



Be the Church

The Way Things were Meant to Be

Have you been settling for just “going to church?”

Experience the exciting reality of “Being the Church.” The word for Church is Ecclesia and it refers to a group of people who have been called out of one thing and into another. Discover what God called you from and what He is calling you to.

Steve Highlander

Be the Church: **The Way Things Were Meant to Be**

A Study Booklet by Steve Highlander

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EMMAUS ROAD MINISTRIES

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Our passion is for everyone to find their place in the Body of Christ and serve the Lord to their full potential. Everything we do is to this end.

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Brother Steve Highlander has served the Body of Christ as a pastor, teacher, chaplain to at-risk teens, and missionary. He founded Door of Hope Prison Ministries and produced and spoke on two popular radio programs.

Steve is a published author and has written three books.

Test the Spirits, is based on the Biblical admonition, “Brothers, don’t believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are

from God.” This book examines the serious warning from Jesus and every New Testament writer concerning the deception Satan releases in the end times. Steve offers ten tests to try any person, message, movement or experience. Discover how you can develop more spiritual discernment and be encouraged to prepare for the greatest spiritual harvest of the ages as we move toward the last day.

Four Anointings Every Church Should Have explores Paul’s revelation of the Body of Christ. Four Anointings looks at the three Old testament anointings God gave to manage his Kingdom and how the translate into the Five-fold ministries of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher revealed in Ephesians chapter 4.

He has also authored numerous study booklets. Steve developed and manages several websites, including: www.TalkToAPastor.com, is dedicated to answering questions about the Bible and life from people around the world. www.EmmausRoadInstitute.org provides free resources and online training for third-world leaders and gospel workers worldwide. His personal website, www.SteveHighlander.com is dedicated to their personal ministry with updates on their mission work and free resources.

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Be the Church:

The Way Things Were Meant to Be

Author's note: I use the term CHURCH in two ways. When I use a capital "C" (Church) I am referring to the eternal, worldwide Church that includes all born-again believers today and for the last 2000 years. When I use the lower case "c" (church) I am referring to the local assembly of believers or the denominational organization.)

Introduction

As we look around Christendom today, we see an overabundance of churches and a shortage of practical Christianity. Could it be that we have become so focused on *going to church* that we have failed to **BE** the Church?

I am not advocating doing away with going to Church, nor am I saying that church attendance is not important or necessary to maintain strong Christian lives. I am saying that '*going to church*' is not the totality of what God had in mind when Jesus died on the cross.

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. Hebrews 10:24-25

The point of this study is not "to go" or "not to go" to a local church; It is "what we are to do when we get there and what we are to be when we are not there."

Christianity's power to change lives decreases as it becomes more doctrinal and less practical. It is not the doctrine ascribed to, but the life lived that testify to the power of the risen Lord.

When Christians become more focused on the structure of the service than on people, we have left the domain of the Spirit and have entered the arena of religion.

Does your Christian life seem to revolve around "going to church?" Is church the only place you practice worship, prayer, and Bible study? Is "*Christian fellowship*" synonymous with "*fellowship dinners*," or do you get together with Christians for fellowship outside the four walls of your church building? If church in America was suddenly outlawed and you couldn't "*go to church*," would it disrupt your whole idea of Christianity?

For all those Christians who sometimes find themselves wondering if there is more to the Christian life than just *going to church*, I offer the following thoughts, and with them an encouragement to stop just *going to church* and start *being the Church*.

The Church Defined

A person's definition or view of the local church is going to impact the way they relate to The Church (that spiritual entity called the Body of Christ). Is church someplace you go? Is it an organization you belong to? Or is the Church something you are? The Greek word for "Church" is *Ekklesia*, which means "*called out*."

The reference is to the people and to the purpose for which they have been called out. In the truest sense of the word, you cannot “go to church,” because you are the Church. Hence, the Church can assemble as instructed in Hebrews chapter 13. *We are encouraged not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.* The Church is not a building, organization, or denomination; it is made up of every person who has made Jesus Christ their savior through faith.

You are a member of the Church—the *called out ones*. You have been called out of something but also called into something.

