

# Covenant Membership

## Session 5 | Our Community: How We Know and Love the Church

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### Introduction

- A. This week we will be discussing our second of three Values: **Our Community: How We Know and Love the Church**. We will progress through this in a manner similar to **last week**:
1. First, I simply want to reintroduce our **Value** of Community to us.
  2. Then, I want to discuss two particular **Passions** that flow out from this Value.
  3. Then, we'll discuss Our **Leadership**, Our **Gatherings**, and Our **Commitments** as a church.

### Key Text

I identified **Ephesians 2:19** as the **key text** for this Value. Allow me to read it in **context** here as we begin: “<sup>11</sup> Remember that at one time you Gentiles . . . <sup>12</sup> were . . . separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility<sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,<sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (**Eph 2:11–19**).

### Creation and the Cosmic Symphony

- A. The Bible opens with a sort of **cosmic symphony**. With God as **Conductor**, the universe is born. And with each day of creation a common **refrain** is repeated again and again: “*And God saw that it was **good***” (6x).
- B. But all of this sets us up for the moment when the whole **cadence** of creation is thrown off, and this **jarring dissonance** is introduced in **Genesis 2:18**, when God looks at Adam and says: “*It is **not good** that the man should be alone.*”
1. There's an **awkwardness** to all of this. God is good. What He makes is good. How in the world could He have **missed this** one? Shouldn't omniscience have come through for Him here?
    - a. We can be confident that God did not miss this. He is only wanting to make sure that we don't miss this. There's a **point** He's trying to make for us here.

- C. By creating this **awkward dissonance** (and it gets even more awkward, with God parading the animals before Adam as potential partners), God is drawing our attention to the simple yet significant fact that man needs to be in **community**.
  1. As God is in community within Himself—**Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**—so man created in God's image needs to be in community—so *"male and female He created them" (1:27)*. And when at last man has woman we can return to **1:31** to hear God's declaration over it all: *"[B]ehold, it was **very good**."*
- D. But, into this divine symphony, man introduces a **dissonance** of his own. When Adam and Eve turn from God it's as if they take a **hammer** to the **mirror** of God's image in them. And it shatters.
  1. And when it shatters, it doesn't just shatter in the **vertical**, but in the **horizontal**. When man breaks community with **God**, he also breaks it with **woman**—*"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (3:12)*.
    - a. There's a dividing wall of hostility raised between us and **God**, raised between **individuals** (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel), and, later, raised even between whole **nations** (Jews and Gentiles).
- E. We live in this reality **every day**! It's why we have **locks** on our front doors. It's why we do **background checks** for our kids ministry volunteers. It's why even neighbors so often rush past one another on the sidewalk without ever even saying **hello**.
  1. We're **estranged** from **family**, from **neighbor**, from **nations**. Man is **alone**, and it is **not good**.

## Redemption and the Package Deal of Reconciliation

- A. But we have a **good God** don't we?! It was our **sin** that separated us. So He made His **Son** to be sin on our behalf. In some mysterious way, God **breaks community** with Himself—the Father against the Son—that we might be **brought back** into community with **God** and with **one another**!
  1. Read **Ephesians 2:13-14** again: *"<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both **one** and has broken down in his flesh the **dividing wall of hostility**."*
- B. The most **striking feature** of this text in **Ephesians 2** is that **reconciliation is a package deal**. To be reconciled to **God** is also to be reconciled to **one another**. To be *"brought near"* to God in the **vertical** is to have *"the dividing wall of hostility"* removed in the **horizontal**. When you get the **former**, you get the **latter**. And you can't get the **one** without the **other**.
  1. You can't have the **Father** if you won't take the **Gentiles**!

- C. Here is where it again becomes so plain that our Values are a part of an interconnected **ecosystem**.
1. ***Faith*** gives way to ***Community***. Or as Ray Ortland puts it in his little book *The Gospel*: “*Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture*” (p. 21). Or as I’ve stated it now so many times: We are a ***cross-centered*** and ***cross-cultured*** church.
    - a. The **love** that God has **shown us** in the gospel, is the same kind of love we start to **show one another**.

