

Christian Membership

Ecclesiology Part 2
On Corporate Fellowship

Let's come before our God and Maker, the One who loves us and keeps us as our Good Shepherd. Let's ask for his blessing and his illumination as he nourishes us with his Word this morning.

PRAYER...

The topic today is CHRISTIAN membership – *not* CHURCH membership, but *Christian* membership. We'll get to the difference shortly. This is the second in a series on God's design for his Church. We learned from the message on *Christian Prosperity* that God has a plan to prosper us, a plan to give us hope and a future. To accomplish his plan, God has called us to himself. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him (2Pet 1:3). We come to know God through his word, but we also come to a *practical* knowledge of God *through his Church*. The elect of God's Church were united with Christ before the foundation of the world to be conformed to his likeness (Eph 1:4-5; Ro 8:29). For what purpose? So that we may *fellowship* with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1Jn 1:3). That means we not only need to be saved, but if we are to live in fellowship with God, then we also need to be sanctified – we need to be cleansed and set apart for God's use like fine china for a banquet table, or kosher dishes for a Passover meal. We learned that the Church is where this sanctification takes place. We learned that the Church was made for us; it exists to serve and to prosper us. But we were also made for the Church; we are called to serve and to prosper it.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

We are a mutually dependent communion of saints. Remember that? This week we're going to explore WHY we are mutually dependent. What is that makes communion an essential attribute of the Body? We know that communion is a contraction of two words: common-union; we share something and someone in common. We share the Gospel in common, and the riches of the saints; we share God's grace and forgiveness – but we don't just share our experience of salvation. We share Christ's Spirit in common. If we don't have the Spirit of Christ, we don't have Christ (Rom 8:9). Christ *pervades* his Church. He lives among us just as he lives within us. He gives life to the Body of Christ, just as he gives life to each one of us individually. *We are members of the Body of Christ.*

The word “member” refers to an arm or a leg, an eye or a hand. It is a functional and necessary part of the body; it’s not just decorative. It is something – or someone – that cannot be removed without causing pain and loss to the rest of the Body. If we lose the tip of a finger, or just a little part of an ear lobe, it hurts *all over*. Every believer is that kind of body-member. Every believer is an essential part of the Body of Christ. Every believer has an intended purpose and functionality within that Body. *Every* believer is necessary to the whole. EVERY believer was designed before the foundation of the world to fulfill his or her purpose *in the Body*, AND *in the world*. That’s why we’re still here.

That makes the Church an Organism, not an Organization. God bestows gifts on each member. He intends us to use these gifts for the common good (1Co 12:7). We are not to offer our “members” as instruments of unrighteousness, but to present them to God for his use as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13). In Romans 11, Paul describes himself as a “member” of the tribe of Benjamin. His heritage and his identity are tied to his membership in that tribe. It’s true of Church membership as well. Our heritage and our identity in Christ have roots here in the Church. In Rom 12:3-5, Paul merges these ideas of individuality and unity:

“I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” ESV

He continues this theme in 1Co 6:17-20: “But the one joined to the Lord is one Spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. Every *other* sin a person might commit is outside the body, but committing sexual immorality is toward his own body. Or do you* not know that your* body is a temple of the Holy Spirit among you*, whom you* have from God? You* are not your* own, for you* were bought with a price. So glorify God in your* body.”¹

There is a connection between individual godliness, and the fact that we are not our own. We belong to Christ. We were purchased by him for his precious possession. Here Paul uses the word “body” as a double entendre – it has two meanings. The obvious meaning is our personal body; we are not to abuse it with addictions and misuse. But it carries a second meaning. We can’t see it in the English translation,

¹ Asterisk is second person plural (you-all); body is singular common (the body of you-all); “his” is *Christ’s* Body?

but the word “your” in “your body” is *plural* – even though the word “body” is singular. He could have said “your bodies,” but he didn’t. In good Southern English he said, “the body of You-All.” He extended the meaning beyond our personal fleshly housing in which the Spirit dwells, into the larger Body of believers among whom the Spirit dwells. Both are true at the same time. The Spirit dwells in each of us; but for that very reason he also dwells among us. We live together in the Church as a single organism, carrying out the will of God on earth.

