

1 CORINTHIANS 10:16, 17

A CONFESSION OF PARTICIPATION

“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.”¹

“**I** want my communion!” This is the pitiful cry frequently heard throughout the years of my service among the churches of our Lord. Perhaps the ones crying don’t use those precise words, but their intent is to demand that I concede the accuracy of their doctrinal view. The snivelling shares much in common with pouting children who demand their own way in a contest of wills with a parent. However, the pouting comes from professed Christians who make no investment in the life of the assembly, but are nevertheless convinced that they should share in every dividend of grace. Unwilling to accept the responsibilities associated with membership in the congregation, they illogically believe they should be full participants at the Lord’s Table. I confess that I have often been tempted to respond to their whining with sarcasm. “Oh, look. Little baby Christians. I wonder if they will ever grow up.”

The pouting saints are often reacting to biblical instruction or demonstrating pique at learning that my understanding of conditions for participation at the Lord’s Table fails to match their presumption. It is not my practise to exclude anyone from the Lord’s Table; rather I take great care to teach accurately what is written, asking that those who choose to participate assume responsibility for their own actions. As result of confronting the Word of God, however, contemporary saints often revert to whimpering rather than thinking. In recent years I have observed what seems to be an increasing number of individuals who react with obvious irritation rather than examining the Word of God to discover whether their personal view finds support. Rather than examining their own beliefs, they pout because their feelings are hurt.

I grieve to note widespread confusion that exists concerning the Lord’s Table. Tragically, much of that confusion is perpetuated by preachers who fail to present scriptural teaching. It is easier to permit deviant liturgy surrounding the Meal to continue than it is to confront error through careful exposition of Scripture. In too many churches, the Lord’s Table is tacked on at the end of a service as though it were an afterthought rather than being the centre of worship that God meant it to be. We who serve at the sacred desk are culpable before the Lord because we have permitted this situation to continue for such a long time. Whether the teaching I present is accepted or whether it is rejected by those listening, I am nevertheless honour bound to provide sound instruction in accordance with the Word as I seek to build strong believers who are thoroughly equipped to apply the truths of God’s Word.

The passage before us does not directly address the doctrine of the Communion Meal—the issue will be addressed shortly here in this first letter to the Corinthian church. However, the Apostle did not shy from employing the Meal in presenting a rebuke to Christians who had become rather casual about the demand for a righteous life. In the text for this day, Paul pointed to the declarations presented within the Meal to compel the Corinthians to bring their conduct into line with their profession. The same need is apparent among Christians in this day, and therefore the teaching Paul provided will benefit us as much as it benefited the Corinthians.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Among the Corinthian saints there were not a few who had reduced the Christian Faith to a personal religion designed to make them feel good about themselves. In other words, their religion was all about them. They went to church, rather than being the Body of Christ. They observed the liturgy rather than worshipping in assembly. The Faith of Christ the Lord had become a series of private acts as an end within themselves rather than private devotion building to a crescendo as the Body assembled in worship. Paul was compelled to address these dangerous deviations resulting from Christians altering the Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints in order to create a novel personal religion. That same teaching is needed again today as the saints reject the revealed will of God in order to invent new forms of religion.

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE LORD’S TABLE — Though I have provided an explanation of my understanding of the Lord’s Table on other occasions, it will undoubtedly prove beneficial for us to review again what we understand Scripture to teach. The questions that are immediately raised in a church context surround the issue of whether we observe an ordinance or a sacrament, and whether this is a church ordinance or a Christian ordinance. The answers to these two questions will provide a basis for applying the doctrine of the Communion Meal, permitting us to worship in a manner that honours the Lord and fulfils His desire for us as a congregation.

I acknowledge that much, dare I say most, of Christendom believes the Communion Meal to be a sacrament. To speak of the Meal as a sacrament implies that grace is conferred in some measure and in some manner through participation at the Lord’s Table. Those holding such a view are undoubtedly sacerdotal and sacramental in their approach to the Christian Faith. They hold that the Meal makes the one who participates a better Christian, or perhaps makes that one more acceptable in the eyes of the Lord. Whether the advocates of the sacramental view are willing to state their case so boldly, this is the result of advancing this particular view of the Communion Meal. Some hold to transubstantiation, others hold to consubstantiation, and yet others hold to a more nebulous mystical view of the Meal. What all sacramentalists hold in common is the belief that God in some manner blesses participants because of participation.