## Consummation and the Nucleus of God’s New Creation

- A. And it gets even more **amazing**. God’s ultimate goal of **cosmic reconciliation**—“*to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth*” (**Eph 1:10**)—begins in the **church**. It begins right here in **this room**, with **these people**. **We are the nucleus of God’s new creation!**
1. That’s why all of the **earth** is described as looking to the church—creation is “*longing for the revealing of the sons of God*” (**Rom 8:19**). And it’s why all of **heaven** is looking to the church—“*angels long to look*” into what’s going on here (**1 Pet 1:12**).
    - a. **What God is beginning here with us will one day envelope the universe!**
- B. O brothers and sisters, **what kind of community ought we then to be?!** **Ephesians 2** makes it plain: the **great goal** of God in the cross was not merely that we be **reconciled to Him**, but that we be also reconciled to ***one another***.
1. This means, on a **sadder note**, that when we move against this **momentum**—when we turn coldly from our **spouse** in the bed, when we **harden our hearts** against our brother or sister in Christ, when we **compete** and **gossip** behind each other’s back—**we stand in opposition not only to the other person, but to God Himself who has given His very Son that we might be reconciled with one another!**
    - a. **How could we drink from the cool streams of his grace and then turn and spit acid on one another?!** May such a thing never be in our church!
- C. I praise God that there are so many ***tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations*** represented even in this little church, and that we enjoy **rich, reconciled community** with one another, uniting around the cross. By His grace, may it only grow richer!

## Our Passions

### (1) Gospel Humility

- A. There are few things I am **more passionate** about cultivating in this church than this: **Gospel Humility**.

1. As far as I can tell, a church will **live or die** on this point. Are we going to **bicker** and **bite, compete** and **divide**? Or are we going to **humble** ourselves, take up our **crosses**, and **follow** Him?!
- B. **Bonhoeffer**, in *Life Together*, quotes from **Luke's gospel** and then proceeds with a **warning** for the church: *"There arose a reasoning [or 'argument'] among them [the disciples], **which of them should be the greatest**" (Luke 9:46). We know who it is that sows this thought in the Christian community. But perhaps we do not bear in mind enough that no Christian community ever comes together without this thought immediately emerging as a seed of discord. Thus at the very beginning of Christian fellowship there is engendered an invisible, often unconscious, life-and-death contest. "There arose a reasoning among them": this is enough to destroy a fellowship.*
- Hence it is vitally necessary that every Christian community from the very outset face this dangerous enemy squarely, and eradicate it. There is no time to lose here, for from the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume and hold over against that person. . . . [It] can occur in the most polite or even pious environment. . . . It is the struggle of the natural man for self-justification. He finds it only in comparing himself with others, in condemning and judging others" (pp. 90-91).*
1. What are we to **do** with this? How do we resist this **massive threat** to Christian community? How does the church *"face this dangerous enemy squarely, and **eradicate it**"*? Answer: **Gospel Humility**.
- C. To **flesh** this out, consider a quote I came across from **Greg Gilbert**: *"Unity lives where self regard dies, and self regard dies at the foot of the cross."* We will be united (**community**) only where self regard dies (**humility**), and self regard dies at the foot of the cross (**gospel**).
1. Let's **walk back up** his thought for a minute.
- (1) At the Foot of the Cross, Self Regard Dies...
- A. Self regard, pride, works in two different directions:
1. We commonly think of it, on the one hand, as a **high regard for self**—"Aren't I great?!"
  2. But it is of the same essence, on the other hand, when one has such **low regard for self**—"Aren't I horrible?!"
- a. In both cases it is that all of life is **orbiting** around **self**.
- B. Brothers and sisters, if we still have **regard for self** after gazing upon the cross of Christ, we either have **not yet seen the cross** for what it truly is, or we have **strayed dangerously far** from it and are in desperate need of returning back to it.
1. The cross will **not let** me have self regard **on either side** of the balance.

- a. If I have **high** regard for self, the cross says I am a **horror**—so shot through with sin that, for God to even look upon me again, the beloved Son **had to die**.
  - b. But, if I have **low** regard for self, the cross says I am a **treasure**—so cherished that, to bring me back home to God, the beloved Son **chose to die**.
- C. O, my friends, the ground is **level** at the foot of the cross. No one is more **loveable** than another here. No one is more **loathsome** here. All of your **goodness** can't endear you. All of your **badness** can't disqualify you. God's grace is **no respecter** of persons.
  - 1. It's concern is not for you on either side of the balance, but only where you stand in relation to Christ!
- D. And self regard just **dies** right there! It's no longer about **me** at all. It's about **Him**!

## (2) Where Self Regard Dies, Unity Lives!

- A. And as self regard **dies** at the foot of the cross, true Christian unity and community comes **alive**! Like **compost** in the soil, the **decaying** of my **pride**, **feeds** the root of our **fellowship**!
  - 1. What happens when a community has lost regard for **self**? They can finally have regard for **one another**.
    - a. As Bonhoeffer comes out in the conclusion of his thought: *"Self-justification and judging others go together, as **justification by grace** and serving others go together"* (p. 91).
- B. Gilbert's flow of thought really just follows the Apostle Paul's in **Philippians 2:1-8**: *"<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*
  - 1. **Unity** in our community will come from **humility**, but humility will be formed in us only by the **gospel**.
- C. We are passionate about **Gospel Humility** in this church.

