



The Church He is Building – The People of His Habitation

Spiritual Exercise

“Hold Us Together” by Matt Maher (Love with bind us together into a shelter from the storm.)

Introduction

The rebellion of Adam and Eve was devastating to mankind, and costly to God. The Creator lost His reign in the hearts of mankind; He lost His relationship with them; and He lost His habitation among them. This all happened in the first three chapters of Genesis. The rest of the Bible is the story of Him getting it all back – culminated in the last three chapters of The Revelation. It is a beautiful story of love, rescue and restoration.

Discovering true purpose in life – purpose founded in the Truth – is an adventure into the heart of God. It requires intimacy with God and submission to His reign in the Lord Jesus Christ. The desires that He intends to give us are also His desires. They become His purposes and the good works He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Over the next two weeks, we are going to explore God’s purposes in light of our relationships with others – particularly those with whom He has given us influence.

This week we will discuss the last of the losses – His habitation with and in His children. As we discovered with reign and relationship, there is a part for us to play and a blessing that comes from pursuing God’s intentions in His habitation. The New Testament refers to God’s habitation as the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the Church. Here are a few verses about this wonderful mystery.

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. John 14:23

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, “*I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” 2Corinthians 6:16

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

Moreover, we will see that God’s habitation is found in a plurality of people (more than 85% of the “you” pronouns in the New Testament are plural). There are no lone-rangers in the kingdom of God.

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

Searching Out the Matter

(All Scripture references, but those noted, are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

What is this Church that Christ is Building?

Church (*ekklesia*): from *ek*, "out of," and *klesis*, "a calling", was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens "gathered" to discuss the affairs of State; a gathering of citizens called out from their homes; an assembly.
Vine's Expository Dictionary

In ancient Greece, and then adopted by the Romans, the *ekklesia* were a special group of individuals chosen from each societal group (e.g., arts, philosophy, government) to inculcate a conquered country with the Roman way of life. They functioned behind the scenes to infuse (and sometimes force) Roman culture. We see this in Scripture, where the Jewish government was a puppet to the Romans – they could not kill Jesus without Pilate's approval.

The important truth to note here is that the *ekklesia* was not a subculture of the society. The Romans in Israel were not trying to be like the Jews. They were a counter-culture intent on making the Jews think like Romans. As we know from history, they rubbed the conquered society the wrong way, so to speak, and the society did not like it. Jewish uprisings were constant and eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

It is no different for the *ekklesia* of Christ. Our King conquered in His death, burial and resurrection. From its formation, the true Church has stood against both the pagan world and the religious "church"; and it has been persecuted. The Romans eventually crucified thousands of Christians; and we know the Jews played their part in the persecution of the early church.

Additionally, Christ does not recognize His church by physical structures, organizations, or meeting times. These are man created constraints that many times impede the development of His Bride. This is His passion; the subject of His intercession. And Her perfection is a prerequisite for His coming back to establish His Father's eternal Kingdom.

⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." ⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:6-8

¹ Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. Revelation 21:1-3

What is His Purpose for His Bride?

For now, we are going to take a broader, contextual view by examining God's prescription (aka, way) for church life. We will do this from two perspectives. The first is God's vision of church life described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The second is the operative church Luke describes in the Acts of the Apostles.

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 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; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶ 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.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Christ not only died for our sins and was resurrected that we might have life, but He gave us gifts that we might be edified (aka, built up) into the church. And we are to be that church – a temple of living stones, for His habitation. What follower of Jesus Christ would not want the church described in this passage:

- Equipped – this means fixed for its intended use (like a bone or net).
- Unity of both faith and knowledge, even unto perfection that is measured by the full stature of Christ.
- No longer deceived.
- Able to speak the truth in love.
- Maturing in **all** things.
- Knit tightly together (like a hug instead of a handshake).
- Effectively working – the Greek here is *energeo*; the energy of ministry.
- Every part doing its share – no 20% doing 80% of the work.
- A fellowship building itself up in love.

