

1 | We Are Joined Together



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A few years ago, I visited Muir Woods National Monument—known for its beautiful California redwoods. Dwarfing other tree species, redwoods can grow to more than 350 feet tall and can be as wide as 24 feet in diameter.

Yet, as massive as these trees are, redwoods possess remarkably shallow root systems. But the roots overcome their lack of depth by extending outward more than 100 feet from the tree's base. Each tree's roots then intertwine with the roots of other redwoods. By joining together, the individual root systems create a forest of trees with staggering strength.

The simple reality is that redwood trees weren't created to exist in isolation—and neither were we. Just as a redwood tree requires a forest of other redwood trees in order to stand, so also the Christian requires a spiritual family in order to grow. The church—the body of Christ—is that family. Being a part of Christ's church isn't an option. Through Jesus, God designed us to live and serve together as His body.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: When we come to _____, we also become a part of the _____ of Christ.

JOINED TOGETHER

How we view the church affects how we interact within the church. Which of the following best represents how you currently view your church? Circle one.

- A. Lecture hall B. Community hub C. Family
D. Organization E. Sanctuary F. Other: _____

The New Testament writers used various metaphors to describe God's church, such as *flock*, *temple*, *household*, *gathering*, and so forth. But the most frequently used metaphor is *the body*. Through this picture, we learn that each Christ-follower is a member (or part) of the body, while Jesus Christ is the head.

Ephesians 1:20-23 ²⁰ He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens— ²¹ far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Christ is the head of _____ , the church.

As its head, Jesus holds ultimate authority over the church. His authority isn't dictatorial, oppressive, arrogant, or abusive—but it's absolute. Someone might ask, "How is it that Jesus gets absolute authority over the church—and everything else for that matter?" Jesus' authority was neither received by democratic vote nor granted by a council's affirmation; His authority has no root in human decision at all. Jesus received His authority as a demonstration of God's power. In other words, Jesus' authority is all about who He is as the Son of God.

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— ⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

Christ brought us into His church by His _____ .

In most clubs and organizations, you sign up to become a member. You pay the dues. You attend the meetings. Then, you go to work on the club's agenda. The Bible teaches us a radically different method for membership in His body. Membership in the body of Christ isn't about what we do to *get* in. Instead, it's about what *Jesus* has done to *bring* us in.

Why does God save sinners like you and me? We might think it's simply because He loves us. God most certainly loves us, but He saves us for a bigger reason than just to display His love. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (v. 10). God doesn't save us *by our* good works; He saves us *for His* good works. God saves us to show His divine handiwork. Through our redeemed lives, He displays for the world His character, love, and glory. And the local church is the place where He does that best.

Ephesians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.

We are members _____ in God's household, Christ's church.

God has always had a people. The Old Testament records God calling Israel (the Jews) to Himself. They were God's chosen people among the nations (the Gentiles).

- ▶ God commanded the Jews to obey Him, tell of His greatness, and believe His promises—the greatest of which was the promise of salvation for both Jew and Gentile alike.
- ▶ Because of their faith in Christ, the Gentile believers were brought near and were "no longer foreigners and strangers" (v. 19). Although foreigners and strangers possessed some legal rights, they lacked the full rights of citizenship. Spiritually, the Jews felt superior while the Gentiles felt inferior. But Paul shattered both of these feelings by pointing to the uniting work of the gospel.
- ▶ You and I are modern-day Gentiles. We come from a variety of countries, speak a multitude of languages, and celebrate diverse traditions. Yet, in Christ's church, we share the same citizenship and hail from the same family through Jesus.

DAY 1: God's power is displayed in the church.

Read Ephesians 1:20-21.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians declares the authority and grace of God. Consider what this passage tell us about God's demonstration of His power through His Son, Jesus:

- ▶ God raised Jesus from the dead.
- ▶ God seated Jesus at His right hand in a place of ultimate authority over every other ruler.
- ▶ God gave Jesus an eternal rule—not only in this age but also in the one to come.
- ▶ God put everything under Jesus' authority.
- ▶ God appointed Jesus as head over everything for the church.
- ▶ God appointed Jesus to fill all things in every way; in other words, everything finds its purpose in Jesus.

Through His power, God pronounced Jesus as the infinitely superior Ruler of all things—including His role as head of the church. This means no human leader stands as the ultimate authority in your local church. Although God has ordained offices to exist in the local church, no pastor or board serves as head. Only Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God in the seat of ultimate authority as head of His church. All human leaders are to look to Jesus, follow His example, teach His Word, and submit to His leadership.

Which of God's actions recorded in Ephesians 1:20-21 do you find most remarkable? Praise Him today for who He is and what He has done.

“He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens—far above every ruler and authority.”

EPHESIANS 1:20-21A

DAY 2: Jesus is head over everything for the church.

Read Ephesians 1:22-23.

In the ancient world, the head was considered the life-giving member of the body—one that both controlled and sustained it. This is what Paul told us in verse 22: Jesus is “head over *everything* for the church” (emphasis added). Jesus isn’t the head over *some* things for the church; He is head over *all* things. The church can do nothing of spiritual significance apart from Jesus. And since every Christian is a member of the body, it means that, as individuals, we can’t do anything significant apart from Jesus.

The word “everything” also teaches us that believers can’t compartmentalize life so that Jesus is head over some things and not over others. Whether we’re obeying Jesus all alone in our workplaces or serving Jesus together through the church, we need the life-giving sustenance that only He can give. Just as a human body is lifeless without a human head, so also the church is powerless without a spiritual head. Jesus is head over *everything* for the church!

*A healthy family involves regular involvement in the family members’ lives.
Commit to making time with your church family a priority.*

DAY 3: We cannot earn God’s favor; we need a Savior.

Read Ephesians 2:1-5.

Few passages of Scripture sum up Jesus’ work on our behalf like Ephesians 2:1-9. Follow Paul’s train of thought in these verses:

- ▶ **We are saved.** The need to be saved implies peril. We normally don’t cry out for rescue from a party or game night. We cry for help when our lives are in danger. Paul described that danger early in the chapter: “You were dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1). Because of sin, everybody enters into the world spiritually dead. Accompanying that spiritual state is a nature opposed to God. In that condition, we face God’s wrath and judgment. Against the backdrop of this bad news, Paul gave us good news: “God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ” (vv. 4-5).
- ▶ **We are saved by grace!** Grace describes God’s undeserved favor toward sinful humanity. The One we’ve sinned against initiates the salvation we need. It’s definitely counter-cultural—and it’s utterly undeserved. That’s grace at its heart. Salvation (and entrance into His church) begins with God’s benevolent initiative toward us—not the other way around.

Memorize Ephesians 2:4-5 as a reminder of the power and depth of God’s love.

DAY 4: Christ's sacrifice is the foundation of our faith.

Read Ephesians 2:6-10.

Paul continued to describe God's gift of salvation in verses 6-10.

- ▶ **We are saved by grace through faith.** Some people think faith is simply a shot in the dark, an intellectual leap, or just believing without seeing. That's not how the Bible describes faith. Faith is accepting the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done to reconcile us to God. What has Jesus done? He lived the perfect life we were required to live. He died the punishing death sin required us to die. God approved Christ's sacrifice and raised Jesus from the dead; Jesus gained victory over death and offers us eternal life. Trusting these truths to make you right with God is at the heart of saving faith.
- ▶ **Every aspect of our salvation is God's gift to us—not work done by us.** Twice in this passage, Paul reminded us that no work on our part can earn salvation. Rather, the entire process is a gift of God's grace. We don't enter Christ's church by paying dues, signing a roster, or performing good works. God's sovereign, merciful, and gracious work on our behalf enable us to be saved and to come into His church.

Spend time in prayer for your church today. Commit to pray for the leaders and the ministry opportunities available in your community.



DAY 5: The church is God's household—His family.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

Great diversity exists in the family of God, but we hold a mutual responsibility of togetherness. God built us together to be His dwelling. Each follower of Christ in your church is a brick in the temple of God. He takes those individual bricks and forges us together by the mortar of His gospel. We depend on each other far more than we may think.

Our culture is becoming increasingly individualistic. It's hard not to allow that reality to affect the way we view the church. But Scripture presents a radically different approach. The church isn't simply about me or my needs. The church isn't a club we can take or leave. Fellow church members aren't spiritual acquaintances we should keep at arm's length. The church is God's household—His family. It's the Body for whom Christ died. And for the Christian, the church is a nonnegotiable need. When we come to Christ, we also become a part of the body of Christ.

Next Sunday, make a point to meet and get to know the names of the people seated near you. Find out their names, and invite them to your Bible study group if they aren't already involved in one.

*“For the Christian, the church
is a nonnegotiable need.”*

CHRIS JAMES