

*The Joy of Church Membership*

**BELIEVE & BELONG**



**CROWN**  
**CHRISTIAN**  
**PUBLICATIONS**

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*The Joy of Church Membership*  
**BELIEVE & BELONG**

**CLARENCE SEXTON**

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**SUNDAY SCHOOL AND  
BIBLE TEACHING SERIES**

**BELIEVE and BELONG**  
*The Joy of Church Membership*

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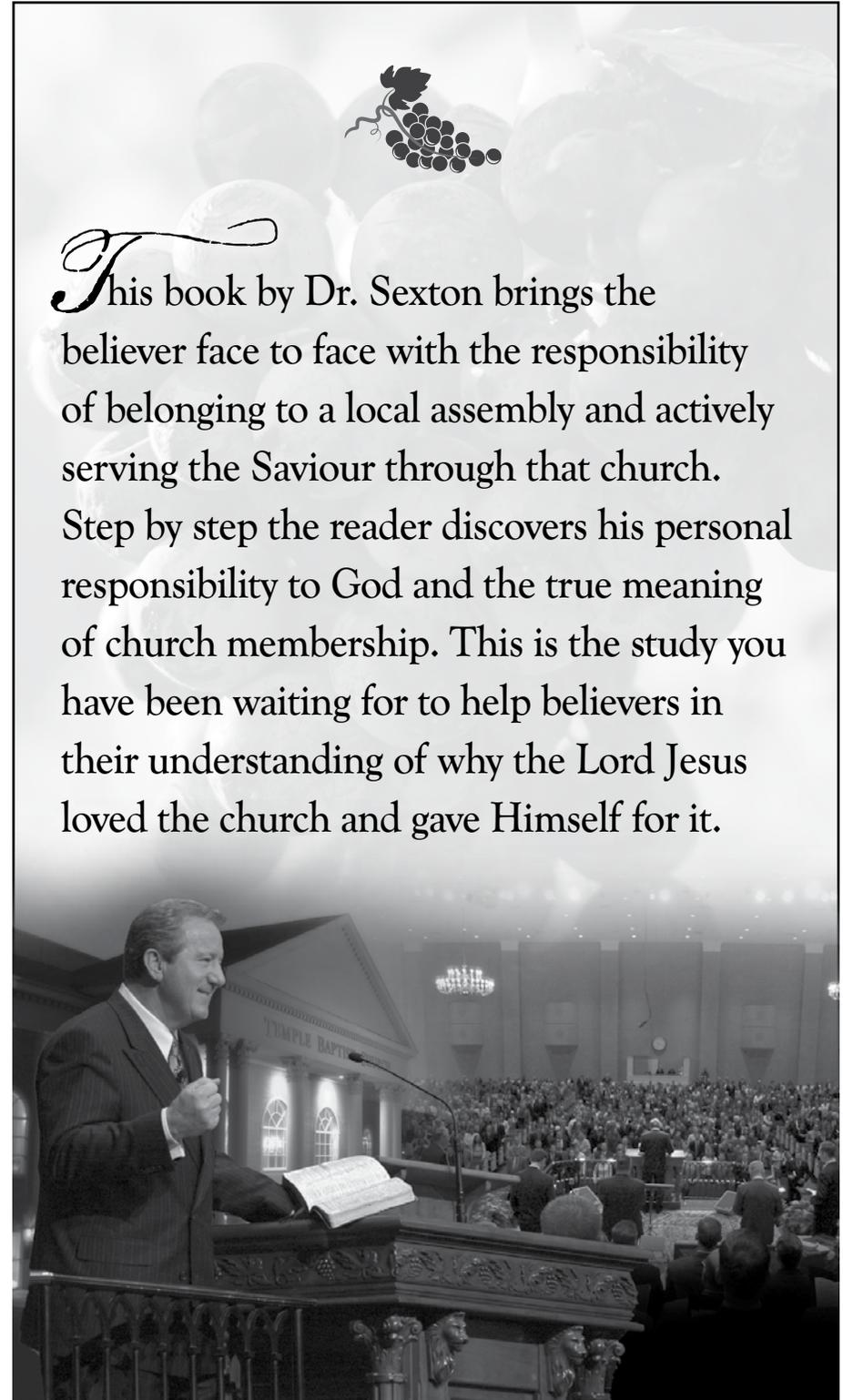
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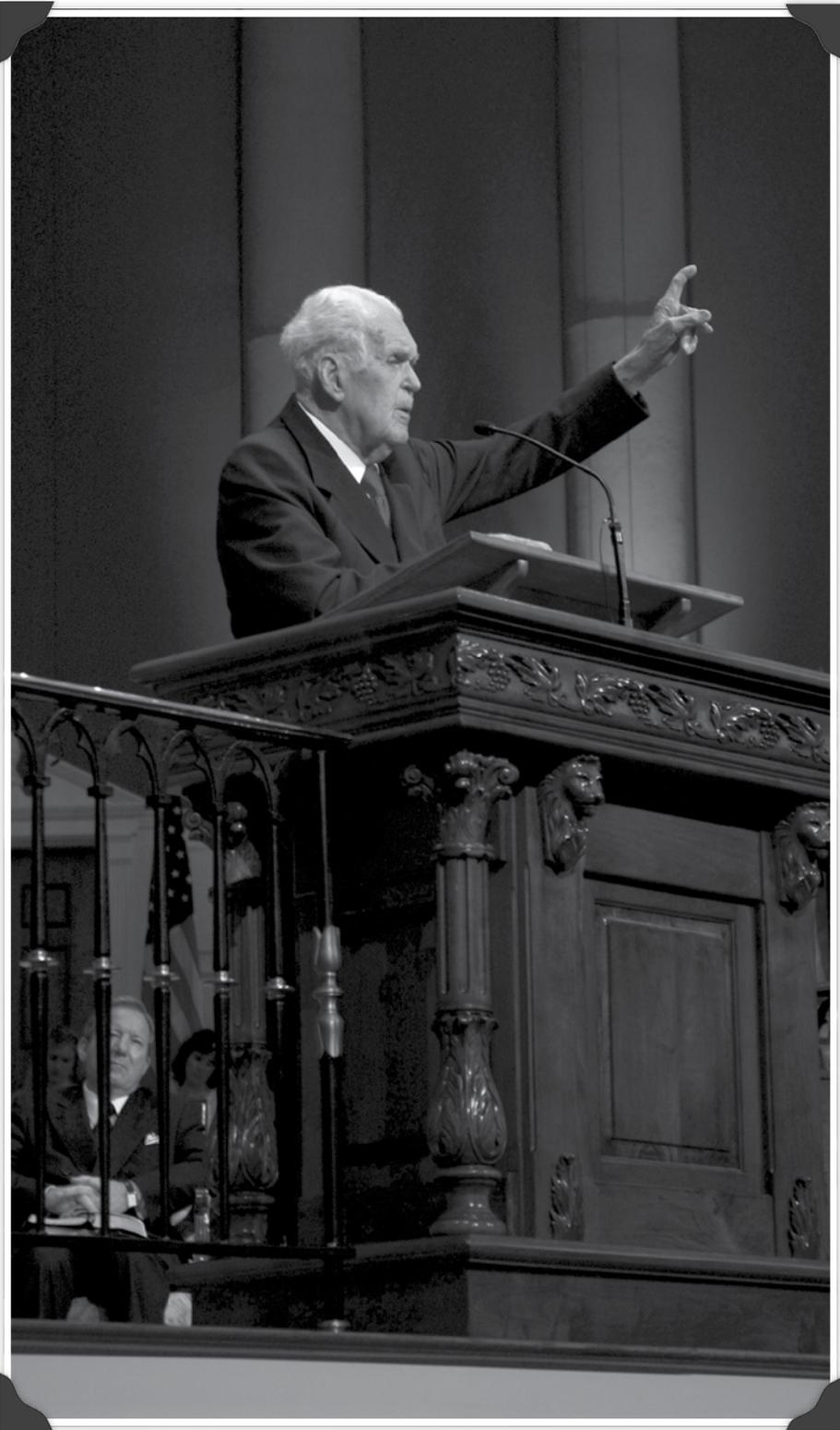
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*T*his book by Dr. Sexton brings the believer face to face with the responsibility of belonging to a local assembly and actively serving the Saviour through that church. Step by step the reader discovers his personal responsibility to God and the true meaning of church membership. This is the study you have been waiting for to help believers in their understanding of why the Lord Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it.





