

10. The Gospel Community

My own testimony re: ministry and the church (Acts & Ephesians)

“By becoming a Christian, I belong to God and I belong to my brothers and sisters. It is not that I belong to God and then make a decision to join a local church. My being in Christ means being in Christ with those others who are in Christ. This is my identity. This is our identity. . . . The loyalties of the new community supercede even the loyalties of biology (Matthew 10:34-37; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 11:27-28). If the church is the body of Christ, then we should not live as disembodied Christians.” - Tim Chester and Steve Timmis

Gospel → Community → Mission

The mission of making disciples and the church (Matthew 28:18-20)

“The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God’s new community. For his purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in a future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory.” - John Stott

Defining the Church

Matthew 16:15-20

ekklesia - called ones, called out ones

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

“The church is essentially the living community of those who have responded to the call of God, and therefore not the formal ecclesiastical structure immediately brought to mind today in the word ‘church.’”
- Bruce Milne

Called out - out of the domain of darkness, out of the domain of sin, Satan, and death (from Adam into Christ)

Called together - called to assemble as a community (congregation)

Called for - the mission of making disciples (witness to the world)

Called to - the Lord and one another (reconciliation, adoption, household)

The Church and the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is the rule of God and the sphere of blessing in which His rule is realized. Although God rules over everything, His reign is acknowledged and made manifest in different ways among different people. How does the Kingdom of God relate to the church?

Jesus spoke primarily about the Kingdom → the epistles speak primarily about the church.

“The concept of the kingdom of God implies a community. . . . The concept of the kingdom of God implies both the existence of a group who own Him as King and the establishment of a realm of people within which His gracious power is manifested.” - I. Howard Marshall

“While there is an inseparable relationship between the Kingdom and the church, they are not to be identified. . . . The Kingdom is God’s reign and the realm in which the blessings of his reign are experienced; the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God’s reign and entered into the enjoyment of its blessings. The Kingdom creates the church, works through the church, and is proclaimed in the world by the church. There can be no Kingdom without a church -- those who have acknowledged God’s rule -- and there can be no church without God’s Kingdom; but they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men.” - George Eldon Ladd

The Universal and the Local Church

We see the distinction between the universal and the local church in Paul’s use of “the body” in Ephesians 1:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:27

The universal church is composed of all believers on earth.

Ephesians 1:22-23 *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

The local church is comprised of believers assembling together in a particular area (house, city)

1 Corinthians 12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

The local church is made up of people gathered together in a particular locale who have committed themselves to practically walk out their faith in Christ together. This commitment is to the spiritual authority God places in the local church, the relationships with other believers whom God has joined us with and the various works of service that we are to perform for one another as we carry out the mission of making disciples.

The local church is important for at least five reasons:

1. It provides a context to put our commitment to Christ into practice

2. It provides a context for our growth and maturity
3. It provides a context for us to discover and use our particular spiritual gifts
4. It provides a context for spiritual protection (doctrinal and moral)
5. It provides a context for demonstrating the gospel's power

"We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place." - Millard Erickson

"Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church." - Karl Schmidt

Throughout the NT, the emphasis falls on the local church.

Commitment to a local gathering of believers (membership) is assumed in the NT.

1. People are said to be "added to the church"
2. The "church at" _____ suggests a discernible body in a particular location
3. Practicing the "one anothers" assumes a close relationship and commitment to other believers
4. The call for demonstrated unity (they will know you are my disciples by your love) assumes mutual commitment
5. The sacraments and church discipline assume that it can be clearly determined who is and who is not in the church
6. Elders are always local and the church is called to submit to their elders

Hebrews 10:24-25 *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 encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

The Nature of the Church

1. The Church is One

Matthew 16:18 *I will build my church . . .* (singular)

1 Corinthians 1:13; 12:12, 20

Romans 12:4-5

John 10:16; 17:20-26

The Unity of the Church is Rooted in our Relationship (union) with Christ

1 Corinthians 12:27

Galatians 3:27-28

1 Corinthians 1:2

“The church forms a spiritual unity of which Christ is the divine head. It is animated by one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ; it professes one faith, shares one hope, and serves one King.” - Louis Berkoff

“The true unity in the Holy Spirit of all regenerate people is a fact, irrespective of outward denominational disunity. The call for unity in the NT is therefore a summons to ‘keep’ the fundamental oneness of life which the Spirit has imparted through regeneration. . . . The unity of the invisible church is an accomplished fact, given with salvation.” - Bruce Milne

The Unity of the Church Does Not Demand Uniformity

- not uniformity of organization or practice. We can differ on “non-essentials.”