## (2) Every-Member Ministry

- A. We must not think that because we are all **humbled** by the cross of Christ that we are all therefore **irrelevant** to the mission of Christ. No! He **humbles** us so that He can **use** us.
1. We are of **little use** to the kingdom so long as we think we are of **great use**. It is only when we have **given up** on our own **strength** and **purpose** that we can at last be reinvigorated with His. He can start using us because we **stop fighting back**. To come under Christ is not to sit ourselves down on the **bench** so much as it is to finally be put in the **game**.
- B. With Christ as our **Head**, we become a member of His **body**, and in His body, every part plays a **vital** role. Far from **irrelevant** to the mission of Christ in this church, you are **vital** to it.
- C. This is the Paul's great burden in **1 Corinthians 12**: *"<sup>4</sup> [T]here are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . .*  
*<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body" (vv. 4-7, 14-20).*
- D. Some people approach the church like those dudes in the gym that think every day is **biceps day**. The **ladies** don't dig big calves like they dig big biceps, so every day is biceps day. But after months, even years, of this, the guys look ridiculous. They have these massive **tree-branch arms** and these tiny **twig legs**. If you got in a fight, all you'd have to do is kick his **shins** and he would just topple over.
- E. Well, some people approach the **church** like this. The work is to be done by a **few**.
1. They might think this for a number of reasons:
    - a. Maybe they're the **bicep** and their **proud**—"Stand back, I got this!"
    - b. Maybe they're not the bicep and they're **lazy**—"Pass out the popcorn and let me just veg."
    - c. Or maybe they're **broken** and **depressed** and feel like others need to do it because if they try they're just going to screw it up.
  2. Whatever the case, every day is **biceps day**. So Christ's body gets all **disproportional** and **disfigured**. And we have the appearance of strength but we're substantially weak.

- a. Brothers and sister, may it **never be** with us! Every member matters.
- F. The call of the **pastor** or the **Elder** or the leader is not so much to do all the heavy lifting as it is to **equip** every member to **lift together**: “<sup>11</sup> *He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* <sup>12</sup> *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*” ([Eph 4:11–12](#)).
1. It is only as every member is playing a vital role that the body as a whole is made **strong**. Paul goes on to say that this is how we stop being “*tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*” ([v. 14](#)).
  - a. Satan can’t just come and kick our **shins**, because every member is involved in this thing.
- G. So this a **call** for the **proud** (like myself) to let others into the work. You are not God’s gift to the church. Every member is God’s gift to the church. This is a call for the **lazy** to get off the couch. God didn’t save you to be a **spectator** but a **soldier**. You are needed in this church. This is a call for the **depressed** to “*shake yourself from the dust and arise*” ([Isa 52:2](#)). The **Spirit** of Christ is in you. Have no fear! “[F]or God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love” ([2 Tim 1:7](#)).
1. This is a call for **Every-Member Ministry**.

## Our Leadership

### Leadership for the Sake of the Membership

- A. With our **presuppositions** of **Gospel Humility** and **Every-Member Ministry** in place, we are positioned to better understand this next discussion of **Our Leadership**.
1. By now it should be clear we are not talking about leadership as those who are more **worthy**—for the ground is **level** at the foot of the cross; or more **important**—for **every member** is a minister.
- B. But, nonetheless, God, because He **cares** for the church, provides her with **structure**, **authority**, and **leadership**.
1. God cares not only for **ardor** in the church—that the spiritual gifts are being passionately pursued and exercised. He cares also for **order**—that the spiritual gifts are being used in an **appropriate way** ([1 Cor 14:40](#)).
  2. God cares not only for the **organism** of the church—that, like a body, every member is doing its part. He cares also for the **organization** of the church—that, like a body, there is a **skeletal** structure designed to support and undergird the organic life.



- C. God promotes **order for the sake of ardor**. He promotes **organization for the sake of the organism**. He establishes **leadership for the sake of the membership**.

## The Elder and the Deacon

- A. The church, it would seem from the Scriptures, is given **two perpetual offices** by her Savior: namely, the **Elder** and the **Deacon**. And these are the two types of official leadership that we recognize **here**.
- B. Now I don't have time to go through the **origin** and general **function** of these offices within the church, but I will **define** them for you here:
1. **Elders are under-shepherds of Christ, appointed by the Holy Spirit, through the church, to serve by leading, preeminently in the proclamation of gospel word.**
  2. **Deacons are assistants to the Elders, appointed by the Holy Spirit, through the church, to lead by serving, preeminently in the manifestation of gospel deed.**
- C. If you want to know why I landed on the definitions I did, you'll have to read through that section in your **notebook**.