God made every one of us a necessary component of his Church. He built us into its walls as living stones. We serve God by serving his Church with our gifts and with our calling (1Pet 4:10). He prospers each one of us, so that we may in turn prosper his Church: we are holy so that his Church may be holy – and his Church is to be holy because *God* is holy. *As he is, so are we in this world* (1Jn 4:17). He has summoned us *together* to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last (Jn 15:16). It’s a *team* effort. It’s a *family* affair. We “[are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens... and members of God’s household](#)” (Eph 2:19). We belong to each other as much as we belong to Christ; we belong to each other specifically *because* we belong to Christ.

Eph 4:25 [“Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another.](#) NKJV

Eph 5:29-33 [For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church; for we are members of HIS body, of HIS flesh, and of HIS bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.](#) NKJV

We are **one**. And yet we are also distinct and diverse. We have been individually called into God’s service; but at the same time, we have been called to serve Him together, *through* one another. We sometimes hear believers say, [“I love Christ, but I hate the Church. So I have a *private* relationship with Christ and that’s enough for me.”](#) How can that be? We have been called to *assemble* together as a *Church* in the sight of God and man? The word “church” means an assembly. It is the Hebrew *mi’qara* or *qahal* in the OT, and it is the Greek *ecclesia* in the NT. It means the gathering or assembly of those who have been called out – it means gathering or assembling together into a *single cohesive unit*. We don’t gather like travelers in some train station who happen to find themselves in the presence of others. We don’t mingle in the crowd to kill time, waiting to conduct our own business afterward. We’re not disinterested and uninvolved in the lives of those

with whom we're travelling on our assigned journey. The Church is a *purposeful* gathering. It acts in a coordinated and cooperative fashion. As its members, we have been assembled to achieve the purposes for which God has called us together. That's why we are commanded, "[Do not forsake the gathering together of the saints.](#)" (Heb 10:25) We share something in common that absolutely requires us to act in a coordinated fashion. We'll get to that shortly. For now, let's consider what it means to be "one body in Christ" (Rom 12:5), "fellow citizens" in the kingdom of God, and members of God's household (Eph 2:19).

We are the children of our fathers, through David to Jacob to Isaac to Abraham to Adam to *God*. We are and we have always been the sons and daughters of God. We are the offspring of Adam; we are his inheritors (1Co 15:45-50). We are also the offspring of Christ (Isa 53:10); and we are his inheritors. We are members of the same family, and inheritors of a common legacy. In Adam we inherited a sinful nature, and all the *curses* of his estate. We held his estate in common. But in Christ we inherited a new nature, and all the *blessings* of Christ's estate. And we likewise hold that estate *in common*. In Col 1:13 we are told that we were carried or transported *out of* the dominion of darkness, which was Adam's estate, and *into* the kingdom of the Son, which is Christ's estate. The *New Covenant* in Christ's blood is the *Last Will and Testament* of Jesus Christ; it was signed in his blood, and we are the named beneficiaries of his estate. It says in Romans 8:17 that we are not just heirs of God, but co-heirs with Christ – *and with one another*. It is not my estate or your estate, my inheritance or your inheritance – his household *cannot* be divided (1Co 1:13; Lk 11:17). It is the estate of Jesus Christ; it is *our* common inheritance in God's Kingdom. We share it to *his* glory, and for *his* purposes. He is the one who holds it all together (Col 1:17); he purposefully directs its activities.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

Eph 4:11-13 - [He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until everyone comes to the unity of the faith, and to the unity of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, and to the full measure of the stature of Christ...](#)

Eph 4:15-16 [Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way toward him who is the head, toward Christ, from whom the whole body *is* joined and held together by every joint's supply, each part working according to its fitted capacity, making the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. WHG](#)

What I'm about to say may strike you as somewhat strange – but only in modern evangelical America. This passage is suggesting that we are not only individually conformed to Christ's likeness, but the *Body* is conformed to Christ as well. No single one of us is an adequate representation of Christ to the world; but the Church as a whole is. We are each a piece of the larger image of Christ. We as the Church are *corporately* conformed to that image. This is such a pervasive teaching in the Old and New Testaments that it's hard to understand how we can miss it – but we've sure missed it in evangelical America. There is a strong trend in today's Church toward Roman Catholic mysticism, and pursuing a private experience of God. We think the Church is a buffet table of self-help offerings; we sample things according to our personal tastes, and walk away when we're done. But we haven't been called into monastic contemplation to live separate from the world and each other; nor were we called into mystical experiences so we can contemplate the vain imaginations of our own mind. God's truth is propositional truth; it is not a matter of personal feelings and perceptions, but of objective revelation; its focus is not on personal growth, but on growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Pe 3:18). It is tangibly demonstrated in our love and care for others.