To identify the Meal as an ordinance, on the other hand, is to acknowledge that this is a tradition shared with all who follow the Faith of Christ the Lord. The Lord’s Supper was instituted by the Master when He gathered His disciples in the Upper Room on the evening He was betrayed. The Meal was then handed down through the teaching of the Apostles to the churches of our Lord as an observance to be kept. Those holding this position concerning the Meal understand that participation will not make one a better Christian, though participating in an unworthy manner may expose them for their hypocrisy and sin. Those who believe the Lord’s Table is an ordinance understand that we are already recipients of grace, and that whether we participate or not, we are now the objects of God’s mercy and grace.

If the Meal is a sacrament, then it is a serious matter to fail to participate in the Meal. If the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, failure to participate may indeed jeopardise the individual’s relationship to the Saviour and even their eternal standing with God. However, if the Meal is an ordinance, the individual is in no danger should he or she fail to participate. According to the Apostle’s instruction, however, those participating without recognising what they are doing, or those participating in an arrogant manner, or those participating while focused solely on their own interests, may place themselves in grave danger of divine judgement. This is the reason for the apostolic warning, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord... [And] that is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:27, 30**].

Those who have sat under my teaching will know that I hold to the latter view rather than the former. I have no desire to pick a fight with any fellow Christian, but neither should fellow believers expect that I will jettison my own understanding for the sake of false and momentary harmony. Moreover, I hold that this is a church ordinance and not a Christian ordinance, in so far as the Meal is intended to be a means of congregational worship and not an opportunity for private worship. It is now time to consider these two views and the implications that arise from these disparate views. It is fair to say that the view that holds the Lord's Supper to be a Christian ordinance predominates among evangelical churches. This dominance of a particular view does not make that position correct, only popular.

If the Communion Meal is a Christian ordinance, then the decision to participate is necessarily an individual judgement. Whether one is baptised or unbaptised is of no concern to the congregation if the Lord's Supper is a Christian ordinance. Holding to this particular view precludes church discipline since the individual's private judgement is the sole determinant of whether to partake of the Meal or to decline to participate. Thus, those holding that the Lord's Table is a Christian ordinance, whether they have considered the issue or not, practically hold that the Meal is intended to be private worship, albeit usually in a corporate setting.

However, if the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, then the local congregation is responsible to oversee the conduct of the Meal, and each particular congregation is the arbiter of whether those who are not members are permitted to participate or excluded from participation. However, as overseers of the Meal, the local assembly is bound by Scripture to caution those who approach presumptuously and to restrict those who are clearly precluded by the Word of God from participating in the Meal. Flowing from this understanding of Scripture is the position that the Lord's Table must be a congregational form of worship, and participants are testifying to a real communion and not merely a mystical communion. In other words, those participating are actually testifying that they are sharing their lives when they observe the Meal together.

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance and not a sacrament; and it is a church ordinance rather than a Christian ordinance. Thus, the Communion Meal is an act of corporate worship as the local church unites to remember the sacrifice of the Saviour, to confess their anticipation of His imminent return, and especially to confess their true fellowship as the Body of Christ. Gathering at the Lord's Table, we worship corporately as we confess that we share our lives. Paul says that the "cup of blessing" is "*a participation* in the blood of Christ," and that "the bread we break" is "*a participation* in the body of Christ." The word that is translated "participation" in either instance is the Greek term *koinōnía*, which in older translations is rendered "communion." Thus, this is the origin of the reference to the ordinance as Communion. At the Lord's Table we jointly participate in worship as a congregation—we share our lives as members of His Body.²

² Previous studies on Communion, may be found at these url's (e.g. "Will You Let Just Anyone Eat at Your Table?" <http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=116768&Sermon%20Will%20You%20Let%20Just%20Anyone%20Eat%20at%20Your%20Table?%20by%20Michael%20Stark>, "In Memoriam," <http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=118078&Sermon%20In%20Memoriam%20by%20Michael%20Stark>, "Judgement Day," <http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=121964&Sermon%20Judgement%20Day%20by%20Michael%20Stark>, "Whatever Were You Thinking?" <http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=120921&Sermon%20Whatever%20Were%20You%20Thinking%20by%20Michael%20Stark>, "An Invitation to the Lord's Table," <http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=113678&Sermon%20An%20Invitation%20to%20the%20Lord%20E2%80%99s%20Table%20by%20Michael%20Stark>)