Called Out of Death into Life.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. John 5:24

The Church is made up of people who have been given new spiritual life by Christ. The Bible speaks of being “**dead in sin,**” and the book of the Revelation talks about the “**second death**” or spiritual death.

When a person is born again through faith in Christ, he/she receives spiritual life and becomes a member of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The Church then is characterized by an inherent life. The life imparted by God has both quantity and quality. Concerning quantity, it

is Eternal life. ***“...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** Romans 6:23b.

Concerning quality, it changes and positively impacts us.

Jesus said, ***“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.....”*** (John 10:10). The gospel message not only declares our sins are forgiven (providing for eternal life) but also informs us that the power of sin over our lives has been broken that we might live to walk in the newness of life. ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:17

The first characteristic of the Church is new life. As members of the local church we should be focused on experiencing it and sharing it with others. The Church has been called from death into life.

Called Out of Darkness into light.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 1 Peter 2:9

The second thing that you have been called out of is darkness. Therefore, the second characteristic of the Church (the people of God) is spiritual light or understanding. Before a person can understand God to any degree, they must have spiritual insight given to them

by the Holy Spirit. Many people try to read the Bible but testify that they just do not understand it or get anything from it. The problem is reading a spiritual book without the spiritual insight that can only come from the Holy Spirit. However, as it is written: ***“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit*** (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV).

The Bible declares that darkness is the domain of Satan. Jesus told Paul that he was sending him to the Gentiles, ***“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God”*** (Acts 26:17).

Paul explains about those ***“whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them”*** (2 Cor. 4:4). Wherever you find spiritual darkness, you find the power and work of Satan. God sent Jesus to deliver people from that realm and power.

The ability to begin to understand God and see things with spiritual eyes has been given to every believer in Jesus Christ. However, many people who have been taught to “go to church” have never been taught that they have these privileges as a part of the real Church. As Christians begin to “be” the Church, they will find their ability to understand the Bible and other spiritual things increasing dramatically.

Paul prayed this powerful prayer for the church at Ephesus 1:17-18:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; How our lives and churches would be changed if every Christian prayed and believed this prayer.

Called from the Kingdom of Satan to The Kingdom of God

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Col. 1:12-13

Yet another characteristic of the true Church is the power to overcome Satan. As we learn to “be” the Church, we discover the power and authority that Jesus has delegated to His people to fight spiritual battles.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:10-12

The Bible declares that a person is blinded and under the power and dominion of Satan until God saves him/her through faith in Jesus Christ. After salvation, Satan still harasses Christians. Although legally, Satan's power and authority over a believer in Jesus Christ have been broken, we generally experience the reality of that freedom over a period of time, rather than all at once. That means that throughout the Christian's life, he or she will need to deal with spiritual battles—both in their personal lives and in those around them that need spiritual help.

The Church has been delivered from the power of Satan and now abides in the Kingdom of God. Basically, there has been a change of authority. Satan no longer has the right to control a Christian. A Christian can have the confidence that spiritual battles, whether in their own lives or those around them, can be won.

People can “go to church” without ever experiencing the liberating power of God. However, as we strive to “be the Church,” it will become natural to fight spiritual battles and win.

If we have been called out of Satan's power, we have also been called into God's Kingdom. Being the Church means that we now operate with a different set of principles and values. A kingdom infers a King and a domain. A government, if you will. A government has laws and regulations, a structure of government, and an economy. All these apply to the Kingdom of God.

In the world system, the rights of citizenship come with birth. So as with the Kingdom of God—we are born into it. Being the Church means that we increasingly see and understand this Kingdom and strive to operate within its scope of purpose and authority. Privilege and responsibility go hand in hand. Citizenship in the Kingdom is not optional—neither is the responsibility to be an active citizen. When we stop “going to church” and start “being the church,” we will discover the power contained in both privilege and responsibility.

Called out of the World into The Body of Christ

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:41-42

We have been called out of the world and into fellowship with other believers. The Bible tells us that we are in the world but not of the world. In other words, some fundamental things must change about the way we think and act. The world’s philosophy—which is dominated by sinful nature and darkened thinking—just does not jibe with God’s Kingdom. The world has a tremendous amount of influence on a person. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she must leave the things of the world behind and adopt a new system of influence.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not

in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts. Isaiah 55:7-9

A person can go to church and discover that the church does things the same way that the world does. “Being” the Church requires that we develop new ways of thinking and doing. The disciples often got into a discussion about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus told them that His Kingdom did not operate the same way the world did. If you wanted to be great in His Kingdom, you would need to become a servant.

