



### "Community in the Person & Work of Jesus"

**Idea:** The people who repent of sin and place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ are brought into the household of God, the community of faith called the church, sharing a common life in Christ.

**Intro:** This summer we are examining the concept of biblical community. We have defined community simply as that of "a unified body of individuals" or *one-together*. Thus far in our study we have discovered that community exists and is desired in this world because creation follows the pattern of its Creator. God is a communal being. That does not mean, however, He is one of many gods. The Bible does not present a plurality of gods. Instead, it teaches that there is only one God who exists in three distinct Persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit dwell together in perfect community. They are equal in being but subordinate in role.

The Triune God created all that there is; therefore, creation bears His mark of community. Every part of the universe has its counterpart. This is most beautifully seen in the creation of

mankind. Adam was the very first human created. God formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed life into his nostrils (Gen 2:7). There on day six of creation, God tasked Adam with the duty of naming the animals. Through that process, Adam realized that something was missing. He found no helper suitable for him. Every other creature had its mate. Every other creature dwelled in community with a helper, but man had no helper. Thus, Adam understood the deep longing of his heart to live in community with God and other humans. God fashioned the woman Eve from Adam's rib, and the two of them became a perfect reflection of the glorious community existing within the Godhead. Adam and Eve enjoyed the beauty and responsibility of overseeing God's creation without any sin (Gen 2:25).

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve's perfect community with God and with one another was destroyed when they sinned against the Lord by eating from the forbidden tree. Their sin brought upon them all the curses that God had warned them about. Death entered the life cycle of creation. Adam and Eve died spiritually and they would eventually die physically. God cursed them because of their rebellion, but He also extended grace. He spoke of one who would come to put an end to the tyranny of the serpent that had tempted them, and God also made a covering for their sin. The sacrificing of the animals to make clothing for Adam and Eve foreshadowed the sacrificial system of Israel that would be established hundreds of years later. Last week we learned how God continued to pursue man, through the call of Abram and the establishment of Israel, even though man continued to walk away from Him in rebellion and sin.

**Inquiry:** The sacrificing of the animals in the Garden ultimately foreshadowed the sacrifice that would be made by the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross. God created man to be in relationship with Himself and with one another. Sin destroyed God's design. The sacrificial system given to Israel through the Law pointed to man's need of atonement, but it was never enough. The blood of goats, bulls, and lambs was never

enough to cover the sins of man. They pointed simply to the need for a Savior who could atone for man's sin and rebellion against God. For that reason, Jesus stepped into salvation history. The Bible reveals that it is Jesus and the work He accomplished on the cross and in the grave that restores to man the community for which he was created. So let's look at four truths in regard to community in the Person and work of Jesus.

### **1. The death and resurrection of Jesus secured redemption for humanity.**

Israel's soteriology emphasized the need for redemption. The entire Levitical sacrificial system was constructed around and for redemption. Jews were commanded to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of both their personal and corporate sins (Lev 4:1-6:7; 16:1-34). The Jewish mind did not understand redemption solely on an individualistic level. Salvation came as a result of being a part of the people whom God had chosen. There is a clear stressing of community in the salvation of the Old Testament. Those who sinned against God by breaking his commandments were either put to death by the men of Israel or cut off from the people of Israel (Deut 15:30-36). The community carried out the sentence.

The sacrifices of the old covenant foreshadowed what was to be fulfilled in the new covenant through Christ, including the concept of community. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'*" (Jer 31:33). The author of Hebrews connects Jeremiah's prophecy to the work Christ accomplished on the cross. He says, "*But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises*" (Heb 8:6). The

author portrays Jesus Christ as the true high priest who is ordaining a new and better covenant. Jesus, through his penal substitutionary death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, has satisfied the justice of God and purchased redemption for humanity.

*17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

*18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. – Romans 5:17-21*

Jesus' redemption brings mankind back into community with God and with one another.

## **2. Community with God is restored solely through the blood of Jesus.**

Upon trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the believer becomes a member of the community of faith. The New Testament uses the images of a house, a building, a temple, and a body to describe the community experienced in Christ (Heb 3:6; Eph 2:21; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 4:12). Apart from Christ, people are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). They are spiritually cut off from community with God. Paul describes such a one as being “far off” but “brought near by the blood of Christ.”

*12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

– Ephesians 2:12-13

A. T. Robertson points out that Paul’s use of “but now” (νυνὶ δὲ) in verse 13 is strongly contrasted with the phrase “at that time” (τῷ καιρῷ ἐκεῖνῳ) of verse 12. Paul stresses the drastic change that has taken place in the lives of the Gentile believers. The language he uses to express the community that believers now enjoy with God is similar to the language used in Hebrews 10:19-22, where believers are encouraged to “*have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus*” and thus “*draw near*” to God. In Ephesians 2, Paul’s audience was Gentile believers, while Hebrews was written to address a Jewish audience. In both epistles, the ground of approach for the two groups is the same. They come into community with God through the blood of Christ.

The Gentiles in Ephesians 2 are depicted as aliens and strangers of the heritage and promises of Israel. In his commentary, Harold Hoehner lists five privileges that the Gentiles lacked. First, they were separated from Christ. It is noteworthy that Paul indicated that the unbelieving Jews were also separated from Christ (Eph 2:17). Second, they were excluded from the citizenship of Israel. Third, they were unaware of the covenant promises given to Israel. Fourth, the Gentiles lacked the messianic hope possessed by Jews, who anticipated a deliverance from their current national situation brought about by a messiah. Fifth, the Gentiles may have worshiped many gods, but they did not know the one true God revealed in the Scriptures. They were, as Paul stated, separated and far off from Christ, but Jesus brought them near through the shedding of his blood.

Those, therefore, who had no hope because they were without God were given hope in the Son of God.

### **3. Community with others is restored solely through the blood of Jesus.**

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

Paul specified that when individuals come into community with God through Jesus Christ, they also become a part of the community of believers. Those who place their faith in Jesus are no longer estranged from God, and they also are no longer alienated from other believers. Instead, they become fellow citizens with the saints and are members of God's household. Vertical redemption creates a horizontal restoration of relationships. The two groups (Jews and Gentiles) become one. John Polhill proposes that Christ creates an entirely new person:

“When Paul spoke of Christ's redemptive work as creating one new person out of the two (Eph 2:15), it was an advance over the salvation-historical perspective of Romans 11. In Romans Paul spoke of the Gentiles being grafted into the root stock of Israel. Israel remained the original people of God, now redefined in light of Christ and open to the inclusion of the Gentiles. In Ephesians 2, however, Paul seems to have developed his view. Now it became a matter of a new people, a new creation formed out of the two formerly separate peoples.”

The new people created by Christ become the community of faith. The members of this new community individually make up “God's household” (Eph 2:19). Paul expounds on this teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. There he uses the image of a body that is made up of many members, and he focuses

on the organic unity of the Christian community. Verse 12 reads, *“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.”* Commenting on this verse, Charles Talbert gives some insight:

“Christ here is not the name of an individual, Jesus, but of the community that derives its existence and identity from the individual. Just as in the Old Testament Israel could serve as the name of an individual (Gen 32:28) and of a people, so in Paul the name of Christ is used both for an individual (1 Cor 2:2; Rom 5:17) and for the Christian community (1 Cor 15:22). The Christian community, Paul is saying, is like the human body. It is an organic unity with a multiplicity of parts.”

#### **4. Believers express community by being connected to the body of Christ.**

Paul stresses community in 1 Corinthians 12:14-20. He focuses attention on the diversity of the body, emphasizing the need for each of the different members. Using language of anatomy, he explains that each individual body part could not function without being connected to the body. His point is that believers can only express community when they are connected to the body of Christ. Paul further emphasizes this point by using the phrase “one another” (1 Cor 12:25). Thirty-five times in the New Testament “one another” follows an imperative verb. God calls believers to “love one another” (John 13:34-35), “accept one another” (Rom 15:7), “submit to one another” (Eph 5:21), and “pray for one another” (Jas 5:16). These references to community reveal that the Bible knows nothing of a believer in relationship with Christ who is not also in community with the body of Christ. Jerry Bridges, in his book *True Community*, asserts, “God does not save groups; he saves individual people. But

although God saves us as individuals, he immediately incorporates us into the body of Christ.” It is clear that the individual Christian experiences an intimate relationship with God; however, the “one another” language indicates an intimacy between believers as well. They are, after all, one body (1 Cor 12:12). Paul magnifies this point by saying, “*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another*” (Rom 12:5).

**Conclusion:** Today community is distorted as a result of the fall, yet Jesus is restoring community through his redemption. The people who repent of sin and place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ are brought into the household of God. They become part of the community of faith called the church, sharing a common life in Christ. It is together as the church that believers both express and experience what the New Testament calls *koinonia* (κοινωνία). The term is often translated as *fellowship*. It can also be understood simply as *community*. The believers who make up the church are a unified body of individuals who are one together through Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of Christendom, the early church has best exemplified what New Testament community ought to look like in the local church and how God uses it to further his kingdom. It is the model we strive to emulate today.

You, however, cannot experience the community God created you to enjoy apart from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And you cannot experience all that God desires for you apart from connection with Christ’s church.