

the *gift* of fellowship

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

Do we *really* need to go to church? Is it that *important*?

1 Corinthians 12:20-27 - But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Romans 12:5 - so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Here the apostle Paul shows us that we are all a part of Christ together, all believers are unified in Him. Note that there should be no division in the body. The Bible constantly teaches us not to cause divisions or contentions among ourselves. Why we have done exactly that is beyond me. Also, we should not cut **ourselves** off from the body. If we do, we are no longer part of the body, and *every* part of the body is especially important to the rest of it. We must remain unified as one body, with Christ as the head. Do not be discouraged if you don't believe you are playing an important role in the body, because you **always** are. Use what you have already been given to keep growing and help others grow in knowledge and faith.

Proverbs 14:12 - There is a way *that seems* right to a man,

But its end *is* the way of death.

The things we are doing always seem right to us because we can so easily convince ourselves of almost anything. Of course we always think we are right about everything. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and if we are honest we will admit it. Always we need to follow Christ as we are called and seek His truth.

Matthew 7:13-14 - "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

No one said following Christ was going to be easy. In fact, Jesus here says that it is difficult. Satan is constantly trying to tear us down, and in order to prevail we must give everything we have to God and trust in His guidance.

The next few verses here in Matthew Jesus talks about false prophets (and false doctrine) and those who do not really follow Him. Take note of these things.

In verses 21-23 Jesus continues, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Jesus plainly tells us who will and will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Now of course it should be our goal to get to heaven, but if our faith is based on avoiding hell or on getting to heaven, we may need to rethink our relationship with Christ. The apostle Paul says that he is willing to give up his own salvation for others, and we should take a similar attitude. *Here's something to think about hypothetically.* If somehow we were condemned to hell, no question about it, would we still use the time we have on this earth to do the will of the Lord and live righteously, knowing we could never make it to heaven? Back to this verse, we need to obey the Father's will and we must *know* Christ. Always it should be our goal to be growing closer to Him.

Hebrews 10:22-25 - let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

It is so important to come together as followers of Christ for a few simple reasons. One of these is accountability. Because it's so easy for us to drift away into our own way of thinking, we need someone there to keep us in line and on track, following the narrow path. We are plainly told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves.

Galatians 6:1-3 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

It is our responsibility as part of Christ's body to help the other parts and take care of others. We must also be careful as we help someone out of sin because we are subject to the very same sin. This happens more often than one would think. Bear one another's burdens!

James 5:13-16 - Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

We all have struggles, and God knows we can't bear them alone. It is our responsibility, no **privilege**, not only to help others through their struggles, but to allow ourselves to receive help. So often (especially when at church) we put on this *mask* and pretend like we are perfect and that everything in our lives is just great all the time. We all know that this is hardly true. There is no reason to be hesitant to be completely open about your struggles and things that are going on personally for you. It is important to form a close relationship with fellow Christians, go to someone that you trust and can count on to help you through any struggles you may have. Holding things in (even small, seemingly trivial things) is never good. We should be willing to be open about our shortcomings not only with God but with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Colossians 2:1-3 - For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Here Paul offers some encouragement to those (like us) who have not personally met him. Encouragement is such an important part of fellowship. We can always use encouragement to help our perseverance, and hopefully we will not only be encouraged but always offer encouragement to others, you never know when someone might really need it.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-21 - Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.

Philippians 2:1-4 - Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

We are called to be selfless and help others. We all have a selfish nature that pulls us down, but through Christ we can rise above it, and all things. By avoiding confrontations and "dealing" with people, **we are being selfish**, pursuing our own interests rather than others. It is so easy to fall into selfishness (in all its forms), so we need to constantly be watching out for it. Christ calls us to humble ourselves and present ourselves as servants before Himself and others.

John 13:34-35 - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Everything we do should be out of love. If there is any kind of selfishness in anything we call "love", *it is not love*. Jesus says the greatest commands are to love the Lord and to love one another. Everything else will fall into place because we have love. It's not always easy to love our enemies or people we don't always get along with, but that's exactly what we are called to do.

Some people have **no problem** loving others, but they do not love *themselves*. This is essentially just another form of selfishness, because you cannot truly love others without first loving yourself (and the Creator who **made you**). This attitude is usually the result of an uncomfortable past. When we put on Christ we become a new creation through Him, and all darkness is left behind. Do not continue to dwell in your old skin, but put on Christ and walk in the glory you have been *created* for since the beginning. Read **Romans 6, Ephesians 4:17-24, Colossians 2:12-17**.

1 John 3:16-23 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

John 15:9-17 - "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another."

Jesus says we are more than just His servants, our relationship with Him is so much more than that; we are His *friends*. We must be willing not only to die for Jesus and for one another, but to *live* for Jesus and one another.

So is going to church on a regular basis *really* that important? **Yes!** And more than this, we should be spending time with the people in our church family on days other than Sunday and Wednesday. We are all part of God's family, and a church should be like a big (or small) family. I am confident that you will find assembling with Christians to be an overwhelming blessing! I will not say you must or must not go to any particular place to worship God. But remember that a worship service is a *worship* service. We should not be worried about whether our attention is being kept, how exciting or entertaining it is, or what we get out of it. It's not about what we get out of it, but what we can put into it as is pleasing to God. However, if we are not getting anything out of it, something is wrong. Either we do not have the right attitude, or we are in the wrong place. It is **so** important to find a church where you know you can grow and help others to grow as well – *in love*. Avoid cliques and the like, this is just another form of division; and we should get to know **all** of our family.

Unfortunately, many congregations do in fact teach and practice false doctrine. Jesus and the apostles tell us this has been an issue since the early church, and we must watch out for it. Ultimately, it is our own responsibility to ask God for His guidance in these matters, to help us decide. As Christians we are told to exhort those who are in error. Hopefully these are usually sincere mistakes, but being sincerely wrong is still wrong. A few passages to look at which speak about false teachings are **2 Timothy 4:1-4, Colossians 2:18-19, Ephesians 4:11-16, Acts 20:28-31** and **2 Peter 2**.

If you haven't been going to church, I *really* urge you to begin going regularly. I believe you will find it to be *such* a blessing.

Again I encourage you to continue reading the Bible and having fellowship with Christians on a regular basis. If you haven't begun to do these things, now may be the time. If you need anything at all please don't hesitate to let me know.

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