance at our services and meetings is disregarding the Scripture and the requirements of membership at DRBC, including our church covenant and Section 3.3.1 of the Constitution and Bylaws.<sup>1</sup>

Faithful attendance honors Christ and builds up His church. Non-attendance moves in the other direction. It makes light of His name and harms His church in many ways and for many reasons.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Faithful attenders confirm the power of the gospel and support evangelism, whereas non-attenders make evangelism harder.**

Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples, “so that the world may believe” that the Father sent the Son into the world (John 17:21). For the world to see our love and unity, we must regularly gather together. Everyone who bears the name of Christ—as affirmed by a local church by calling them a “member”—yet who willingly chooses to live their lives apart from the covenanted community of believers is practicing identity theft. They’ve taken Christ’s name, but they don’t honestly identify with his body, the local church. Living unaccountable lives, they make evangelism harder for other Christians, because, often, they aren’t living like Christians.

### **2. Faithful attenders confirm Christ-centered life for new believers, whereas non-attenders confuse them.**

New believers need good models (Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Titus 2:2-6). When the doctrine they’re taught doesn’t sync with the models they see in the absentees, they become confused. They’re led to believe one can be a “Christian” and yet have little or no connection to Christ’s body. Non-attenders are not only reverse witnesses (see the previous point), they’re reverse models. They disregard and disobey countless passages of Scripture and fail to image God’s character in the most basic ways, even though they claim to be his adopted children.

**3. Faithful attenders encourage other regular attenders, whereas non-attenders discourage them.**

One reason to gather regularly is for the sake of personal encouragement. “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). When a church allows non-attenders to remain members, they effectively gut the meaning of membership, which hurts and discourages the faithful.

**4. Faithful attenders comfort their leaders by their adherence to the truth, where non-attenders worry them.**

Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.” In light of this verse, a faithful pastor or elder should feel responsible for the spiritual state of every member of his flock. Like a father worried about his son who hasn’t yet come home late at night, a good shepherd doesn’t rest until all his sheep are accounted for. Non-attenders make this task nearly impossible.

**5. Faithful attenders are positioned to exhort, correct, and encourage their fellow members according to God’s Word, whereas non-attenders are not.**

Because of their absence, non-attenders cannot possibly know when or how the other members of their church community are burdened by sin or suffering. When church members are present and engaged, on the other hand, they can speak the truth in love to one another, just as their Lord exhorted through the apostle Paul. “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).

**6. Faithful attenders will steadily grow in respect to their salvation, whereas non-attenders will not.**

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). Since God has appointed specific means by which Christians grow in their faith, neglecting those means will stifle spiritual health and growth. Hearing the Word of God preached, singing the Word of God in corporate worship, and serving the body of Christ according to the Word of God are just a few examples of graces given to us for our sanctification. They are primarily available to those who gather faithfully with the church.

**7. Faithful attenders will be helped to persevere in faith, whereas non-attenders endanger their souls.**

While it is true that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, it is also true that God uses the local church to help us persevere in saving faith. In the book of Hebrews, we find that one of the primary ways God guards us from apostasy is through the spiritual strengthening of other believers (Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:19-31, 12:25-13:17). As it has been made clear in all the previous points, we need other believers to help us fight sin and follow Jesus. This means that while your attendance at church does not earn your salvation, it is something God uses to help you persevere in faith and enter into the final rest that has been laid before us in Christ (Hebrews 4:6-16).

These concerns weigh heavily on the elders of DRBC, as it should on the whole congregation. We are called by God to love one another and are duty-bound by Scripture to care for each other by ensuring that we are fulfilling our commitments to the Lord and to one another (Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-13). We do this because, by God's grace, we care deeply for the Lord's honor and the welfare of one another's souls.

For all of these reasons, we cannot stand idle when a member is not attending church on a regular basis (1 Peter 5:1-3). In these situations, the elders will lead the congregation in making inquiries of the individual's status and, if necessary, will encourage them to honor their responsibility to attend services. If the member does not respond to the elders' inquiries or fails to provide us with an adequate explanation for non-attendance, we will follow the command of the Lord Jesus as reflected in the DRBC governing documents and present the member's name to the congregation for removal from membership as a matter of church discipline (Matthew 18:15-18).

Signed,

The Elders of DRBC

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<sup>1</sup> The language of the DRBC Constitution and Bylaws is founded on the Scriptural commands listed above and forms the basis for the way we as a church practice meaningful church membership. To that end, Section 3.3.1 states, in part, that: "[i]n accord with the duties enumerated in the Membership Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church by regularly attending its Lord's Day meetings; by faithfully observing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; by submitting to its discipline and instruction; and by attending and voting on all matters submitted to the congregation's vote at its members' meetings." See *Del Ray Baptist Church Constitution and Bylaws*, Section 3.3.1 (Duties and Privileges of Membership) (August 11, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Many authors and pastors have addressed the Scriptural foundation for the dangers of non-attendance, but some of the clearest and most concise materials have been produced by pastors Mark Dever and Matt Schmucker, both of whose written work informed the preparation of this statement. See, e.g., Mark Dever. "A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership" in *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 147-66; Matt Schmucker, *Why Should Churches Discipline Members Who Consistently Do Not Attend?* (9Marks, 2010).