The Unity of the Church is the Basis for Our Fellowship

- unity expresses itself in goodwill, fellowship, and love for other Christians and churches

Ephesians 4:1-6

Philippians 2:1-2

Divisions in the Body of Christ are Shameful

1 Corinthians 1:10 (ch 1-4)

2. The Church is Holy

1 Corinthians 1:2

Given what follows in his letter, it seems odd that Paul calls the church in Corinth “holy” or “sanctified.” This doesn’t mean that the church is sinless. It speaks of holiness or sanctification in the positional sense. This positional sanctification is thus being worked out in a progressive way.

The Church’s Holy Position

1 Corinthians 1:30

2 Thessalonians 2:13

The church is also holy because of the indwelling presence of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

The Church's Holy Calling (progression)

"A Church's relationship with Christ the church's head will be expressed in the moral character and tone of their common life and relationships. A church which is a stranger to holiness is a stranger to Christ." -

Bruce Milne

Colossians 3:12

1 Peter 1:15-16

3. The Church is Catholic

- meaning "universal" - it is not limited to a nation or particular group of people but includes every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). Neither is it limited to a particular place (eg Jerusalem) - see John 4

Galatians 3:28

Colossians 3:11

Revelation 5:9

"To speak of the catholicity of the church is thus to refer to the entire church, which is universal and which has a common identity of origin, lordship, and purpose. . . . While the local church is an entire church, it is not the entire church. As catholic, the church includes believers of past generations and believers of all cultures and societies." - Evangelical Dictionary of Theology

"Catholicity means that the church is Christ's. We cannot exclude those whom he welcomes, or welcome those whom he excludes." - Edmund Clowney

4. The Church is Apostolic

- the church is based on the doctrine of the apostles as handed down from Jesus.

Hebrews 3:1

Ephesians 2:20

Ephesians 3:4-5

“The church carries the apostolic gospel down through the centuries and around the globe. What it bears is neither a memory of the gospel enshrined in tradition, nor a new gospel, appropriate to a later age, but the apostolic gospel, recorded in the inspired words of the NT.” - Edmund Clowney

The Marks of the Church

True Preaching of the Word

Proper Celebration of the Sacraments

Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline

Describing the Church

“Each of the metaphors used for the church can help us to appreciate more of the richness of privilege that God has given us by incorporating us into the church.” - Wayne Grudem

1. God’s People

This emphasizes the fact that God chooses particular people and calls them out of the world and gathers them together as His own.

The OT covenant formula: “I will be their God and they will be my people” is ultimately fulfilled in the church.

2 Corinthians 6:16 *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among men and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Hebrews 8:10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’*

2. God’s Family

This emphasizes our relationship with God. As his adopted children, we call God our Father and Jesus our brother. This image also speaks to the inheritance we have in Christ. Also, it speaks to the relationship we have with each other as brothers and sisters.

Ephesians 2:19 *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

1 Timothy 3:15 *...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.*

Ephesians 4:6 *...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Romans 8:14-17 *...For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

“This image reminds us of our high privilege: raised by his grace to the glorious status of sons and daughters of God. It speaks too of the character of our mutual relationships, as members of one family, and challenges us to trust our heavenly Father to meet all our needs.” - Bruce Milne

3. God's Flock

This description emphasizes God's care and protection for the church. Sheep are the most helpless (dumb and defenseless) of all animals and must rely completely on their shepherd for their survival. This evokes for us all the shepherding images of the OT and NT.