Yet, in the church, we find the same structure of government as in the world and the same ambition to *climb the ladder* of success or recognition. To be effective in the Kingdom of God, we must learn to leave the ways of the world to the world and do things God’s way.

There is another thing about being called out of the world into the Body of Christ. That is the fact that we **are** called **into** the Body of Christ. God did not save you to leave you unattached.

I have often heard people say, “I don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” While there is some truth to this statement, I question its validity. You can be a Christian without “going to church.” However, the majority of the New Testament is devoted to how we should operate as the Church. Remember the admonishment in Hebrews 10:25:

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. There is no justification for not going to church.

The problem is twofold.

Some people who say they do not have to go to church to be a Christian simply aren’t Christian. There is something about becoming a true Christian that calls you into fellowship with other Christians. The passage in Acts chapter 2 tells us that those who received the word “*continued steadfastly*” in some things, one of them being fellowship.

The second problem is that people have been to church and see little spiritual value in it. Unfortunately, regarding many churches, I would have to agree. They have been in churches that had little spiritual reality. Not knowing the difference, they assume that all expressions of the local church are just like that. Herein is the difference between “*going to church*” and “*being the Church*.”

“Being the Church” means that we have developed an attitude of forsaking the way of the world while embracing the fellowship of the saints at the same time. It was never God’s intention for someone to get saved and exist alone. He has called us into a relationship with the Church, His Body (Colossians 1:24).

Called Out of Disobedience into Obedience

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. Romans 6:15-18

We are called from disobedience (sin) into obedience.

Obedience to God, His Word, and the Holy Spirit’s leading are not an option in the Kingdom of God. It is a part of the genuine package. Consider this statement about Abraham, the father of faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise... Hebrews 11:8-9

Notice how faith and obedience work hand in hand. Obedience is the fruit of faith. In fact, it is hard to have one without the other. Real faith will result in obedience because you will act on what you genuinely believe. Obedience without faith causes burnout. After a while, you will stop doing something if you do not believe in it.

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. 5:9

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.1 Peter 1:2

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15

These and other verses make it clear that “being the Church” means obeying the head of the Church, who is Jesus Christ. You can go to church and never obey God. Individuals and congregations must decide to obey God, first in the fundamental things of the Bible, then in the leading of the Holy Spirit.

I had a conversation with a lady years ago who went to a particular denominational church. The subject was baptism, and while we agreed on several points, her church was practicing an unscriptural application of it. I started to say, “But the Bible says...” and she cut me off with, “I don’t care what the Bible says; that’s how we do it in our church.”

Here is a person that will not grow very much. The church has some problems too if their tradition is unscriptural and they are unwilling to change. Jesus told the Jews that they had made the Word of God of no effect by their traditions (Mark 7:13).

The Word of God is powerful, and to believe it and obey it releases that power into our lives and our churches. The opposite is true also.

That is extremely important in the issue of church government and leadership. Today, many churches operate with an unscriptural form of church leadership and expect God to bless something He has not set in order.

God did not tell us to start churches and figure out how to keep everyone happy. He laid out a pattern for New Testament Church life and expected the churches to follow it.

God can and will bless our error for a time, but as we grow, we are responsible for adjusting our ways as we grow in wisdom and understanding.

It is tough to call Jesus “Lord” and tell Him “no” at the same time. Obedience is a part of the gospel message and indicates the condition of the heart of an individual or a congregation.

We have been called from self-will into obedience.

Church = Change

The very word translated “*Church*” carries the idea that we are called out of something and into something. There are spiritual changes made. One cannot be truly saved without these fundamental changes taking place in their life because they are the essence of the gospel and the Kingdom of God. However, each area of change must also be accompanied by an ever-increasing desire and understanding if we are to walk in its fullness.

Having understood that the Church is not “where we go,” but “who we are,” let us go on to look at some other areas of “being the Church.”