## Our Gatherings

- A. Finally, I want to address **Our Gatherings** as a church. Even here I'm going to have to **narrow** my sights for the sake of time on one gathering in particular: namely, the **Sunday Service**.

## The 20/20 Vision

- A. But before I do, let me at least make mention of what we've called **The 20/20 Vision**. You'll find that vision laid out in **Appendix 8**, and I would encourage you to read it.
1. But, in short, drawing from **Acts 20:20**, I simply make the claim that if we are to **see** and **show** Christ rightly (with 20/20 vision), we must be meeting in both **large gatherings** and **small groups**.
    - a. The largest gathering we have is the **Sunday Service**. And our standard small groups are the **Home Group** and, diving down even deeper, the **DNA Group**.
- B. But let's just close by looking briefly at the **Sunday Service**.

## Sunday Service

- A. Initially it seems the early **Christians** gathered formally for worship on the **last day** of the week, **Saturday** (the **Sabbath**) with the **Jews** in the temple and synagogues. But as it became clear that the Jews were rejecting their Messiah and that the Christians were now a distinguished religious people, "**Christians**" (**Acts 11:26**), they began meeting on **Sunday**, the



**first day** of the week, the day of Jesus' **resurrection**, appropriately called "*the Lord's Day*" (Rev 1:10; cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2).

1. Jesus' **resurrection** on this **first day** of the week, then, initiated a **new creation**, with a **new humanity** and, hence, a **new day of worship**!
- B. I think people are prone to neglect or **downplay** the Sunday gatherings because they **don't quite get** what's going on here. For some it's just **another event** on the calendar. And if something **better** comes up, well, there's always **next week**. *"I mean, really, what's the point? We just get together and talk about the **same thing** and sing the **same songs**."*
- C. The author of Hebrews comes in to **help** us at this point.
1. Hebrews 10 begins with a discussion of Christ's **high priestly** work in offering a **full** and **final sacrifice** for our **sins** (vv. 1-14).
  2. Then it moves to a discussion of the **New Covenant** Christ has made with us in His **blood** (vv. 15-18).
  3. And then, in vv. 19-25, the author begins to draw out **implications** for the **covenant community**, the **local church**. And with these implications he gives us a **breathtaking vision** for the **local church** in general, and the **Sunday Service** in particular: *"<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> 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."*
- D. In light of **Christ's work** on the cross for us, the author calls us to **three "let-us"s**—three things we ought to do when we **meet together**.
1. First, when we meet together: *"let us **draw near**"* to God (v. 22). We gather together and we **rush the throne** of grace. Coming together is ultimately about coming into **God's presence**!
  2. Second, when we meet together: *"let us **hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering"* (v. 23). We encourage one another to keep **holding onto** the One who is holding onto us. Hearts can drift into **doubt** and **denial**. And we're here to hold up each other's arms.
  3. Third, when we meet together: *"let us consider how to **stir up** one another to love and good works"* (v. 24). Hearts can grow **cold** and **embittered**, **lazy** and **apathetic**. And we're here to stir one another up.
- E. And he closes with a **final plea**: *"[Do] not [neglect] to **meet together**, as is the habit of some, but [encourage] one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (v. 25).

1. We're going to **need one another** in the days ahead. Our faith will be **tested**. **Trials** will come. If we're not gathering with the Saints, we're not going to make it.
    - a. The **world**, the **flesh**, the **Devil** are doing everything they can to keep our eyes off the coming **Day** and fixate them on the **here** and **now**. *"Eat, drink, and be merry. Get your revenge. Indulge your lusts. Live it up."*
      - i. But we come in here and we say, "No way! Let's rush the throne. Let's hold fast the confession. Let's stir each other up. And let's keep waiting for that Day that's drawing near!"
- F. Consider the words of **Charles Spurgeon** as we close: *"One day a young man came to visit [Spurgeon] and said to [him], 'I can be a Christian without the church; I don't need others.' They were sitting in the lounge by an open fire and Spurgeon picked up some tongs, took a coal from the blazing fire and placed it on the hearth. They continued talking and after awhile, Spurgeon said, 'Look down at the hearth. What happened to the coal I took out of the fire?' The young man answered, 'Well, it's become black. It's lost its heat and its flame.' Spurgeon replied, 'Young man, that's why you need to be part of the church, because it is only together we are stimulated and together that we grow. But like this coal taken out of the fire, on its own it dies out. But in the heat of the fire all the other coals are stimulating it to go on glowing and give off heat.'"*
1. You are helping me **burn**, and I pray I am helping you! O church, let's not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some! It is **not good** that man should be **alone**. But "[b]ehold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] dwell [together] in unity"! (Psa 133:1).