Psalms 95:7 *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice...*

Psalms 100:3 *Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Isaiah 40:11 *He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.*

Ezekiel 34:15 *I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.*

Hebrews 13:20 *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,*

John 10:14 *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,*

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

“This image underlines the utter dependence of the church on its head and Lord, the compassion and love which the Lord expresses towards us, and his commitment to guide, protect and nourish his people.” - Bruce Milne

4. Christ's Body

This description emphasizes our vital union with Him and our dependence upon Him as our head as well as our responsibility to obey Him as our head. It also emphasizes, particularly in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16, our dependence on one another for proper functioning of the body. And our mutual care for one another. Further, it emphasizes the way we are called to continue His work. Spiritual gifts given to the body for edification and witness.

There is the dual aspect of one body but many members or parts.

Romans 12:4-5 *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.*

1 Corinthians 12:27 *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

Ephesians 1:22-23 *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Ephesians 4:12 *...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

Ephesians 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*

Colossians 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

Colossians 2:10 *...and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

Colossians 2:19 *...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

“The living Christ was so identified with his community that it could be spoken of as ‘his body’, that is, the concrete expression of his real presence.” - Bakers

consider what Jesus says to Paul on the Damascus Road

“His being the head implies that all our life and nourishment flow from him; we live out of him, from him, through him and unto him.” - Bruce Milne

5. God’s Building/Spirit’s Temple

This description emphasizes God's dwelling among us through the Spirit. His presence is not limited to a building but is ever present in and among His people. Also emphasized is Christ as the foundation of the church, the one on whom all else is built.

This image, more than any other, establishes us as a community of the Spirit.

Romans 8:9 *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

Romans 8:11 *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

1 Corinthians 3:9 *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

1 Corinthians 3:11 *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Ephesians 2:19-22 *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

1 Peter 2:4-5 *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

“At Pentecost the Lord came to take possession of his people, filling his spiritual house with his presence.” - Edmund Clowney

6. God’s Vinyard

This image emphasizes our vital, life giving connection to Christ and the fruitfulness that is both expected and possible as a result.

Psalms 80:8 *You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.*

Isaiah 5:1 *Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.*

Isaiah 5:6-7 *I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!*

John 15:1-8 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

“This image speaks of God’s care of the church, the church’s total dependence on its Lord for its life and existence, and his concern for its purity and fruitfulness in the world.” - Bruce Milne

7. Christ’s Bride

This description particularly emphasizes God's unique love for His church and His commitment to bring her to perfection. This was a common OT theme with Israel's idolatry being likened to adultery.

Isaiah 54:5-8 *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer.*

Isaiah 62:5 *For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

Jeremiah 2:2 *"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.*

Ephesians 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, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Ephesians 5:32 *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Revelation 21:2 *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 *I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Jesus is referred to as the bridegroom and the consummation as a wedding feast.

Matthew 9:15 *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

Matthew 25:1 *"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom."*

Matthew 22:2 *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son...."*

Revelation 19:7-9 *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and*

pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

"Christ embodies God's husband love for the church, expressed supremely in his self-sacrifice for her so that the church might be presented to her heavenly bridegroom 'as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless..' (Eph 5:27). - Bruce Milne

"The image underlines that God's relationship to his people is one of unqualified love. He has chosen and redeemed us because his desire is towards us; we are the objects of his eternal love. This metaphor also confronts us with our responsibility to be single-minded in our devotion to God and to recognize the gravity of giving our affection and loyalty to other things, not least our own ambitions and interests. God's love is so deep that it cannot tolerate rival affections." - Bruce Milne

The Role of Pastors

Acts 20:28

Ephesians 4:11

Hebrews 13:17

1 Thessalonians 5:12

The Importance of Church Discipline

Matthew 18

Seriousness of sin (vv. 1-9)

The Heart of the Father (vv. 10-14)

The Responsibility of the Church (vv. 15-20)

The Restoration of the Sinner (vv. 21-35)

- based on God's forgiveness

- forgive and restore - don't be hard hearted and self-righteous when a sinner does repent

The Goals of Church Discipline

1. To Glorify God through Obedience to His Word

2. To Maintain Our Testimony and the Honour of Christ's Name

Romans 2:24

1 Peter 2:12

3. To Maintain the Purity of the Church

1 Corinthians 5:6-7

Hebrews 12:15

4. To Deter Others from Sin

Ecclesiastes 8:11 *Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.*

1 Timothy 5:20 *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.*

5. To Restore Sinners

Galatians 6:1

James 5:20

6. To Preserve God's Blessing Rather Than Invite His Judgment

1 Peter 4:17

Community Life

VII. Community Life

"Not only are we bound to God, but all who are in Christ are bound together with us by His blood." - Charles Simpson