The Church: The Body of Christ

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Romans 12:4-5

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.....Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 1 Cor. 12:12-14 & 27

but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Eph. 4:15-16

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Ephesians 5:23

Organization or Organism?

Paul declared **THE Church** to be **THE BODY OF CHRIST**. This typology makes for wonderful teaching and preaching. A multitude of illustrations can be drawn from it. There is a danger we must avoid. The revelation of the Body of Christ is not just a literary device used by Paul to convey a thought. It is a spiritual reality.

Paul did not declare the Church to be like the Body of Christ. He said it is the Body of Christ.

While the Church must have some organization, it is not, never has been, and never will be **an** organization.

The Church—The Body of Christ—has an organic unity, both with Christ as the head and with every member of the Body.

Two Dynamics of The Body of Christ

Please stop and read 1 Corinthians chapter 12 to better understand this section.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul explains the function and relationship of the physical body in the context of spiritual gifts. He shows how each part of the body has a special part to play and a special place for the body to function correctly and to its full potential.

One can “go to church” and never experience the fullness of the Body of Christ. But to “be” the Church means that we understand the dynamics of life in the Body of Christ and that we find our place and fulfill it.

We must understand and yield two dynamics if we will fulfill our place in the Body of Christ. The first is *relationship*, and the second is *function*.

Relationship Is Central to The Church

Christianity is the only religion that places such a high degree of importance on relationships. Most other religions can be practiced with or without others being involved, not so in the Body of Christ. The very nature of the Church calls us to operate and cooperate with God and with each other.

There are, of course, two aspects to the relationship issue.

The first aspect is that I must be properly related to Christ as the head, or I have no spiritual partnership in the Body of Christ. In a parable about the vine and the branches in John chapter 15, Jesus said that unless we “*abide in the vine,*” we can do nothing. Without a vital, life-giving connection with Jesus, we can produce nothing of eternal value. There can be **NO** spiritual fruit born in our lives unless we connect with Jesus and stay connected to Jesus.

The second aspect is that I must be properly related to the Body of Christ, finding and fulfilling my place within the context of the local assembly. I must say—without apology—that it is impossible to be correctly related to Christ without also being properly related to the Church, which is His Body. Consider this verse in I John.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 1 John 4:20-5:2

Attached to The Head?

Let me paint a couple of word pictures to illustrate my point.

Picture a head with some toes where the ear should be and a leg dangling from the chin. You observe a hand coming out the top back of the head and see one eye gracing the right cheek. Fingers grow from the nose, and internal organs hang here and there.

We laugh at the absurdity of this. Or recoil in horror at the ugliness. Yet this is precisely how we act concerning relationships in the Body of Christ. While we give mental assent to the way things should be, we do not see it in practice that much.

Now picture this: A hand unattached to a body. It is a hand, but to what purpose? It draws no strength or life from the body, nor is it of any use to the body. Too many Christians approach Christianity this way.

While we must have a personal relationship with Christ, we must also be properly connected to His Body to function as we should.

Too many Christians today have a *loner mentality*. That is, they do not want to be connected or committed to anyone or anything. Some Christians and ministries go about with no accountability or input, receiving no correction or instruction—or encouragement for that matter.

Churchgoers hop from church to church, avoiding relationships, commitment, and accountability. It is the bonds of love and commitment that hold a church together. That relationship causes it to function as the Body of Christ in the fullness of the Spirit.

We must understand and yield to both aspects of that relationship within the local church. First in vital relationship with Christ, then in a functional relationship with the rest of His Body.

Strong Relationships Make Strong Churches.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and Ephesians chapter 4, we find Paul dealing with the practical issues of relationship and function. Look at Ephesians 4:15-16

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul says that as we speak the truth in love, we will **grow**. We will grow upward toward the fullness of Christ, and we will grow together in spiritual unity.

Paul wanted the churches to have ever-deepening relationships. In these verses, he tells us that the **“whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies.”**

A joint is not a bone but rather a point where two or more bones come together. It is, in essence, a relationship—a functional relationship at that. So, let's replace "joint" with "relationship" in this verse.