Together we are the Bride of Christ. *Together* we are the Church. *Together* we are Christ to the world. Each one of us is shaped to serve as a living stone in the walls of his Church. Each one of us is specially carved, shaped, and polished to fit into our reserved place, so that *together* we form the likeness of Christ. To do that, each of us must be conformed to that overall image. And yet each of us is unique; we have our own distinctive voice. *Together* we are heard as a symphony, and not as a cacophony of noise. We are each fitted to our special calling and equipped to fulfill our function IN the Church, BY the Church. THAT'S how God designed it. If we don't embrace this concept of the Church as the whole, and ourselves as its parts, then we cannot grasp what it means to be a member of the Church. Now, let's look at why we must act in a coordinated and cooperative way. If we act independently and separately, what is it that cannot be fulfilled?

THE CHURCH WAS CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

The Church is an Army on the Move; it's not static or stationary. It's the *Church Militant*. We have an objective to gain, a strategy to guide us, and tactics designed to achieve success. That train station I mentioned earlier is where the troops are gathered for deployment. To that end, we *must* be members of one another. We are Christ's ambassadors, his conquering army in the world. We were united in Christ for that very purpose. We share that mission with every believer, whether past, present, or future. That mission is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world,

and to *demonstrate* the truth of it. Did you catch that? **Our shared mission is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, and to *demonstrate* the truth of it.** What implications does that statement have for our membership in the Church?

Our Ministry is the Ministry of Jesus Christ. When Jesus began his ministry, he actually read his mission-statement to the Synagogue at Nazareth. Turn to Luke 4:18-19. He read to them from Isa 61:1-2. This is our mission statement too:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me for this reason: He has anointed Me

- To preach the gospel to the poor;
- He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
- To proclaim liberty to the captives and
- recovery of sight to the blind,
- To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
- To proclaim the Day of the LORD’s favor.”

Just as the Father sent the Son into the world for this purpose, and just as Christ sent the seventy out two by two and not alone, so Christ sends us into the world as a cohesive unit. Luke 10:2-3 - **Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray [or ask] the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.”** NKJV

At the last supper, Christ redeploys his apostles. On the eve of his crucifixion, he commissions them and sends them out – the training and preparation are now over. John 13:19-20 “**tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I SEND accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.**” NIV Christ joins his followers to his own ministry, sending them as he himself was sent, carrying his Gospel with them. Because we have been united together in the BODY of Jesus Christ, we are tied to this ministry of Jesus Christ. In other words, we partner or commune with Christ when we actively continue his ministry of the Gospel to the world. And we continue his ministry to the world in a cooperative venture with other saints. Logically, that means **we also maintain our communion with Christ *through* those saints.** We cannot fully commune with Christ separately or in isolation. That may sound shocking to the American evangelical ear, but it’s true.

Being inextricably tied to the ministry of Christ means that our communion with Christ **MUST** result in communion with other believers. It’s not that it *should*, or that it *ought* to result in communion with other believers. It **MUST** result in

communion with them. Jn 13:34-35 - “A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples [*that I have sent you*]: if you love one another.” Mk 9:35 - “If anyone would be first, he must be last and servant of all.” This type of mutual love and humble service characterizes the communion and the fellowship that exists between believers and Christ, because it also characterizes the communion and fellowship that exists between the Father and the Son. Fellowship is not the same as friendship or companionship. Again, *fellowship is not the same as friendship or companionship*. That’s a common misconception in evangelicalism. Fellowship is what flows from having a *shared body of truth* and a *shared mission*.

PLEASE TURN TO JOHN 17:4... Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “I glorified you on earth, [HOW?] having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. [Isn’t that how we glorify Christ as well?] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” The Son is united to the Father by carrying out his assigned work, and the Father is united to the Son by glorifying him in that work. They are members of one another. That same kind of membership is what Jesus prays for us. SKIP DOWN TO VERSE 20:

Jn 17:20-23 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, [WHY?] SO THAT the world may believe THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, [WHY?] SO THAT the world may know THAT YOU SENT ME, and loved them even as you loved me.”

