

Life Together...



CALLED INTO
THE COMMUNITY
OF FAITH

Members One of Another Romans 12:4-5

The title of this current series is *Life Together: Called into the Community of Faith*. In the interest of continuity and comprehension I have been spending a few minutes each week reviewing the previous sermons in the series. So as we begin this morning I want to go back over the big ideas of each of the first six sermons. First, when it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think **corporately**. As Millard Erickson puts it, "There is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life" (*Christian Theology*, p. 1039). Second, the Bible teaches that we share a **common life** in Christ. We are joined to Jesus in both a representative and vital union. Third, the **gospel** alone is the essential mark of the true church. I quoted J. A. O. Preus who said, "It is the presence of this Gospel, in its verbal [and] visible forms (i.e., Word and Sacrament), that identifies the Church of Jesus Christ and distinguishes it from every other organization or sect. Where this Gospel is, there you have the Church. Where you do not have evidence of this Gospel, you do not have visible, and therefore trustworthy, evidence of the Church." From the Belgic Confession we learned that there are three dimensions of this essential mark: the faithful preaching of the Word, the faithful administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline (see Article 29). Fourth, maturity in the body of Christ is measured, not according to

human standards of “success” but by the presence of the enduring virtues of **faith, hope, and love**. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in **I Thessalonians 1:2-3**. ² *We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;* ³ *constantly bearing in mind your **work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.* Fifth, the Lord Jesus Christ has established His Church in the world for the **gathering** and **perfecting** of the saints through the proclamation of the Gospel. The marching orders for the Church are to win men and women to Christ through the preaching of the gospel and then build them up, strengthen them, by that same gospel. **Acts 14:21-22**, *And after [Paul and Barnabas] had preached **the gospel** to that city and had made many disciples, they returned ... strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue **in the faith**.* Sixth, we explored the metaphors used in the New Testament to describe the fellowship of God’s people - building, bride, and body. These reinforce the idea that the Christian life is **designed** by God to be lived in **community**.

Now here’s the point that all of this has been leading to. I want to loosely quote A. A. Hodge, one of the old Princeton theologians. In this brief paragraph Hodge repeats one word ten times. See if you can catch it:

“Since all true believers are thus intimately united to Christ as the **common** Head of the whole body, and the Source of a **common** life, it follows that those same believers must be intimately united together. If they have but one Head, and are all members of one body, they must have one **common** life, and be members one of another. The view of Rome is that individuals are united to the Church through the sacraments, and through the Church to Christ. The true view is, that the individual is united to Christ the Head by the Holy Spirit and by faith; and by being united to Christ he is, by the very nature of the case, united to all the members of Christ’s body, the Church ... They have a **common** Head, and

common duties with respect to him; a **common** profession, a **common** system of faith to maintain, a **common** gospel to preach, a **common** worship and service to maintain. They have a **common** life, and one Holy Spirit dwelling in and binding them together.” What is the word? Right. “Common.” This quotation is taken from Hodge’s Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, *Of the Communion of Saints*. Take your hymnal and turn with me to page 864. I want us to read the first two paragraphs of this article together:

1. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are **obliged** to the performance of such **duties**, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

2. Saints by profession are **bound** to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other **spiritual services** as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

This doctrine of the communion of saints is derived from verses such as **Romans 12:4-5**, *For just as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

Here’s the big idea taken from G. I. Williamson: “Every member of Christ is, therefore, by the nature of the case under obligation to perform certain duties

which conduce to the good of all members of the body” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, p. 197). One guy put it this way, “ ‘The Church basically binds me to love, sacrifice and serve you – regardless of what I think of you’ ” (*The Enduring Community*, p. 120). Beloved, the Church is not a voluntary organization any more than marriage is a voluntary arrangement. In the wedding ceremony I speak of marriage and “the mutual obligations growing out of it.” I don’t know about you but when I said, “I do”, I bound myself to Julia Cummings. You may be a real *saint*, moved to do all that you do by a warm feeling of affection. But I am often moved by that raw duty and obligation to which I am bound by nature and by promise as a husband and a father. Of course, I would like to think that this sense of duty flows out of my affection for Julia, Katheryn, and David. You are obligated to your spouse. You are obligated to your children. You are obligated to your parents. You are obligated to your employer. Are these obligations unlawful? Is there something inherently sinful about them? Because you are sometimes moved by a deep sense of obligation does it cast some dark shadow upon the appropriateness of your actions? Obligation is not a motive opposed to love or one that can take the place of love but one that necessarily attends true, Biblical love. Indeed, it is the man who does not love who does not fulfill his domestic obligations. Look again at our Confession, “Saints are *obliged* to the performance of such duties ... Saints by profession are *bound* in the performance of spiritual services.”