PARTICIPATION SPEAKS OF SHARED SALVATION — “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” Warning the Corinthians against slipping into a religion that consisted of mere rite and ritual, Paul reminded them that they shared life in the Beloved Son. Christ the Lord died that His people might live. Thus, we are redeemed by the blood of the Lord. The church at Ephesus, and by extension every church, has been “obtained with [God’s] own blood” [see **ACTS 20:28**]. The blood of Christ serves as a propitiation to be received by faith [**ROMANS 3:25**]. Therefore, we who are Christians confess that “we have now been justified by His blood” [**ROMANS 5:9**]; “we have redemption through His blood” [**EPHESIANS 1:7**]; and He “has freed us from our sins by His blood” [**REVELATION 1:5**].

There is but one way to salvation, and that is through faith in the Living Son of God. Haled before the Sanhedrin, Peter spoke a great truth when he testified of Jesus the Saviour, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” [**ACTS 4:12**]. There are not multiple ways to Heaven; there are not even two ways to God. There is but one Saviour, Christ the Lord, who gave His life as a ransom for all mankind that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [**JOHN 3:16**]. Someone has said quite well that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. There is no class distinction between Christians; we are either saints or we are ain’ts.

Writing Hebrew Christians who were being persecuted most severely, the author states, “Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [**HEBREWS 9:24-28**]. Therefore, we who are Christians “have been sanctified through the body of Jesus Christ once for all” [**HEBREWS 10:10**].

To be certain, when we come to the Lord’s Table, we partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Saviour. Each of us confesses that the bread speaks of His broken body, given for us; and we confess that the wine sparkling in the cup speaks of His blood, shed for us. Thus, the words that are spoken encouraging us to “do this in remembrance of [Him]” are more than mere words, for we look back, remembering His love that was displayed for each of us. However, in the context of the message today, that salvation must be recognised as a shared salvation. Each of us who are redeemed has the forgiveness of sin and the adoption as a son. Each of us anticipates an inheritance as result of His sacrifice presented because of us.

We once shared condemnation as sinners, though we dare not see that as a fellowship. Nevertheless, each of us was once “dead in trespasses and sins” [**EPHESIANS 2:1**], and thus “we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” [**EPHESIANS 2:3**]. However, we now share in a fellowship that is far different, for “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages we might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” [**EPHESIANS 2:4-7**]. Now, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [**EPHESIANS 2:10**].

PARTICIPATION SPEAKS OF SHARED SERVICE — “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” Notice that Paul says that the Lord’s Table is a participation in Christ. He will shortly teach the Corinthians that they are the Body of Christ when he writes, “You are the Body of Christ and individually members of it” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:24]. It is significant that the Apostle would say that they *are* the Body of Christ, rather than saying they were *part of* the Body of Christ. Since the Apostle is addressing the congregation identified as “the church of God that is in Corinth” and not a universal entity, we must conclude that the fact that he chose to say they are the Body of Christ indicates that they should see themselves as a unique expression of Christ, rather than seeing themselves as part of a universal, mystical body.

The Corinthians were being reminded that collectively they formed the Body of Christ. Hence, participation at the Lord’s Table was confession that they shared in the redeeming blood of Christ the Lord. It also spoke of the fact that they shared in the Body of Christ. It will be beneficial to review Paul’s argument leading him to make the declaration concerning the Corinthians being the Body of Christ. The passage is worthy of careful review.

“The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that 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 honoured, all rejoice together.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-31].

In this passage, the Apostle emphasises the service expected of each member. Earlier, he had spoken of the diversity of gifts provided by God, each one vital for the health of the Body. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

“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” [**1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-12**].

Take special note of verse seven, which tells us that the divine gifts have been entrusted to us for the benefit of others and not for our own enjoyment. Ministry to our fellow church members is the expected work of each individual who has been entrusted with God’s grace gifts. These spiritual gifts are entrusted to you, if you are a Christian. Questions arise from this knowledge, questions that demand answers. Where are you serving? Where did God place you? How are you fulfilling the ministry God has assigned?

In a similar context, Paul spoke of the employment of God’s grace gifts when he wrote to the Roman Christians. “As in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” [**ROMANS 12:4-8**].

Did you take notice of Paul’s assertion in verse five? “Though many, [we] are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” This is a declaration he makes in other places as well. In **EPHESIANS 4:25**, he bases his argument for the need to speak truthfully with one another on the fact that “we are members of one another.” And in **EPHESIANS 5:30** he asserts that “we are members of [Christ’s] body.”