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every [relationship] supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Have you ever had a sprained ankle or a dislocated shoulder? The pain is terrible, and the body doesn't function as it should. The arm cannot access the strength of the muscle. A man who could lift fifty pounds with one arm cannot lift five pounds with a dislocated shoulder. Did he lose his strength? Technically no. The muscle is as strong as ever, but the improper relationship in the joint makes it impossible to access the power available to it. So, it is with the Body of Christ.

When relationships are "*sprained*" or members become "*dislocated*," the whole body suffers from a lack of strength. The power and presence of the Spirit may still be there, but the church is unable to access it due to improper relationships.

That is what Paul means when he speaks of "***That which every joint (relationship) supplies.***"

I have been in churches where this problem was evident. The Spirit of God attended the services, and the presence of God was evident, but there was very little power. These same churches had some serious relationship problems.

A Close-Knit Church

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love. Colossians 2:2a

God does not want a loose-knit group of people. He desires that they be closely knit together, caring for one another, and operating in the same mind and Spirit.

I will put this in a modern illustration. Consider the difference between a shirt that has an iron-on transfer and one that has the same design embroidered on it. The iron-on transfer is connected but not ingrained into the fabric. As a result, it can peel and flake after some rough use. The embroidery is interwoven with the fabric, becoming part of it. It is more difficult to separate. The iron-on transfer takes a matter of seconds, while the embroidery might take some time.

In relating this to church relationships, we can see why there are so many “flaky” Christians hopping from church to church. God desires that we get interwoven with the people around us, forming solid relationships that will weather the storms of life and the attacks of the enemy. It is much harder to unravel from people you have been knit together with.

Only as this happens will the local assembly begin to experience the reality of the fullness of the Body of Christ spoken of in Ephesians 4:13:

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Unity in Diversity

God loves variety. Just look at the world around us. There are hundreds of types of plants. Consider the animal kingdom. Even within the species, there are various breeds. And within the breeds, there are multiple colors and markings. The world is filled with people who have all kinds of ethnic features.

How mundane life would be without the beautiful variety God—in His creative genius and power—gave us.

How unfortunate it is then that we want everyone to be the same when it comes to the church.

We have our pet styles of preaching or teaching and tend to only listen to those ministers who “preach with fire” or “teach line upon line.”

We want Christians to look alike and act alike. And usually, the standard of appropriate conduct is the big “me.”

Since most of us would hesitate to vocalize it, I will say it for all of us. We want people to be like ourselves for the most part. How boring!

Paul dealt with this tendency in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. He first discusses the various gifts of the Spirit, pointing out several important issues.

First, in verses 4-6, he declares that there are different gifts and different ways in which a person might operate in those gifts. Still, in all this diversity, the unity of God remains. Notice Paul brings each aspect of God into play here, “the same Spirit . . . the same Lord . . . the same God.”

The simple fact is that God may give ten people the same gift and cause it to operate differently in all ten people.

When we reject the gifts of the Spirit in a person because *“they don’t do it as I do,”* or *“that’s not how I was taught it should be,”* we shut off an avenue for God to minister to us. And we are not the only ones that lose out. When we squelch the gift in someone—or even fail to encourage it—we hinder the person God wants to use. As a result, we rob the Body of Christ of a gift given to it by the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul makes a second point. God gives different gifts to different people. Notice I Corinthians 12:7 & 11:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: (verse 7). But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (verse 11).

We must realize that God wants to use **EVERY** person in some way. That means God wants to use me, and God wants to use **YOU**. No exceptions. God desires to use

every person in the Body of Christ. The Bible tells us here that God **HAS** given gifts to **EVERY** person.

The question is not, “Has God given you a gift(s)?” Instead, are you allowing God to develop and use the gift(s) He has already given you?

Here is where relationship and function are inseparable. I must recognize and develop my giftings for the good of the Body of Christ. Likewise, I must encourage, respect, and receive the giftings that God has placed in others with who I am in a relationship.

Another point in these verses concerns the giving of gifts. They are given “*as He wills.*” God, by the Holy Spirit, imparts gifts to His people at His discretion, not ours. That causes a couple of common problems that we must grow past.

I may see a particular gift in someone and desire that gift for myself. It may or may not happen at my will. To function correctly in the Body, you must find, accept, and develop the gifts God has given you instead of sitting back waiting for the one you might desire.