You may be having the same thought I'm having, "How is this possible? We are so far from this, I can't imagine how we get there." It is more than we can think or imagine. But, I am sure that He is up to the task.

You might also be thinking, "Sure, this is God's vision; but I would like to see one in operation." That's a reasonable request. So, let's look at Luke's description of the true "first" church:

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly^[g] received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church^[h] daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:40-47

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

Throughout the history of Christendom, there has been much said about going back to the original church model. And this talk seems to be increasing as we draw closer to the end of the Church Age. In fact, there are groups (even in America) that are pursuing this example of healthy community living.

And it's no wonder, look at the results. Thousands being added at a time! The Lord adding to the church daily! When was the last time any fellowship in America could claim such Great Commission results?

The "One Another" Fellowship

²⁰ "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:20-22

Christ's desire is that we would be one, as he and the Father are one. He has been praying for 2000+ years that we would be perfectly unified. He gave us the glory that the Father gave Him for this very purpose!!

The Father intends to answer His Son's prayer. Every purpose that God has given us includes this underlying objective. Therefore, every purpose involves more than one person, and will by its nature draw more to it.

Notice that Christ asked His Father to make us one (not to empower us to do it). It is a work that only the Father can accomplish. Our response must be agreement with Christ's prayer, and surrender to the Father's work. How are we to be made into the fellowship of His habitation? Where do we start? We start by searching it out: Beholding Christ as we seek the revelation and transformation the Holy Spirit will provide. We will begin with the meaning of fellowship.

Fellowship: *koinōnia* (Greek); fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse; intimacy; a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship. *BlueLetterBible.org Outline of Biblical Usage*

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1Corinthians 1:9

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 1Corinthians 10:16

⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Ephesians 3:8-12

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

How amazing that we share (with the Father, Son, Holy Ghost and all the saints) in the mystery of God's manifold wisdom to this age!! What a privilege!! We are to proclaim and live in the fellowship of His habitation. Ah, but what does this look like in practical terms? Let's explore the "one another" verses for the understanding.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1John 1:7

Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another. Mark 9:50

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

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Romans 12:4-5

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another... Romans 12:10

⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Romans 15:5-7

⁷ Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? ⁸ No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do* these things *to your* brethren! 1Corinthians 6:7-8

²³ And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, ²⁴ but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, ²⁵ that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. 1Corinthians 12:23-26

¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:13, 26

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, "*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*" for we are members of one another. ³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4: 1-3, 25, 32

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

1Thessalonians 5:11

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

James 5:9

⁸ Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

1Peter 3:8-9

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1John 1:7

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

1John 4:11-13

I confess that this is the most challenging facet of my walk with the Lord. My heart is so far from the revelation of these verses. How far have we drifted from God's purpose? How did we get here? At least a part of the answer is our fear of the consequences. Being a part of the ekklesia is not a comfortable place to be. In fact, it can be downright dangerous.

The Consequences

The call to be a counter-culture ekklesia has not changed in 2000+ years; and the call remains the same in every community, culture and country. The church is the church, and the world is the world. They are at enmity with each other. And the world will hate us when we stand against it – a good measure of our devotion to the Lord's purpose.

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

John 18:36-37

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:4

If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

John 15:19

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2Timothy 3:12

Rubbing the prevailing society the wrong way is to be expected. So is their resistance, aggravation and (dare we say) offense. The question for us: How will we respond?

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

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 6:12

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2Corinthians 10:1-6

It is also important to recognize that the world has found its way into the church; and, as in Jesus' day, may be the source of the most severe persecution.

Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. Mark 3:6

But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" John 19:15

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. Acts 8:1-3

But we will implore them just the same.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2Corinthians 5:20

To be a transforming agent, the Church must consciously and continuously stand apart from the world. Otherwise, there is little hope for either one.