# *Dedication*

*In memory of Dr. Lee Roberson*

*(November 1909-April 2007)*

*My* relationship with Dr. Lee Roberson started more than half a century ago. My father found a job with a Venetian blind company, working for a man who was an active member of the Highland Park Baptist Church. This man learned that we had moved into the East Lake housing project, and that there were four little children in the home—myself, my brother (who is now a preacher), and two little girls.

He spoke with someone in the church who had a bus route, and they found us in that housing project and brought us to church.

It has been a romance of admiration, love, respect, and devotion. Without a doubt, Lee Roberson was the most Christ-like man I ever knew.

*Clarence Austin*  
*Feb 5, 42*

*Before you begin reading this book, read this list of Bible verses. Choose which ones you are going to memorize and meditate upon.*

**“...members one of another”**

Romans 12:5 *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

Ephesians 4:25 *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*

**“...minister the same one to another”**

1 Peter 4:10 *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

**“...serve one another”**

Galatians 5:13 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

**“Bear ye one another's burdens...”**

Galatians 6:2 *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

**“...forgiving one another”**

Ephesians 4:32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

**“...admonishing one another’**

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

**“...taught of God to love one another.”**

1 Thessalonians 4:9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

**“...let us consider one another”**

Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:*

**“Speak not evil one of another...”**

James 4:11 *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*

**“Confess your faults one to another...”**

James 5:16 *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

**“...having compassion one of another”**

1 Peter 3:8 *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:*

**“Use hospitality one to another...”**

1 Peter 4:9 *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.*

**“...edify one another”**

Romans 14:19 *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

### “...forbearing one another”

Ephesians 4:2 *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

Colossians 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

### “...same mind one toward another”

Romans 12:16 *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

Romans 15:5 *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:*

### “...preferring one another”

Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;*

1 Timothy 5:21 *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.*

### “...exhorting one another”

Hebrews 3:13 *But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Hebrews 10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

### “...love one another”

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

Romans 13:8 *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

1 Thessalonians 3:12 *And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*

1 Peter 1:22 *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*

1 Peter 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

1 John 3:11 *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*

1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

1 John 4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

1 John 4:12 *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

# BELIEVE AND BELONG

*“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

Acts 2:42



Years ago, as a young man, I invited the Lord Jesus Christ into my life as my personal Saviour. I followed Him in believer’s baptism, and I became a member of a local church. I am happy, not only to say that I am a Christian, but also to say that I am a member of a New Testament church.

We refer to the time in which we live as the “church age.” This age began when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world and established the New Testament church.

Churches are not buildings. The New Testament church has no walls. The building is a place to gather for worship and prayer. The work of the church, His body on earth, cannot be limited to what goes on inside a building.

The New Testament church is a local assembly of baptized believers who have voluntarily joined themselves together to carry out the Great Commission. Each local assembly is to have

only the Lord Jesus Christ as its head. The members are bound together by their mutual love for the Lord Jesus Christ and their love for each other. The body of believers adheres to a body of doctrine mutually agreed upon and founded on the Bible. (An example of a doctrinal statement can be found on the internet at FAITHfortheFAMILY.com.)