The other problem is God may give you a gift or ministry that you do not particularly want. Sometimes you must step up to the plate and accept God’s will, finding joy and satisfaction in fulfilling God’s purpose for your life. I can assure you that fulfilling God’s will for your life will be the biggest blessing you could hope for—even if you don’t appreciate His call for the time being.

You can “go to church” and never give what you have or receive what you need. But “being the Church” opens a whole new realm of giving and receiving as the Body of Christ learns to minister to itself, by the Holy Spirit in love.

Hands, Feet, Eyes, Ears and Noses

In verses 15-21 of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul deals with two aspects: relationship and function. These are the two common attitude problems that the Church must overcome to experience the reality of Ephesians 4:13.

till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

The first attitude can be summarized like this: Because I am not like someone else, I am not an important part of the Body of Christ. The second is summarized this way: Because someone else is not like me, they cannot be an important part of the Body of Christ.

Both attitudes are wrong and hurtful to all involved. The first belongs to a person with poor self-esteem. The second to a person with—shall we say—a big ego.

The underlying concept is unity in the midst of diversity. I do not have to be like someone else to be an integral part of the Church. Likewise, I cannot insist that everyone else be just like me before accepting them and their giftings.

To be complete, the Body of Christ needs all of the various gifts, functions, and ministries Christ has given her.

Romans chapter 12 lists a variety of motivational gifts. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 lists nine charismatic gifts of the Spirit. Ephesians chapter 4 lists five ministry gifts.

For a church to be complete in the ministry of Christ, she must seek to have all these gifts operating in her midst. Trying to function on less is like having an eight-cylinder engine trying to run on six cylinders. It will run, but not like it was designed.

The Same Care One for Another

It is important to remember that the unity of the Spirit is not a cold, organizational agreement but rather a warm, living, loving relationship. Paul ends 1 Corinthians chapter 12 by reminding the believers that there should be “*no division*” in the Body, and that each should have the same care one for another.”

You can “go to church” without being touched by the triumph or trial of the person sitting in the same room. But when we “become” the Church by developing and maintaining relationships, we will be affected by what affects others.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Romans 12:15-16a

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Christ was touched with the feelings of our weaknesses, and because of it, He became the faithful High Priest.

Likewise, God desires for us to be touched with the feelings of others for us to minister to them appropriately.

To say, “I know how you must feel,” when we really do not have a clue how they feel is a reproach to Christ and makes for a very ineffective ministry.

Jesus felt what you and I feel. He experienced it, and His comfort is born of empathy, not sympathy.

So should our ministry be born of empathy, not sympathy!
How human it is to have personality conflicts. Petty differences cloud relationships, and we find ourselves judging more than praying. However, when we genuinely care for those *who assemble with us*, we will have their best interests in mind, ever seeking to see them grow and prosper in the Lord.

Conclusion

The sum of the matter is simple. God intends for the fullness of Christ’s ministry to be expressed in and through the Church. For that to happen, we must prioritize relationships and encourage, use, and receive the gifts God has placed within the Body. No single person or ministry can express the fullness of Christ’s ministry; we need one another.

The Mission of the Church

Now that we have defined the Church and looked at the dual issues of relationship and function, we can now turn our attention to the *MISSION* of the Church. What is God’s

purpose for the Church? What are we supposed to be doing while we are waiting for the return of the Lord?

Two great dangers exist in the churches today. The first is becoming ingrown. That happens when we only focus on the people we have already collected and fail to reach out to those around us.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. Matthew 28:18-20

These two passages express the heart of the two-fold *MISSION* of the Church. That is, to *reach the world* with the message of Jesus Christ and to *make disciples* unto Him.

You Shall Be Witnesses

Jesus left the Church with a promise and a commission.

It is possible to “go to church” all your life and never receive the promise nor fulfill the commission. On the

other hand, “being the Church” means we will experience both the promise and commission.

In these passages, we find the key to fulfilling the great commission—power. All power was given to Jesus. The commission came from him, who has the power and authority to fulfill the mission.

That is where the promise comes into play. Because all power was given to Jesus, He has the authority to delegate power to His Church. The Church is HIS Body. It is this power that we need to get the job done.