Beloved, these public and private “duties”, these “spiritual services” are performed, not in our intentions or imaginations, but in real life, in real relationships, in real ministry to real, flesh-and-blood people. We live out our faith with winsome, gentle, and mature saints. We also live it out with people who “just don’t get it.” With people who are hard to live with. With people who

are socially awkward. With high-maintenance people who drain your energy. And yet, “it is as if God were saying, ‘Until you learn to love this person, to put up with mind-numbing annoyances, to forgive him for the same sin over and over again, to invite him into your home even when he repulses you – until you learn to relate to this impossible person, you’ll never know what it is like for me to relate to you’” (*The Enduring Community*, p. 121).

So what exactly are these “duties that conduce to our mutual good”? What are these “spiritual services that tend to our mutual edification”? “Paul used the Greek word “*allelon*” (*one another*) nearly 40 times to instruct Christians regarding their *mutual responsibilities* to their fellow believers ... Without question, when members of the local church faithfully practice these one-another injunctions, the Body of Christ will build itself up in love (Eph. 4:16)” (Getz, *Measure*, pp. 189-190).

As those united to Jesus Christ we are to love one another. Love comprehends all other Christian graces and duties. **John 13:34-35**, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” **John 15, 12** “*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you ... 17 This I command you, that you love one another.*” Make no mistake, this kind of love is no mere profession. **I John 3:18**, *Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

As those united to Jesus we are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love (**Rom. 12:10a**). The word for “devoted” means kindly affectioned. The phrase *in brotherly love* links this devotion to that strong natural affection between parents

and their children or between siblings. So I am to speak *to* you, to act *toward* you, and to think *of* you as I do my own flesh-and-blood brother.

As those united to Jesus we are to *give preference to one another in honor* (**Rom. 12:10b**). “Give preference” means to take the lead. The idea is this: in terms of respect and kindness (*honor*), each one is to be an example for the others. Scotch Calvinist, Robert Haldane says, “This is a thing in which [Christians] may lawfully strive with one another ... they are permitted and enjoined to strive with one another in the indication of mutual respect” (*Romans*, p. 564).

As those united to Christ we are to *be of the same mind toward one another* (**Rom. 12:16**). Christians can be of one mind theologically and still manifest a disaffection toward one another. This verse speaks of harmony of sentiment. In other words, we are to actually *feel* towards one another the way Christ feels toward us. Does the Word not cut deeply and cleanly this morning?

As those united to Jesus we are to *build up one another* (**I Thess. 5:11**). **Romans 14:19**, so then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the **building up** of one another. The image is one of building a house. Have you ever seen the demolition of a large building on the news? Some Christians have the gift of demolition. Their well-placed charges of criticism and complaining when set off weaken the structure of the building that is the Church of Jesus Christ. Haldane says that we are to pursue “such things as will have a tendency to *increase* the faith and establishment of each other ... Christians in general are not sufficiently aware of this duty” (*Romans*, p. 606).

As those united to Christ we to accept one another. **Romans 15:7**, *Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God*. Accept does not

refer here to condoning sinful behavior or overlooking that which threatens or disturbs the peace and purity of the church. The word means “receive.” It means to take to oneself. It means to take a special interest in the other person. It means to warmly welcome them into fellowship. **Acts 28:2**, *And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and **received** us all.* Haldane, “Now Christ has received, and does receive, all who believe the truth even in the feeblest manner. He accepts those who have the lowest degree of faith in Him” (*Romans*, p. 613).

As those united to Jesus we are to admonish one another. **Romans 15:14**, *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.* Admonition cannot rightly be limited to correction or reproof. Biblical admonition is a specific kind of instruction. Admonition, in the words of Charles Hodge, is “to bring the truth seasonably to bear on the mind and conscience” (*Romans*, p. 437). Admonition is not the duty of pastors and elders exclusively. This is a mutual obligation that may be effectively carried on and properly done by those who are full of kind feelings (*goodness*) and who are well-informed Biblically and theologically (*knowledge*).