In Acts chapter two, the apostle Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, preached on the day of Pentecost, and God blessed in a miraculous way with the salvation of three thousand souls. The people were convicted of their sin as they heard the message. The response is given in Acts 2:41-47,

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

*And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Do you want your church to be a church with great influence for the Lord? Do you know that the church is supposed to be great in its influence? My opinion is that the greatness of the

church has more to do with its influence than it has to do with its size. The real measure of a church is in its likeness to Jesus Christ. Many church buildings are filled with people who are not influential for Christ. The church has no greater influence than the influence of its members.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour is a most wonderful thing. Being identified as a member of a local Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church is also the privilege and duty of every Christian. This is the way God does His work.

God's Word declares, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41). A distinct group established by the Lord Jesus had added to them about three thousand souls.

## THEY BELIEVED

"*Then they that gladly received his word.*" The people believed the Word of God as it was preached. They believed what the preacher said. The apostle Peter preached the message of Jesus Christ and told them of Christ, the promised Messiah; that He came from heaven, died on the cross, was buried and rose from the dead; and that He, this Jesus, is the only way to heaven. The Bible says that they believed God's Word, and they repented as they were pricked in their hearts and convicted of their sin. They received Jesus Christ into their lives as their personal Saviour. The greatest thing in all the world



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is to know that you are a Christian, that you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

In Acts chapter sixteen, the apostle Paul was in jail for preaching the gospel, and a jailer was there. About midnight, as Paul and Silas were singing and praising God, the Lord shook the jail where they were. The jailer, who knew that if these men escaped he would have to pay with his life, came trembling and fell down before Paul. He asked the question, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30). No doubt, they had already been talking to him about salvation, about knowing Christ. The Bible says in Acts 16:31-34,

*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

The jailer asked, “*What must I do to be saved?*” The reply was, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*” If there is anything added to simple faith in Christ, any work that we must do in order to be saved, salvation is no longer a gift.

Someone explained to me the gospel. He told me that Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a sinless life. He died on the cross, paying my sin debt and the sin debt of the whole world. He bore all our sins in His body on the cross. He was buried, and He rose

from the dead, and He ever lives to make intercession for us. This person said, “If you ask Him to forgive your sin and invite Him into your life, He will hear your prayer and forgive your sin and save you.” I believed it, and as a teenager I asked the Lord to forgive my sin and I invited Jesus Christ into my life as my Saviour. I trusted Him as my Saviour. We should know clearly that we are saved, and know with certainty.

You could ask someone, “Are you an American?” If he is, he will answer without hesitation, “Yes.” You can ask the same man, “Are you a Christian?” The typical answer is something like this, “Well, I hope so. I want to be. I’m trying to be.” Is it possible to answer with just as much certainty that you are a child of God as you would answer about your citizenship? Yes! We can know for sure that we are God’s children if we have received the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

I Peter 3:15 says, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” Be ready to tell people about how you came to know the Lord. As we answer people concerning our salvation, our answer should be given in a way that explains to them how they can know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. You and I should be able to explain to people how we came to know Christ as our personal Saviour when they ask us about our faith in God. As the Bible speaks of the church in Acts chapter two, the very first thing that God tells us is that these people believed.

Have you believed? It troubles me greatly to think that so many people have identified with a church but have never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

## THEY BELONGED

The Bible says in Acts 2:41, “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.*” They were baptized. Baptism identified

them with the Lord Jesus Christ and with this particular church established in Jerusalem. I wonder how many of you who have trusted the Lord as your Saviour have followed the Lord in believer’s baptism since you have been saved.



*The members of the local church are bound together by their mutual love for the Lord Jesus Christ and their love for each other.*

There are three things that make baptism biblically correct. First, we must have the right candidate. That is a person who knows the Lord as Saviour. Second, we must have the right mode or method of baptism, which is by immersion—going in the

water, going underneath the water, and coming up out of the water. And third, we should have the right authority.