Peter, James, and John needed the power that came with the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Why does the Church today not believe they need the same power to do the same job? The commission to the Church has never changed. God’s promise of power to get the job done has never changed either.

Being the Church means that we understand the task and the means to fulfill it. It means that we seek God for the same power which He endued the early Church. Being the Church means we seek to allow God to use us as instruments of that power to impact the world we live in.

Go Teach

In the King James Version of the Bible, the word *teach* is used twice in the giving of the great commission. One comes before the command to baptize, and the second

comes after. While technically both words can be translated “teach,” Jesus used two different words here.

Many other versions translate the first “teach” to *make disciples or enroll as students*, which is accurate. The second time Jesus says “teach,” it means to provide ongoing instruction. These two words give the twofold thrust of the great commission.

The first is to make disciples or invite people to follow the Master, while the second is to continue teaching them everything Jesus taught.

As I have already said, it is possible to go to church your whole life and never experience the reality of what the Church is all about.

Many people sit in church week after week yet have never led another person to the Lord or helped another believer grow in Christ. They go to church but have never experienced the joy of helping another person become a strong follower of Jesus. Yet this commission and power were not just for the apostles in Jesus’s day; it is for all who call upon the name of the Lord.

You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”
Acts 2:38b-39

What Does It Mean to be a Witness?

Notice Jesus did not say, “You shall go witnessing.” Jesus said, “You shall be witnesses.”

If you mention being a witness in some churches, they automatically think you mean you must go knocking on doors passing out “Four Spiritual Laws” tracts. While this may be a part of being a witness, it is not what Jesus had in mind when He said this.

The difference is the same that we have been discussing throughout this study. That is the difference between “going” and “being.”

You can go witnessing without ever being a witness.

A witness is a person who has first-hand knowledge about an event or subject. A person witnesses a car wreck, so he has personal knowledge. He receives a summons to appear in court to **become** a “witness” concerning the wreck. He is simply asked to tell what he knows. He is not required to explain all the details of the features of the vehicles involved. He cannot speak to the motivation of the drivers. He just tells what he has seen and heard. Consider the story of the disciples being called before the Jewish leaders and threatened. They were told not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore. Their reply?

For we cannot but speak the things which we have *seen and heard.*” Acts 4:20 (Emphasis mine.)

The same is true about being a witness for Jesus. It is not complicated. You must first have a personal encounter with Jesus and then find someone with whom you can share. It is not hard at all.

Jesus said He would supply the power to be witnesses. In other words, you do not have to convince anyone that what happened to you is real. That is God's Job. You just need to tell people that the same thing can happen to them. The rest is between them and God.

Evangelism or Discipleship?

What did Jesus tell the Church to do—evangelize or make disciples? Think about it again. And Again! We were told to **make disciples**, which is somewhat different than evangelizing.

Evangelism is a part of making disciples, but it is not the totality of what God expects from the Church. Our idea of evangelism today is very lopsided. We look at it as a traveling minister who comes to preach a revival or crusade in the church or other venue. Or perhaps someone who leads people to say the “sinner’s prayer.”

Many evangelists preach great soul-winning messages and see significant numbers of people respond to altar calls for salvation. What happens afterward, though? Statistics show that only a very few people responding to an altar call in evangelistic meetings actively follow God after the first year.

What is wrong with this picture? That is not what God intended. While it is unrealistic to think that every person we lead to the Lord will stay committed, I think the problem lies with churches in the area of discipleship.

I think that is why Jesus said, “Go make disciples.” Our responsibility to the great commission is not fulfilled with evangelism alone.

It is one thing to lead a person to pray a prayer for salvation; it is another to walk with that person as they make a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ.

This is where the two “*teachings*” mentioned earlier come into play. We need to teach people what God has to say about salvation, but we also need to teach them that salvation means making Jesus both LORD and SAVIOR. That is discipleship. Discipleship is much harder than evangelism because it requires more personal time and energy. It requires that you get involved in another person’s life and help them become established in the Kingdom of God.

Evangelism can be fun and exciting. We can see fruit quickly (or so we assume). We get to brag about how effective we are and what great work we are doing. But making disciples takes time and does not necessarily show quick results.