Fulfilling our assigned work proves that we are Christ’s disciples, and it proves that Christ was sent by God out of love for us. It draws us into communion with Christ and with the Father. Our assigned work is to proclaim the Gospel and to disciple all nations, teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded (Mt 28:19-20). That is a *corporate* assignment, not just a *personal* assignment. The Greek word for communion is *koinonia*. It means fellowship – participating and sharing with one another. The essence of Christian communion or fellowship is not merely acting in concert with other believers or being in their presence. It is actually *partnering* with other believers in a common endeavor. We demonstrate to the world and to each other the love that God has for us by loving one another. That’s what proves our identity as followers of Christ, as sons and daughters of the Living God.

We cannot say that we love God and yet hate our brothers and sisters in the faith. We would be lying about our love for God (1Jn 4:20). We cannot look down on our brothers and sisters, or despise them, or ignore them, or be indifferent towards them, or envy them, or resent them. WHY NOT? Because it is our love for Christ that *drives* our love for them. Our love for Christ and our love for his Body are inextricably tied together. Our *service* and *care* and *comfort* and *mercy* and *love* and *provision* for other believers are the very means by which we love Christ in a tangible way. We decided that our relationship with Christ is material, tangible, and palpable. It's all those things; but our relationship with Christ is specifically *palpable* within the context of the Church. We can *experience* Christ here.

The Church is the Physical Presence of Christ in the World. The Church is the Body and Bride of Christ, literally. The Church is not only corporate in nature; it is also *corporeal* in nature. We can touch it, receive from it, and respond to it. We can speak directly *to* it, and we can hear directly *from* it. It is a necessary means to experience communion with the Godhead. The mutuality of the *Church* is what palpably conveys the mutuality of the *Godhead*. We don't really understand Christ's sacrifice for us, and his submission to the Father, until we sacrifice ourselves for one another, and submit to Christ in the same way.

John 15:14-16 “Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” Doing what Christ commands flows from the Father's business.

Let me recap for a moment. Because we have been united together in the BODY of Jesus Christ, we are tied to the MINISTRY of Jesus Christ, which is to do the will of the Father. Christ has made known to us our Father's business. We share his ministry together in a cooperative venture. We do so as his friends, and as friends of one another; we are members of his Body, and of one another. Our communion with Christ takes place *through* other believers, whom we love as Christ loved us.

That brings us to the second implication of being tied to the ministry of Jesus Christ. The first implication is that our communion with Christ MUST result in our communion with other believers. WE are the ones who initiate that communion.

The second implication is this: Our communion with other believers is how Christ maintains his communion with US. God speaks to us through his word, AND he speaks to us through his Church, the people of God; we do not speak our own

words, but the very words of God (1Pe 4:11). It is CHRIST who initiates that communion. When we join together at the communion table, we both enjoy and demonstrate the truth that we are ONE in Christ; we are as committed to one another as we are to Christ. We are joined at the hip, partnering in the Great Commission to the glory of our God and Savior. We are cooperating with his Spirit in our mutual sanctification, in our shared cleansing; we don't do this as separate individuals acting apart, but as a single Body acting in unison. Paul writes,

2Co 11:2 I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you* as a pure virgin to Christ.

Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, so that she might be holy and without blemish.

EXPRESSING THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

Let's get specific about our communion with Christ *through* other believers. What does it mean to be a member of the Body of Christ? Predominantly, Christian membership in the Body is about *unity of purpose*, not unity of appearance, form, or even function. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you.’ And the head [which is Christ] cannot say to the feet [the lowliest part of his body], “I don't need you!” (1Co 12:21) Now, obviously the eye doesn't look like the hand, and it doesn't have the same function as the hand. But both are *united in purpose* when it comes to getting food into the mouth. The foundation of Christian unity is oneness – oneness with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, *and* with one another. We have one common purpose, which is to glorify God in all things.

Eph 4:4-6 “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” We are of one mind (2Co 13:11) and that mind or attitude is Christ's (1Co 2:16; Phil 2:5-8).

OK. So how is Christian membership different than membership in a worldly organization or institution? What makes us an organism instead of an organization? Don't organizations strive for unity and single-mindedness just as we do? Yes they do. But the difference is that we are bound, constrained, and motivated by our love for God who first loved us, and sent his Son to the cross on our behalf. We are the

beneficiaries of a unilateral contract in which Christ has done all the work and we derive all the benefits. We are *indebted* to Christ for a life and a ransom that cannot be repaid, and *need not* be repaid. This is not a contract for employment. It is not wages for services rendered in which both parties to the contract benefit from the arrangement. And yet, because Christ lives in each of us (Rom 8:9,11; 1Co 3:16), we are as bound to one another as we are to Christ. We are not free to ignore our obligations to one another any more than we may ignore our obligations to Christ.