The Advantage of Marketplace Ministry

It is important to recognize the fellowships to whom God has connected us. That begins with family and with our "church" fellowships. But it also extends into the places where we spend most of our waking hours.

There are currently 30,000+ registered denominations in the U.S. Many of these sprang out of divisiveness and one-upmanship. How might Christ overcome the pride and weakness of man to create the church He has in mind?

Building the Kingdom is about cooperation, not competition. This is an accepted business principle. In the Marketplace, a follower of Jesus Christ can pursue fellowship with the brethren without the constraints of doctrine and denomination – and work in unity for the glory of the Father without engaging in divisive sectarianism. In the process, God will honor our agreement with His Son's prayer by showing up in the work. And others will be drawn to Him there.

IMPORTANT NOTE: I am not attacking denominations or doctrines, but the spirit of divisiveness that has used them to interfere with God's answer to our Lord's prayer for unity. Ministry in the Marketplace is simply an opportunity to find unity where the "church" is not so confined. I am also not suggesting that

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

individuals leave their organized fellowships and create a type of "Marketplace Church". This would only increase the problem. Local fellowships are critical to the disciple-making process for every believer.

Assignment

1. Review your notes and the Scripture passages from this week's module. Share the ones that are most meaningful to someone you are discipling.
2. For the "one another" verses, identify three to five that you feel the most need for the Holy Spirit's work of transformation. Ask the Father, in Jesus' name, to direct the Spirit do this work.
3. How do you define church? Do you believe that your fellowship includes every area of church life? What if our paradigm was such that our activities in the institution were but a subset of church God's way?
4. Why do we call our congregations, denominations and institutions "churches"? How is this potentially confusing to those outside (and some inside) the ekklesia?
5. Make spiritual exercises of the following devotions.

Devotion

From John Eldredge: *Waking the Dead* (pp. 190, 191)

When he left Rivendell, Frodo didn't head out with a thousand Elves. He had eight companions. Jesus didn't march around backed by legions of angels, either. He had twelve men – knuckleheads, every last one of them, but they were a band of brothers. This is the way of the kingdom of God. Though we are part of a great company, we are meant to live in little platoons. The little companies we form must be small enough for each of the members to know one another as friends and allies.

Who will fight for your heart?

How can we offer the stream of counseling to one another, unless we actually know one another, know each other's stories? The reason counseling became a hired relationship between two people was largely because we couldn't find it anywhere else; we haven't formed the sort of small fellowships that would allow the stream to flow quite naturally. Is it possible to offer rich and penetrating words to someone you barely know, in the lobby of your church, as you dash to pick up the kids?

Where will you find the Four Streams?

The Four Streams are something we learn, and grow into, and offer one another, within a small fellowship. We hear each other's stories. We discover each other's glories. We learn to walk with God together. We pray for each other's healing. We cover each other's back. This small core fellowship is the essential ingredient for the Christian life. Jesus modeled it for us *for a reason*. Sure, he spoke to the masses. But he lived in a little platoon, a small fellowship of friends and allies. His followers took his example and lived this way, too. "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (2:46). "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Cor 16:19). "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Col 4:15).

From Chuck Colson : *How Now Shall We Live?* (pp. 303-304)

Purpose in Fellowship (continued)

The new millennium is a time for Christians to celebrate, to raise our confidence, to blow trumpets, and to fly the flag high. This is the time to make a compelling case that Christianity offers the most rational and realistic hope for both personal redemption and social renewal.

But if we are to have an impact on our culture, the beginning point must be to take our stand united in Christ, making a conscious effort among all true believers to come together across racial, ethnic, and confessional lines. In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed fervently that we would be one with one another, as He is one with the Father. *Why? So that the world will know* that He is the Christ (see John 17:20-23). The unavoidable implication of Jesus' words is that Christian unity is the key to evangelism and cultural renewal. Much of the church's weakness can be traced to its inability or unwillingness to obey the command to strive for unity in Christ.