Therefore, most churches do not emphasize disciple-making—it is messy. Discipling takes time and energy and the “P” word (patience). It is easier to invite them to “GO

TO CHURCH” than it is to help them **“BECOME”** a part of the Church.

That is why we have so many people who “go to church” but never really experience the reality of God there. “Being the Church” means we must step up and accept our command and commission to make disciples of those we have led to the Lord.

A Word of Caution!

A great danger can occur when a Church begins to disciple people. If the leadership is not careful, the church will begin to make disciples to themselves. They end up making followers of the church, the pastor, or its particular doctrinal views. That is not what Jesus had in mind either. We are to make disciples for Jesus, not disciples for ourselves.

Setting aside the past errors and the dangers presented, we still have a mandate to make disciples of the world, not just to evangelize it.

GO!

Our churches do not grow for two reasons. The first is because we do not GO! God never told the world to go to church; He told the Church to go to the world. Unfortunately, much of our current evangelistic effort revolves around inviting people to **“GO TO CHURCH.”**

While people do get saved at church meetings, I still wonder if we are fulfilling the great commission to the greatest extent possible.

The second is they do not take the command seriously to make disciples. When this happens, the new converts either quit after a while or never grow to maturity to become “fruit-bearing” Christians.

The 20/20 Vision of the Church

Years ago, I heard a sermon preached by a good friend of mine, Matthew Dow. The message was entitled The 20/20 Vision of the Church.

In medical lingo, 20/20 vision is perfect. It is a balanced vision. Both eyes are operating together at optimum performance. Nothing is out of focus. This was precisely the point Matthew made in his sermon.

Using Acts 20:20 as the text for his message he spoke about the need for local churches to have a balanced focus in fulfilling the great commission.

How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.

Public meetings were a part of the early Church and are still a major part of the churches today. However, equally important were the meetings in homes. Paul modeled house ministry—or smaller, more intimate groups—to the

churches he started. That is a lost practice in many churches today.

Small-group meetings can be used to effectively evangelize and discipleship family, friends, and neighbors. That would involve meeting one-on-one with people or families and gathering in homes for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship.

One significant weakness of churches in America today is its emphasis on GOING TO CHURCH. As we have already seen in this study, relationship and function are critical elements to a strong Church. These elements are best developed in small group settings, such as occur in home fellowships.

Many of the problems traditional churches of today experience can be solved by teaching “house to house.”

Evangelism comes much more naturally, as some people would come to a home meeting when they might not come to a church building.

Relationships are formed as people interact with each other in a small group setting. It has been accurately said, “It is hard to develop a relationship with the back of someone’s head” (as everyone sits facing the front of the room where one or two people do all the ministry.)

Spiritual gifts and ministries are encouraged and developed in the home fellowship. Whereas in church, the emphasis is on the ministries of a select few, with little time or place given for *body ministry*.

Real questions and problems can be discussed and ministered to in the small group, where trust and confidence have been developed.

These are just a few benefits of having a perfect 20/20 vision for both public and house meetings.

With the Coronavirus outbreak in 2020, many churches shut down—at least for a time. Many went to online services, and members of those churches that did not found services on TV or the Internet to watch.

I appreciate technology. I am glad it is there for people to continue growing spiritually and supplementing what they are getting from their churches. However, there is an inherent danger we must consider. Being the Church is more than listening to worship and hearing a sermon. You *can* get those things electronically. You cannot get fellowship that way. You can not experience the flow of life that comes from genuine fellowship. There is no give-and-take with your TV or computer screen.

Suppose our idea of Christianity is going to a meeting. And that meeting is just about singing a few songs and hearing a sermon. I am afraid that many people—forced to stay home during the pandemic—may decide they do not need to go back to their local church when they can. Either they got out of the habit or discovered they could get a message and music after sleeping late and wearing their pajamas while drinking coffee. Satan will most certainly use this to separate sheep from the flock—and lone sheep become lunch for the wolf.

Conclusion

While there are other aspects of church life, these thoughts should provide ample challenge for those who are striving to be all they can be in the Kingdom of God. We can be satisfied to continue “**going to church,**” or we can determine that we will “**be the Church.**”

*For every person who has ever said, “There has to be more to Christianity than this,” I say, “God Bless you as you **BECOME THE CHURCH!**”*