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40). “If you cause one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better to have a large millstone around your neck and be tossed into the sea.” (Lk 17:2)

We are as truly one in the Body of Christ as the Father, Son, and Spirit are one in the Godhead. The Trinity of the Godhead is reflected in our marriages where God is the third party to every covenant of marriage. The Trinity is no less reflected in the Communion of the Saints where Christ is the head of the Body, and the capstone of the Church. Without him, it all falls apart, and in Him it all holds together (Col 1:17). It isn't what we get out of our Christian membership that counts, but what we contribute to the other members of our communion.

Whether we are talking about the Trinity, or marriage, or the Body of Christ, we are talking about a plurality of persons living in complete order, unity, and harmony. To the extent that we live in DIS-order, DIS-unity, and DIS-harmony, it CANNOT be the result of our union with Christ. It must be the result of our own ignorance of the truth of it; or else it is the result of our stubborn disobedience and outright rebellion in the face of this truth. We cannot live together in peace until we acknowledge that the Covenant of Grace covers *all* believers, equally and completely. That's what makes us members of the same household. When we are estranged from each other, we become estranged from Christ. And when we are estranged from Christ, we become estranged from each other. We are all members of *HIS* Body to the glory of God.

When we abide under the Covenant of Grace together, we can find no sweeter relationships, experience no greater love, and seek no safer shelter, than in the Bride for whom Christ died. We rejoice when we finally realize that we are *all* under grace, equally loved and equally forgiven by God. Here we may know and be known in both our glory and our weakness. Here we are dearly loved and accepted despite our flaws and our failings. Here we can experience peace and contentment in the presence of our God who lives with us, and in us.

Rev 21:2-3 I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Is this only an image of the kingdom of God that we hope may some day descend from the heavens? Or is it rather the image of the Church as it is *supposed* to exist in the world today? The answer is YES. It is both. It is the contrast between the *Already* and the *Not Yet*. The Church is the kingdom of God ALREADY in the world. Lu 17:21 “*Nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.*” But the Church is NOT YET perfected. That perfection will only be complete when Christ returns. When we are perfected and glorified individually at Christ’s return, the Bride of Christ will be presented to him whole and pure, without blemish or stain (Eph 5:25). The Church is imperfect in this world because we, as its living stones, are imperfect in this world. The same corruption that remains in us because of Adam’s sin which caused the whole world to fall into corruption, necessarily remains in the Church. When we suffer sin individually, the whole Church suffers with us. And when we overcome the world through the same power that raised Christ from the dead (Phil 3:10-21), the whole Church celebrates with us.

Do you see the *mutually dependent communion of saints* at work here under Christ as our head? Do you see the partnering that is necessary to make it all work? 1Co 1:9 – “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Our calling is to fellowship or partner with Christ and with one another; our communion together requires unity. And unity requires a certain level of loyalty, a certain level of commitment to one another. It requires what the Bible describes as “mutual submission.” Eph 5:21 **Submit “to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Notice our mutual submission isn’t to defer to other believers and relinquish control to them, but to defer to Christ and relinquish control to *him*.

1Pet 5:5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...

To clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, IS to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Humbling ourselves is not done in fear of God’s

retribution. That's not what "the mighty hand of God" means. God's mighty hand, in Greek, refers to the *agency* of God's hand, not the *threat* of God's hand. We are able to submit only by the mighty hand of God which is upon us, and the mighty hand of God is upon us when we acknowledge that Christ is the head of his Body, not men. What about church leadership then?

Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

If they're exercising their authority correctly, they won't lord it over us; they will *serve* us. They will have to give an account to God for their service, and for the outcome of their leadership. They have been charged with equipping the saints and preparing them for battle. As they submit to Christ in this, we submit to them.

Mutual submission requires that we act together as one. We do it for our mutual benefit AND for the glory of God. We strive never to do anything or say anything that will not benefit the person we are serving. Everything we do and say must be *intended* and *designed* to edify and encourage, to uplift and to instill both life and light. We do not tear down, discourage, or condemn each other. We don't instill death or darkness. We are children of light who illumine the Way (Eph 5:8-11). We are the salt of the earth; we preserve the earth and keep it from perishing (Mt 5:13). We are ambassadors of the Lord of the Universe. We don't speak our own words, but the very words of the One who sends us (2Cor 5:20; Jn 7:18; Rom 3:2; 1Pet 4:11). And so we must not work at cross-purposes.

