



When we as Christians lose sight of God's call to live out our Christian lives **corporately**, we tragically lose the ability to define **love** for the world. The doctrines of the church bring the whole of Christian belief to bear on how a concrete group of God's people actually gather and organize their lives **together**.

Individualism has caused us to expect a love in the church defined as that which makes much of me, whether it is received or given.

Individualism leads to **consumerism** which has caused us to focus on the desirability of the object of love rather than on the process of loving; we view churches like **products** that either satisfy me or not.

Consumerism leads to a fear of **commitment**. Love becomes about what is advantageous to me. Churches then become places where personal **sacrifices** are seldom made so the love of the gospel is seldom pictured.

The fear of commitment leads to **skepticism** toward any system of truth that claims any absolutes. Love in the church must mean not only accepting me, but accepting and **affirming** my lifestyle, my choices, my beliefs as legitimate and good.

The world at large then looks to the Christian church and **hears** about Christ's love but it **sees** nothing different from what it has already known.

Biblical Christianity stands in stark contrast to that individualism. Christianity is personal, but it is not **private**.

The **practice** of church membership among Christians occurs when Christians grab hold of each other in **responsibility** and biblical love.

Rom. 12:10; Rev. 3:19; James 5:16; Heb. 3:13; 1 John 1; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:10

There are many marks of true discipleship, but one mark is **singled out** by Jesus as signifying to the watching world that we belong to Christ.

John 13:34-35

The mark of Christian discipleship is love - love of the kind **Jesus** exercised toward His followers – love visible enough that men will recognize it as belonging to those people who **follow** Jesus.

The **local church** is where love is most visibly and compellingly displayed among God's people. It is where the body of Christ is most plainly represented to the world.

Our membership in a local church is that congregation's public **testimony** that our lives give evidence of our salvation. Membership in a local church is a reflection of a living **commitment** or it is worthless – even dangerous.

Uninvolved members **confuse** both real members and non-Christians about what it means to be a Christian.

1 John 2:19

We don't necessarily know that such uninvolved people are not Christians; we simply cannot **affirm** that they are.

John 13:34-45; 1 John 4:20

Because the church matters – because of what the church is – because of the purpose of the church – membership in the church that fits God's blueprint has got to be **meaningful** membership.

*"Is is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in **community** with Christian brethren."*

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer