

Living the Vision - Part 3 – Hebrews 10:23-25

Scripture Reading: John 13:31-35

Introduction

Have you ever been out driving around and seen a building with a bunch of cars in the parking lot and wondered just what the people were doing in there?

I have had that thought when driving by the Masonic Lodge on Second Street in Delavan

The funny thing is, I suspect that people have might well wonder what is going on inside when they drive by a church on Sunday morning

In the not so recent past, it was common for most people to be in a church on Sunday mornings

But we now live in a culture that is very much post-Christian and what we do in here is likely a mystery to many people

This morning, we come to our third and final sermon in the mini-series titled “Living the Vision”

Over the past two weeks we have looked at the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 as we have considered the roles of outreach and equipping in the fulfilling of our commission to “make disciples”

However, this morning we are moving away from Matthew 28 and the Great Commission as we consider the third aspect of disciple-making: **Body Life**

As I said when introducing the first sermon in the series, we need to view the three aspects of the vision as the legs of a three-legged stool and keep them in balance

Because over-emphasizing or de-emphasizing one or another of the aspects will lead a Christ-follower and a church to get out of balance

As a body of believers, we have to be engaged in witnessing and leading others to Christ

But we must also be engaged in the education and training of those who choose to believe as we guide them into a life of Christ-like obedience

Likewise, we must engage in body life and the nurturing of our fellow Christ-followers for their spiritual health and well-being

As we heard in our Scripture reading this morning from John 13, the association of the followers of Jesus Christ is meant to be different and distinguished by the love they show to one another

Speaking of “one another,” the New Testament is rife with instances of one another commands

While you will find many different counts and lists of them online the most agreed upon number of one another commands seems to be 59

59 times we are told to do something towards our fellow believers

Of course, that means that other believers must be involved if we are going to be successfully obedient to those commands

Therefore, it would seem that they would most likely and efficiently be carried out when believers are together

So, as we turn our attention to the body life part of the vision for the church we will be considering many of the one another commands as well as other passages under four headings

First, we will look at **fellowship** or the relationship aspect

Second, we will consider the **unity** or the partnership that should exist

Third, we will take a look at how **love** or the companionship that defines us

And, lastly, we will look at our **service** or the stewardship that should be present

Let's begin by looking at fellowship and what it means in context of the church

I. Fellowship

The Greek word for "fellowship" in the New Testament is "*koinonia*" and some form of it is used in 17 verses

And "fellowship" is defined in my Greek lexicon as "an association involving close mutual relations and involvement"

That's pretty close to the definition that we find in our trusty Webster's 1913 Dictionary but biblical fellowship is different in a very significant way

We often talk about fellowship as an activity – like when we have fellowship dinners and other gatherings

And that's pretty common as all manner of people get together for all kinds of reasons and call it fellowship

We had a such a gathering just this past Tuesday evening as a part of our Praise and Pie service

But, first and foremost, fellowship is a **relationship** rather than an activity and the activities that we often call fellowship are the natural product of that relationship

And, whereas there are all manner of associations that could be called fellowship in the dictionary sense, in **1Corinthians 1:9** we're informed that believers are partakers of a specific fellowship to which God has called them - fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ

And that vertical fellowship with Christ leads to a horizontal fellowship with one another that differs from all other fellowships

The word "*koinonia*" first appears in **Acts 2:42** right after Peter's sermon at Pentecost when it is said of the three thousand who became believers as a result:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

So we see these early believers began to spend time together and form the bonds of association because of their belief in Jesus Christ

And their relationship with each other flowed from their relationship with Christ

They were mutually participating in the common life that they enjoyed as a result of their relationship with Jesus

And in **2Corinthians 6:14** we see that biblical fellowship is an exclusive fellowship

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

That verse is most commonly applied to marriage and the prohibition against a believer marrying an unbeliever - and that is certainly one way to be unequally yoked

But there is much more to Paul's warning than marriage and he is prohibiting any environment where we become too chummy with unbelievers and allow them to have undue influence on us

The point that Paul is making is that we are to keep associations with non-believers proper bounds

He doesn't prohibit any association with non-believers – that would negate the outreach part of the Great Commission

But we are to be in the world but not of the world and always being careful not to be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewal of our minds as we engage in fellowship with Christ and our fellow Christ-followers

Paul writes in Galatians 2 how he went up to Jerusalem to meet with "those who seemed influential" in the church there to prove his fellowship with them as a believer and he says in verse 9 [**Galatians 2:9**]

...when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised

In other words, only after they were convinced that they were indeed "fellows" did they welcome them to the fellowship

And we see the reason for such care in our next aspect of body life - **unity**

II. Unity

When a person accepts Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they become a member of the Body of Christ

That is to say they enter into a sort of **partnership** with Christ and their fellow believers

Look with me at **2Corinthians 13:14** which speaks to the reality of the fellowship being the product of the Holy Spirit

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all

And we see the idea of unity that we derive from partaking of the body and blood of Christ in Paul's description of the Lord's Table in **1Corinthians 10:16-17**

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Those two instances of the word "participation" is our Greek *koinonia* which we have thus far seen translated as "fellowship"

Paul refers to the unity that Christ-followers share with one another by using the metaphor that likens believers to the different members of a physical body

He says in **1Corinthians 12:12** –

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

And we know that even though the various members of a body are very different and have different functions, they must all work together in harmony

Paul speaks of that in the verses that follow in 1Corinthians 12 and in verses 25 and 26 [**1Cor 12:25-26**] he writes

...there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together

About a dozen of the "one another" commands have to do with unity – let's look at just a handful

Mark 9:50 tells Christ-followers to "be at peace with one another" and **Romans 12:16** says to "live in harmony with one another" and **Romans 15:7** says to "welcome one another" which means to accept each other

In **Ephesians 4:2** we see the command to patiently tolerate one another and in **Ephesians 4:32** the admonition to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you"

1Thessalonians 5:15 says to "seek to do good to one another" and to not get even and in **James 4:11** we read "do not speak evil against one another"

When we see a member of a physical body detached from the body, we don't say, "Oh, that member is just an independent spirit" and we don't believe that the member can do just fine on its own

We know something has gone terribly awry and we know that, unless the member can be reattached to the body, it will surely wither and die

Likewise, members of the Body of Christ are meant to be attached to a local body of fellow believers and Scripture knows nothing of a Lone Ranger Christian - we are made to dwell in unity

Fellowship defines the relationship that we share - it describes *what* we are - a people bound together through our relationship in Christ

Unity tells us how we are to behave within that relationship - as partners existing in harmony and seeking good for our fellow members of the body

The third aspect of body life that is crucial if we are going to be successful in unity is **love**

III. Love

In our Scripture reading this morning we heard Jesus give the following command [**John 13:34-35**]

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

In those verses, we see that one of the distinguishing characteristics of our fellowship is the love that we have and show toward each other

Paul defines love as the highest Christian virtue in 1Corinthians 13:13 and the kind of love that he and the Lord are speaking of is sacrificial love or *agape*

Jesus calls the command to love a "new" command but it wasn't the fact of the love that was new - it was the *extent* of the love that was new

You are to love your fellow Christ-followers as Jesus has loved you

And we know Christ loved us by leaving his heavenly realm, being born as a baby and living among us as a man, and then going to the cross for us -

Jesus is the ultimate example of sacrificial love and our example for how we are to love one another

Jesus wasn't saying that his followers weren't to love the lost and share the gospel with them

We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves but we are to love our fellow Christians as Christ loved us

And the love we have for one another is a key way we distinguish ourselves from the rest of the world

Again, this is a mark of the exclusive nature of being a true follower of Jesus Christ

Love of this type requires **companionship** - it requires closeness

Jesus had to come down from heaven and walk among us to demonstrate his love for us and we must spend time with each other - *agape* can't really be practiced from a distance

So, if we are going to obey this command we need to assemble together

Let's look at **Hebrews 10:23-25** together –

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Notice that meeting together is a key element of stirring one another up to love and good works

And when we are together, all of our activities and interactions must be motivated by love

When love is our motivation we will be able to tolerate one another and maintain our unity as we read in **Ephesians 4:2**

We will gladly serve one another as we see commanded in **Galatians 5:13**

We will be devoted to one another and seek to honor each other as we read in **Romans 12:10**

Love will empower us to bear one another's burdens [**Galatians 6:2**] because love will make us aware of those burdens and compel us to do something to ease their weight on our fellow Christ-follower

Love will cause us to exhort and encourage one another to holiness as we read in **Hebrews 3:13**

We could go on all day looking at examples of the power and provision of love but the end goal of love is to pass along the love that we have experienced and to build one another up in the things of Christ

To take what we have experienced in our vertical relationship with Christ and reproduce it in our horizontal relationships with each other

For the sake of time, let's turn now to our fourth and final aspect of body life which is **service**

IV. Service

When a person rightfully becomes a member of the Body of Christ through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, they become partners with the other members in carrying out the functions of the body here on earth

And if a person is truly sharing in the life of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit they will also share in the concerns, goals, and priorities of Christ and submit to his Lordship in their life

In practical terms, that means that a true follower of Jesus Christ will be a member of a local church, will submit themselves to the godly leadership of the church, and will participate in the ministries of the church

Remember, a member without a ministry is a mystery as every member of the body has a function to fulfill through the gifting and the power of the Holy Spirit

And being a Christ-follower means practicing stewardship

A steward is not an owner but someone who manages the property of another

We readily acknowledge that all good gifts come from our heavenly Father [**James 1:17**]

And we also know that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof [**Psalm 24:1**]"

So we can rightly deduce that the good gifts we have been given by God are given for us to use for his purposes and we are to manage them rightly

We do not become owners of the gifts to use them however we wish but God entrusts us with the gifts so that we might use them as he directs and for his glory

And stewardship involves all aspects of the life of a Christ-follower

I often say that being a good steward means managing our time, talents, treasure, truth, and temple (our bodies) in the way that God would have us do

We've already seen that we are partners with Christ and in any good partnership the work, responsibilities, and burdens are shared along with the profits

None of us would jump at the chance to enter into a lopsided partnership where one partner reaped all the benefits and the other bore the burden of the work

As partners in Christ's business here on earth, God expects us to put what he has entrusted to us to work toward meeting his goals

1Peter 4:10-11 tells us –

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 10 again - that's a command and not a suggestion

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

And it includes every Christ-follower and every gift they have been entrusted with

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ God expects you to use whatever he has given you in his service - no exceptions

And, since we know that there are no "gift-less" Christ-followers, the only question that remains is whether or not you are using what you have been entrusted with in the way God expects you to

Going back to Paul's metaphor of the physical body - every member has a function and when a member ceases in its function the body is weakened and the member withers -

Fulfilling your purpose in the Body of Christ and for the Body of Christ is not an option for a healthy spiritual life

Notice also that the gifts we are entrusted with are to be used *“to serve one another”*

Every believer is entrusted with gifts that they are expected to use in serving one another

As we saw last week that included equipping one another through demonstrated obedience and teaching one another - that is to say being a good steward of the truth that God has entrusted to you

But it also includes fulfilling all the “one another” commands we find in Scripture in love as partners with Christ

We can look to a man named Joses who was nicknamed Barnabas by the apostles and that nickname translates to “Son of Encouragement” because of his propensity to serve his fellow believers

He is referred to in **Acts 11:24** as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”

And that verse goes on to say that “many people were added to the Lord” presumably through the witness of his service within the church

Conclusion

Those who call upon the Lord share a unique relationship with one another

Together we make up the Body of Christ and we have a connection that cannot be experienced by those who remain outside the body

Just as is true with a physical body, we are all different from one another and we all have a different function but we are all called to labor together toward the same goal

We are each tasked with reaching out to those outside the body with the intention of introducing them to our Savior and guiding them into a saving relationship with him

We are each commanded to equip our fellow Christ-followers and train them to obedience by sharing the truths that God has entrusted us with from his Word

And we are each called to love and serve our fellow Christ-followers in the spirit of unity and fellowship so that the love we have for each other

As we strive to be of God in all these duties [**Ephesians 5:1**]

That is God’s vision for his church

Let’s pray

John 13:31-35 (page 1086)

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you.

You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."