As those united to Jesus we are to greet one another. **Romans 16:16**, *greet one another with a holy kiss.* The kiss is a near eastern mode of salutation akin to our handshake here in the west. This is an injunction to more than a common courtesy. The Scripture qualifies this kiss as “holy” (I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Pet. 5:14). That adjective lifts this action to an expression of that peculiar love Christians should have for one another. “Justin Martyr, in giving an account of the weekly assemblies of the Christians of the second century, says, ‘We

mutually salute one another by a kiss, *and then* we bring forward the bread and the cup' " (Haldane, *Romans*, p. 641). You would think that *every* Christian would be able to do at least this. But there are many who enter the place of corporate worship, take a seat, and speak to no one, seemingly incapable or unwilling to take the initiative to extend even the most basic courtesy among Christians – a warm greeting.

As those united to Jesus we are to serve one another. **Galatians 5:13**, *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve** one another* (I Pet. 4:10). The root of the verb "serve" is the same as the word for slave – *doulos*. The literal translation is this: *serve ye as slaves one another*. Christ has set you free from your bondage to sin to be the servants of one another. Are you in this place to serve or to be served?

As those united to Christ we are to show forbearance to one another. **Ephesians 4:1-2**, *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **showing forbearance** to one another in love.* **Colossians 3:12-13**, *And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **bearing with** one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.* The word "forbearance" means to be patient with; to endure; to put up with. William Hendriksen says, "The person who endures injury tries to pay no attention to it ... We, too, at times use a somewhat similar expression when we say, "You should put up with his ill behavior." However, in saying this we do not always mean exactly what the apostle has in mind. We may simply be referring to suffering injury without open resentment, though we boil within!

Paul, however, very aptly combines the forbearance of which he is speaking with the inner disposition of love" (*Galatians/Ephesians*, p. 184). John MacArthur says, "Forbearing love takes abuse from others while continuing to love them" (*Ephesians*, p. 127).

As those united to Jesus we are to be kind to one another. **Ephesians 4:32**, *And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* The reason kindness is important is that it is so clearly linked with the Gospel. **Luke 6:35**, *"But love your enemies, and so good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."* **Romans 2:4**, *Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.* Simply put, to be unkind to others is to show that you have forgotten God's kindness to you in Christ.

As those united to Jesus we are to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (**Eph. 5:21**). Walter Liefeld explains this as "differing at the appropriate times to the other" (*Ephesians*, p. 140). You don't always have to have your way.

We are to *live in peace with one another* (**I Thess. 5:13**). We are to seek after that which is good for one another. **I Thessalonians 5:15**, *See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.* A literal translation sounds like this: *but always the good follow ye in regard to one another.* In other words, bird-dog, sniff out, hunt for, go after that which is beneficial to your brother or sister in the Lord. We are to spur one another on in the way of righteousness. **Hebrews 10:24**, *And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.*

As those united to Christ you are to confess *your sins to one another* (**James 5:16**). In the Roman Catholic tradition, “confession is made to a priest and absolution or remission of sins is received from him” (Boice, *Foundations*, p. 647). Protestants have emphasized this Biblical injunction of mutual or reciprocal confession. This rests largely upon the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of believers. As individual Christians we cannot absolve but we can assure one another of God’s forgiveness as He has promised it in His Word.

Certainly there is a place for public confession. We confess our sins corporately in public worship as we have done this morning. It is proper for an individual, guilty of some scandalous sin, to confess it publicly before the gathered congregation. It is proper for a believer to confess his or her sin publicly when pressed upon the conscience by God to do so. In view here is primarily that reciprocal private confession between saints. Confessing our sin to those we have wronged. Confessing our sins to a trusted friend or pastor. All such confession promotes the health and vitality of the fellowship.

We are to pray *for one another* (**James 5:16**). We must pray for the entire community of saints. We must pray for those individual persons with whom we are in fellowship. We must pray for those over us in the Lord - pastors, elders, and deacons. We must pray especially for the weak, the vulnerable, and the struggling among us. Puritan Thomas Manton, in his commentary on James, says, “Joint striving [in prayer] mutually for the good of each other makes the work prosper. Not to pray for others is uncharitableness; not to expect it from others is pride” (p. 461).

As those united to Christ we are to be hospitable *to one another without complaint* (**I Pet. 4:9**). The Greek word for hospitable, *philoxenos*, is a compound word. *Philos*

means “loving” and *xenos* means “stranger.” Hospitality is commended in Romans 12:13 and Hebrews 13:2. This grace is actually required of church leaders in I Timothy and Titus. Unfortunately, the thresholds of some homes have never been crossed by the feet of the saints. The walls of some homes have never heard the singing, praying, crying, and laughter of the saints gathered there. Some tables have never been set in anticipation of serving a meal to missionaries who are with us for a season. The Christian grace of hospitality is not exercised for its derivative benefits alone. Hospitality has spiritual value in its own right. Through the exercise of this grace we acknowledge that our home is a stewardship from God to be used to serve and refresh His people. True fellowship is promoted as believers entertain other believers. Hospitality is probably the best way of “accepting one another.” What better way for your children to arrive at an understanding of life together than to see the grace of hospitality modeled by mom and dad in their own home?