"Entering into community life involves a conversion (as real as my initial one) from being concerned primarily about my individual good to taking a concern for the common good. I pass from superficial relationships based primarily on my convenience and a desire to have my needs met, to relationships based on self-sacrifice and a commitment to meeting other's needs." – Chuck Colson

Proverbs 18:1 *He who separates himself seeks his own desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.*

Fellowship

“Spiritual fellowship is not a luxury, but a necessity, vital to our spiritual growth and health.” – Jerry Bridges

“The fellowship of sharing with one another what we have received from the Lord is a spiritual necessity. For God has not made us self-sufficient. We are not made so we can keep going on our own.” – J. I. Packer

If the lifestyle of the church is best described as community, our relating with one another within that community is best described by the word, fellowship. Fellowship expresses the idea of sharing, or having something in common with somebody else. The word translated fellowship in the New Testament is also translated as participation, partnership and communion. In essence it means to share a common life. It includes . . .

A. Sharing Our Common Life In Christ

1 John 1:3 ...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:11-12 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

J.I. PACKER - “Fellowship is, first, a sharing with our fellow-believers the things that God has made known to us about Himself, in hope that we may thus help them to know Him better and so enrich their fellowship with Him.”

J.I. PACKER - "Fellowship with God is the source from which fellowship among Christians springs; and fellowship with God is the end to which Christian fellowship is a means. We should not, therefore, think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercises of private devotion. We should recognize rather that such fellowship is a spiritual necessity; for God has made us in such a way that our fellowship with himself is fed by our fellowship with fellow Christians, and requires to be fed constantly for its own deepening and enrichment."

B. Sharing Our Material Possessions

This aspect of fellowship is summarized in Acts chapters 2 and 4 -- "All believers were together and had everything in common," and "there were no needy persons among them." Their commitment to each other was such that when another was in need the entire community responded to meet that need in very practical ways. This includes not only giving our possessions but our time and abilities in service to others.

Romans 12:13 *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

Hebrews 13:16 *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

C. Sharing In Daily Life

JERRY BRIDGES - "The social dimension of fellowship provides an entrance into the spiritual dimension."

The early church was characterized by friendship. They greeted one another, practiced hospitality and enjoyed one another's company in the course of daily living (Acts 2:46). This daily interaction was the context for much of the fellowship mentioned in A. above as well as for much service and ministry that would occur outside the confines of a church meeting.

What is Fellowship and Why Do We Need It?

We fellowship because we need each other. Paul expresses this need in the analogies of the body in **1 Corinthians 12:14-21** and **Romans 12:4-8**. We need each other for a variety of different reasons. These reasons are well summarized by Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

A. Effective Labor

Ecclesiastes 4:9 *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.*

The purpose of the church includes edification or building up the body of Christ and outreach, especially witness to the world. Our relationships are a powerful tool in accomplishing both of these goals.

1. Maturity

We are built up as we are built together. This includes both personal character development and bringing the body to maturity through the diversity of gifts in the church.

JIM DURKIN - "Neither individual Christians nor the church corporately can come to full maturity without enduring, committed relationships among Christians and the atmosphere of care, support, and encouragement that these relationships produce. Every gift and every member

is needed for the church to fully manifest the Lord Jesus Christ. But these individual ministries and gifts will not emerge unless a high quality of commitment and caring - a truly biblical quality - is created and nurtured within the church."

JACK HAYFORD - "One of the chief scalpels that God has chosen for shaping us into His image is the dynamic of personal friendships."

A. SKEVINGTON WOOD - "Individualism is a mark of immaturity."

a. Character development. As one man has said, "One can acquire anything in solitude except character."

Proverbs 27:17 *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

Ephesians 4:14-15 *...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ....*

ARTHUR WALLIS - "Essential to...maturing is a work of purifying that is not accomplished by sitting together in church buildings. The maturing process means being thrown together in life situations. Most of us can be reasonably spiritual on our own. It is alongside someone else that attitudes and reactions begin to surface and the sparks begin to fly."