The eye doesn't have a will of its own when it comes to eating. The hand doesn't have a will of its own when it comes to eating. The HEAD directs the eye *and* the hand to work together to feed the Body. As the hand reaches out, the eye doesn't turn away, because the head orders all the members of the Body to work together in a cooperative venture. Christ is the Head of his Body – and he is therefore our mutual head. When we each submit to Christ to do his will in the world, we submit to one another. The first naturally leads to the second. When we refuse to submit to one another to do the will of Christ, it impossible to submit to the Headship and Lordship of Christ. We are of two minds in the matter. We are double-minded and unstable in all we do. We become DIS-united and DIS-membered as a Body.

If we allow that to happen, or God forbid, if we *choose* to make that happen, we are breaking fellowship not only with one another, but with God. The communion of the Saints is shattered and the peace of the Church is destroyed. We make a lie

of the truth of what God has decreed concerning his Church: that we are One in Body, Spirit, hope, Lordship, faith, and baptism. We deny that there is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:6). We reject the truth that we are of one mind in Christ (1Co 2:16). We allow ourselves to be led by our flesh and not by the Spirit who lives in us (Rom 8:14; 1Co 3:16). We deny our very identity in Christ. Rom 8:14 – “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” If we are not led by the Spirit, being united in our purposes, then we are undermining the clear and obvious truth that we are indeed the children of God (Rom 8:16). We become actors who merely *recite* the word of God, and not ambassadors who *speak* the word of God as his living representatives in this world.

Rom 15:5-6 *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Phil 2:1-8 *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

5 *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be clutched, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

The Church is where we are supposed to practice this kind of humble submission, to experience both the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit. If we don't experience it here in the Church, there is no other place where it may be found!

Mt 5:13 *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its savor, with what shall it be salted? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.”*

Either there is nothing else with which to season the earth – the Church is God's only designated instrument to do that – or else there is no other way to regain the salt's savor – we can't salt the salt with other salt to somehow make it savory again. There is no other Church with which to salt it. Remember, we are ONE

Body. The Church MUST fulfill its purposes because there is no other designated instrument in God's plan by which to spread and nurture the seed of the Gospel. ***Christ works through his Church to spread the Gospel, and to sanctify his people.*** We are the intended beneficiaries of his work on the cross. That work is carried out *in* us by his Spirit – but it is also carried out *upon* us by the saints. When we evangelize, it isn't to make converts and then leave them in the world. We bring them into the kingdom with us, and raise them up in the faith. Col 1:13 - **“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”**

We are brought into the Church to *live*. This is our abode, our habitat, and our home. We only sojourn in the world. Listen to Christ's description of himself as the Gate of his kingdom: John 10:9-10 **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** What does it mean to come in and go out? This isn't talking about eternal salvation in the sense of either having it or not having it. We don't enter into salvation and exit out of it again. This verse is talking about our preservation, our protection, and our prosperity. It says that **HERE** in the Church we find pasture until we leave again. The pasture is a place for the sheep to feed and be comforted, the place in which they grow and reproduce. When they leave that pasture, that safe haven, they go out into the world. They are kept and they are fed in the pasture, but they are exercised and challenged in the world, so they will gain strength and fulfill their purposes.

The Church is a rich tapestry in which all the parts combine to reflect the image of Christ that no single one of us is capable of fully reflecting by ourselves. We are *members* of the Body. We are not the *whole* Body. We are living stones in the walls of the Church. We are *not* the walls on our own. We are a living organism that needs every member to work in complete order, unity, and harmony with every other member. Only then will we live a healthy and productive life as God intends. God draws together in every local body of believers those members who will *prosper* and *thrive* in that fellowship. They will partner together to do the work of Christ in the world. The work of Christ is the work assigned to him by the Father: to bring his prodigal children home – or as Christ put it, to gather his children as a hen gathers her chicks (Lk 13:34). **THIS** is the work assigned to us by Christ. **THIS** is how we partner with Christ. **THIS** is how we demonstrate our fellowship with him. **THIS** is the nature of our communion with him.

May we walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called. (Eph 4:1) Amen.