The right authority is the local church, because baptism is an ordinance of the local church. Baptism is one of the first things the Lord Jesus ordered that we do. The other church ordinance is the observation of the Lord’s Supper, which we discuss later in this book.

The Word of God also says these believers continued in the apostles’ doctrine. This was the same body of truth the Lord Jesus gave to His apostles. Their baptism identified them also with the body of doctrine adhered to by that local church.

There are many groups of people who study the Bible that are not churches. Many crowds or gatherings of Christian people who preach and sing are not churches.

Among the thousands in the city of Jerusalem, there was a “called-out” assembly of believers. These were people who identified with the Lord Jesus and with this local assembly. They held or adhered to a certain body of doctrine. They were in no way confined to a building, but they did gather for worship.

This church, this local assembly, was made up of people who had been born again. They gladly received God’s Word and were baptized. This means they had publicly identified with the Lord Jesus Christ and with this body of believers. “*There were added unto them...*” There existed a group to which these new converts were added. The Bible says they “*continued steadfastly*” in the following:

- In the apostles’ doctrine (God’s Word)
- In fellowship (the common bond they had in Christ)
- In breaking of bread (observing the Lord’s supper)
- In prayer

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:41-42*

After Paul’s conversion and baptism, he came to the assembly in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 9:26-27,

*And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was*

*a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*

An identifiable group of baptized believers definitely existed. They held to a body of truth. They were a “called-out” assembly. This is what the word “church” literally means. They were known for their faith in Christ, and they identified with Him.

To this assembly Paul came to “join” them. The Bible says, “*He assayed [to attempt or endeavor] to join himself to the disciples.*” Beloved, we are not only to “believe”; we are to “belong” to a body of believers, identifying ourselves with the Lord and with that local assembly.

Baptism is a beautiful picture. It is a picture of how our Lord died on the cross, was buried, and rose from the dead. It is a picture of the fact that we died with Him, were buried with Him, and are risen with Him. Much more will be said about baptism in a later chapter.

## THEY BEHAVED

The members of this church behaved a certain way. Acts 2:41-42 says, “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*”

Most people live as if this world is all there is. Let me go a little further and say that most professing Christians live as if this world is all there is. If we believe that there is a real heaven

and a real hell, and that people are going to be in heaven forever with God if they have come to know Jesus Christ or be in hell forever in torment if they have not trusted Him, it will change the way we live. Our behavior is affected by our belief.

One may call his belief “Christian,” but if that belief does not change behavior, it is not biblical Christianity. The Christian life is the life of the Eternal One in us. “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*” (John 17:3). “*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*” (II Corinthians 5:17).

As I allow the Lord Jesus to have His way in my life, He crowds out lesser things. The true Christian is to become a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know Him by faith, and we love Him because He first loved us. We are encouraged by others in the local assembly who know Him and love Him.

Because of our mutual affection for the Saviour, we love and pray for one another as we work together as a body of believers to bring others to Christ. My personal story is not the exception; it is common among Christians.

I grew up in a non-Christian home. When I was a boy in Maryville Junior High School, I attended the First Baptist Church of Maryville because I knew a little brown-headed, brown-eyed girl that I wanted to see there. A kind man eventually took me aside and with the Bible explained to me that God loved me and that the Lord Jesus died to save me and that He rose from the dead. He and his pastor, Dr. J. William Harbin, at the First



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## *Believe and Belong*

Baptist Church of Maryville, Tennessee, led me to Jesus Christ. I went home and I told my mother, “I got saved tonight.”

When I was baptized, my name was entered on that church roll. I thank God that I had the privilege to identify with people who identified with the Lord and with His Word. As God has led in my life, it has been wonderful through all these years, not only to have believed on the Lord Jesus, but also to belong to a New Testament church.