TED ENGSTROM - "I've noticed that behavior put under close scrutiny tends to change for the better. People who are made accountable to a mentor, to a group of friends...become more serious about changing their behavior...When there is improvement, invariably it means that a person has been called to account."

b. Diversity of gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to build the church. No one person has all the gifts necessary, but each one is given a gift that contributes to the common good. We need one another and the gifts each brings to mature corporately.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

1 Corinthians 12:7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,*

Ephesians 4:16 *...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.*

2. Witness

As important as our individual efforts in evangelism are, we must realize that those efforts are not our only witness. One of the most powerful witnesses we give to the world is our unity and love for one another in the church.

John 13:35 *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

John 17:20-21 *"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, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

Acts 2:42-47 *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

JIM DURKIN - "Unity then -- as manifested by lasting relationships among Christians -- is the highest form of evangelism."

NEAL MCBRIDE - "Close relationships among the members of God's family provide a context for applying biblical truth, promote unity and caring among the members, meet spiritual and emotional needs, furnish a setting for lifestyle evangelism, and in short, demonstrate the Body of Christ in action."

B. Support

Ecclesiastes 4:10 *For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!*

Life can be difficult. We struggle with sin -- our own and others; and the effects of sin -- death, sickness, sorrows, pain. We can grow tired, discouraged, fearful, etc. We need others to come alongside and support and help us in such times.

Romans 12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

1 Corinthians 12:26 *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

We would identify six general areas where we are called to support one another.

1. Comfort the distressed.

To comfort means "to cheer, to ease the grief or troubles of."

Job 16:5 *I could strengthen you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.*

2 Corinthians 1:4 *...who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

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

2. Encourage the discouraged.

To encourage means "to inspire with courage, spirit and hope; to hearten." This is not only for the discouraged but a means of spurring one another on - i.e. exhortation.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 *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.*

3. Correct the sinful.

Correction can include confrontation when we are sinned against, mild admonition, or strong rebuke. The goal is always restoration of the sinner. Included in this is the willingness to confess and be accountable.

Matthew 18:15 *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

Galatians 6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

James 5:16 *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

4. Help the weak.

This would include both material and spiritual help.

Romans 15:1 *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

1 Thessalonians 5:14 *Help the weak.*

1 John 3:17-18 *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

5. Council or teach the ignorant.

This would include sharing the wisdom, insight, experience we have gained with those who need it. It is in a special way the job of leaders but in a general way the duty and privilege of all believers.

Romans 15:14 *I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*

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

C. Protection

Ecclesiastes 4:12 *And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

Leaders are not the only ones who are called to watch over the flock. We are each called to watch over one another's lives to protect one another from sin, deceit and foolishness by prayer, intervention, council, etc.

Genesis 4:9 *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"*

Luke 17:3 *Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,*

Romans 16:17 *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*

Ephesians 6:18 *...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*

James 5:20 *...let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

D. Companionship

Ecclesiastes 4:11 *Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?*

This verse speaks of our closest relationships. We are related with all in the local church but we can only be closely related with a few. These few will provide us with the most frequent and deepest fellowship.

Proverbs 18:24 *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

IV. ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FOR BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP

The Bible contains a multitude of commands on how we are to treat one another. Five qualities stand out.

A. Love

Our entire duty toward our fellow man is summarized in the second great command -- love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus expanded our understanding of what this meant in John

13:34 -- "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

What was new about this command was that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would enable his disciples to love one another and the world with the same love with which He Himself loved them. Paul describes this type of love for us in 1 Corinthians 13.

Romans 13:8 *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Galatians 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

Colossians 3:12-14 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

1 John 3:18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 John 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

B. Servanthood

1. Called to Serve

In God's kingdom, serving is not something we do on occasion, it is a way of life. All God's people are called upon and gifted to follow the example of Jesus and be "a servant of all." When we accept the saving benefits of Christ we also accept the responsibilities of becoming His servant. When we serve Him we will invariably find ourselves serving His people. True servanthood is the willful giving of my very self through the expenditure of time, energy, or possessions in order to meet the needs of another as God would direct.

JERRY BRIDGES - "Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, our talents, and our energies in serving one another in the Body of Christ."

Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Colossians 1:10 ...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

JOHN OWEN - "God hath work to do in this world; and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements is to cast off His authority. It is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; but we must also serve our generation as David did before he fell asleep."

JOHN CALVIN - "If we want to be considered members of Christ, let no man be anything for himself, but let us all be whatever we are for the benefit of each other."

2. Gifted to Serve

God not only calls us to serve but provides us the means and gifting to serve effectively. One such means is His Word. Paul writes Timothy that the Scriptures help a Christian "be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Another is gifted leaders who "prepare God's people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12). A third is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who develops our character to enable us to be "useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). Finally, we have specific gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, to enable us to serve in a particular area or ministry of the church.

Romans 12:6-8 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various

kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

1 Peter 4:11 ...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

B. Unity

Unity is more than a lack of strife but an active pulling together around Jesus and His purpose for the church. It requires us to both build unity and resist disunity.

Luke 11:17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

1. Building unity

Positively, unity says we are going to work together in love, respect and mutual submission to glorify God in our mission and relationships. We may disagree on certain matters but we must never allow division over anything. Unity also requires that we have an equal regard for all who are part of the church.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 12:25 ...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:3 ...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 2:1-2 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.

James 2:1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

2. Resisting disunity

- Gossip
- Slander
- Envy/Jealousy
- Selfish ambition
- Rebellion
- Pride
- Selfishness
- Unrealistic expectations
- Unforgiveness
- Bitterness

Unity comes easy when everything is going well. The test occurs when things don't go well as they inevitably will since the church is made up of imperfect people still capable of sinning in many ways. Maintaining unity here requires a commitment to forgive, and a resolve to guard against sins like gossip and slander, bitterness, etc., which grieve the Holy Spirit and divide believers.

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Ephesians 4:30-32 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 ...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

SINCLAIR FERGUSON - "When we look realistically at our Christian fellowships, we are forced to acknowledge that being together sometimes causes as many problems as it seems to solve! We come to recognize that the church is a community in which we receive spiritual help, but also one in which deep-seated problems will come to the surface and will require treatment."

C. Honesty & Humility

BILL HYBELS - "The basic requirement of authentic relationships: honesty. Learning how to tell others the truth is the basis of genuine relationships."

Deep and lasting relationships are built upon honesty and the trust that is bred as a result. Honesty in both what we say and what we do. This includes being willing to . . .

1. Open ourselves up to others to reveal who we really are so that others can truly know us and to resist any impulses to hide or pretend to be something or someone we are not.

TERRY VIRGO - "Externalism kills friendships."

2. Express and hear correction and constructive criticism so we can help one another grow.

TERRY VIRGO - "Confrontation can be very difficult, and many avoid it. But what wasted time could be redeemed in our lives if faithful friends started telling us some truths about ourselves."

3. Bless others through praise, encouragement, thanks, and other expressions of love and regard.

4. Live free of hypocrisy, being on the outside what we are on the inside and being in public what we are in private.

Ephesians 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

D. Commitment

Hebrews 10:25 ...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.

DONALD WHITNEY - "A survey conducted in 1991 reported that one of every eight people who describe themselves as 'born again Christians' do not go to church."

Commitment means a pledge or promise to do something, in this case to faithfully walk out your relationship with God and His people in a local church until God would direct otherwise. Such a commitment is the biblical norm where believers didn't just attend a church but were "added to" and "continually devoted to" it.

Like honesty, commitment establishes trust which enables us to open our hearts to someone, to begin to relate openly and to plan for the future together. It lets others know they can count on you in both good times and bad. Commitment is often the key element in determining whether a person will grow strong or struggle in their walk with God.

JERRY WHITE - "As I observed those whose lives clearly reflected deep spiritual growth and those who seemed to stagnate, I searched for the issue that represented the fork in the road that led to their present state. I believe the foundational issue is specific commitment. . . . Ordinary people who make simple, spiritual commitments under the lordship of Jesus Christ make an extraordinary impact on their world. Education, gifts, and abilities do not make the difference. Commitment does."

Tests of commitment

- change
- disillusionment - often caused by unrealistic expectations or selfish desires
- disagreement - esp. over doctrine or direction
- demands - "Some of the least demanding churches are now in greatest demand."
- opportunities - a better deal
- correction
- convenience