So we now have an idea of how “God intends for each member of a local church to function in order for the Church to become a loving and unified community” (Getz, *Measure*, p.189)? We have a better idea of these “duties that conduce to our mutual good”? We have a better idea of these “spiritual services that tend to our mutual edification”? Beloved, these then, by calling and by profession are our mutual obligations one to another.

We have been commanded, in very clear terms, to the performance of certain duties. Even now we stand condemned on account of our miserable failures to fulfill these mutual obligations to one another. We stand despairing that even with our best efforts we cannot perform what is demanded. Such a weight of condemnation and despair is felt whenever the law is rightly preached. Yes, we

must apply ourselves to obedience with every fiber of our being. But we do so, not under threat that if we fail we shall be condemned at last. We do so with joy and out of gratitude because our faithful Representative Jesus Christ has performed these duties perfectly for us in our stead. The proclamation of this glorious truth is the Gospel. The Gospel serves to salve the devastating wounds inflicted by the law to the comfort of our souls.

Yes, we are bound to love one another ... as Christ has perfectly loved us. Yes, we are to accept one another ... as Christ perfectly accepted us to the glory of God. Yes, we are to forgive one another ... just as God in Christ has fully forgiven us. Yes, we are to be kind to one another ... just as God's kindness in Christ has led us to repentance. Yes, we are obliged to pray for one another ... just as Christ ever lives to make intercession for the saints. Dear one, Christ did all things well, not only as an example for us but also in our place as our perfect Substitute.

And so as you receive the bread and the cup this morning consider the One who did *for* you all that is required *of* you. This glorious truth, then, should prompt us, as those united to Christ, to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another. **I Peter 5:5**, *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.*

I Corinthians 11:23-26, *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as*

often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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Romans 12:4-5

Review of first six sermons

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, *Of the Communion of Saints.*

Romans 12:4-5, *For just as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

THE BIG IDEA: "Every member of Christ is, therefore, by the nature of the case under _____ to perform certain _____ which conduce to the _____ of all members of the body" (G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, p. 197).

As those united to Jesus Christ we are to _____ one another (**John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; I John 3:18**).

As those united to Jesus we are to *be* _____ *to one another in brotherly love* (**Rom. 12:10a**).

As those united to Jesus we are to *give* _____ *to one another in honor* (**Rom. 12:10b**). The idea is this: in terms of respect and kindness (*honor*), each one is to be an _____ for the others.

As those united to Christ we are to *be of the same mind toward one another* (**Rom. 12:16**).

As those united to Jesus we are to _____ *up one another* (**I Thess. 5:11**).

As those united to Christ we are to _____ one another. **Romans 15:7**,
*Wherefore, **accept** one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*

As those united to Jesus we are to _____ one another. **Romans 15:14**,
And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.

As those united to Jesus we are to _____ one another (**Rom. 16:16**).

As those united to Jesus we are to _____ one another. **Galatians 5:13**,
*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve** one another (I Pet. 4:10).*

As those united to Christ we are to show _____ to one another
(**Eph. 4:1-2; Col. 3:12-13**).

As those united to Jesus we are to be _____ to one another (**Eph. 4:32; Luke 6:35; Rom. 2:4**).

As those united to Jesus we are to be _____ to one another in the fear of Christ (**Eph. 5:21**). Walter Liefeld explains this as “_____ at the appropriate times to the other” (*Ephesians*, p. 140).

We are to *live in peace with one another* (**I Thess. 5:13**). We are to seek after that which is good for one another (**I Thess. 5:15**). We are to spur one another on in the way of righteousness (**Heb. 10:24**).

As those united to Christ you are to _____ your sins to one another (**James 5:16**). Protestants have emphasized this Biblical injunction of _____ or reciprocal confession.

We are to _____ for one another (**James 5:16**).

As those united to Christ we are to be _____ to one another without complaint (**I Pet. 4:9**).

As those united to Christ we are to clothe ourselves with _____ toward one another. **I Peter 5:5**, *All of you, **clothe** yourselves with **humility** toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.*