As a Christian, you know that God has endowed you with gifts that were intended to be invested in the Body. In fact, God says that His gifts were given for the express purpose of “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” [**1 CORINTHIANS 14:3**]. These gifts are not so much opportunities for you to serve your own interests as they are enablement to equip you for service. Frankly, if you are not using the gift God entrusted to your care for the purpose God intended it to be used, you are prostituting the gift of God. If you are building yourself—consuming God’s grace gift on your own pleasure, or if you are actually ignoring exercising your gift, you are dishonouring God.

A church is not an organisation so much as it is a living Body. Tragically, contemporary churches often emphasise the church as a business rather than as family. For many people, church is viewed something like a police force, rather than serving as a hospital for weak and injured saints. Assuredly, in this day, church has often degenerated into a social club rather than being the spiritual ministry God intended her to be. People speak of “going” to church rather than of “being” the church. Church is not what we do; church is who we are.

When we observe the Communion Meal, we are declaring that we share our lives. Whether we pause to reflect on what this means or whether we ignore the implications of that confession, we are nevertheless responsible to one another. We are responsible to make every effort to make the body stronger and to maintain the unity of the Body. We fulfil this appointment through building one another, through encouraging one another, and through consoling one another. In short, as we serve one another in love we are utilising God’s gifts to the praise of His glory.

As we endeavour to serve one another, we are to consider fellow members of the Body as better than ourselves. We are to outdo one another in honouring each other. We are to share our lives, considering how we can glorify God through making others stronger and ensuring that they are better than they were before we ministered to them. Sharing the Communion Meal with one another, we testify that we seek to bless others because we share our lives.

PARTICIPATION SPEAKS OF SHARED LIFE — “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” In another place, Paul says that we each “were made to drink of one Spirit” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:13]. Surely, the Apostle speaks of the life we live by the grace of God. Each Christian can testify of salvation, saying with the Apostle, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20]. Thus, my life is no longer mine to claim. Rather, my life is hidden in Christ and now I live out the life of Christ together with my brothers and sisters who share in the life of this Body.

I fear that far too often, the confession of a shared life consists of mere words, if our open fellowship is any declaration of the reality we experience. Frequently, throughout the years of my service before the Lord, I have witnessed people who took offence and ceased participating in the life of the Body. It has not been an infrequent occurrence that someone will later charge that when these departed, no one cared. I find this to be an unfair charge on several levels.

First, the one bringing the report concerning the complaint had opportunity to address the concern of the departed individual and failed to do so. The one who voices the second-hand complaint was responsible to build and encourage the disappointed saint. Commiserating with a disgruntled saint does not encourage them to do what is right. Listening to an angry person’s displeasure without asking what the one complaining has done to address her or his issues fails to build them up by holding them accountable. However, it is far easier to condemn leadership for failing to “do something” than it is to hold one another accountable for doing right.

Again, I have often found that the charge that no one spoke to the individual, or that no one tried to find out what was troubling them, is unsubstantiated. In fact, it is more common that people did try to speak with the one who was dissatisfied. Certainly, the people of God will have prayed for the unhappy saint, asking that God bless him or her, restoring fellowship. Certainly, I know that in many cases where people have bruited about their displeasure, I sought to engage them and sought to draw them out so that we could explore the causes of their discontent.

Finally, responding to discontent by quitting is a symptom of a self-centred age rather than a condemnation of the church. We have a church covenant, as do most of the churches of our Lord. That covenant is based upon sound scriptural principles. Listen again to a portion of that church covenant that we adopted when we first began services as a congregation of Christ.

“Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and on the profession of our faith having been baptised in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

“We promise, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness, understanding and care; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; and to support its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines.

“We promise to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the Church and to its expenses, its commitments to spread the Gospel into all the world and its assistance to those in need...

“We further promise to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to help each other in times of trouble; to be not easily offended and always ready to forgive and settle differences, remembering Christ's command to do so quickly.”

Those who are disgruntled have an obligation to set aside their pique in order to seek unity in the Faith. This is an obligation to which they have repeatedly agreed each time they read the covenant in the company of the congregation. When they fail to assume responsibility to address the issues that disturb them, they display a serious attitude of self-centredness that is detrimental to their own spiritual vitality and that threatens the health of the Body.

As we partake of the Meal, we are confessing that our lives are intertwined to such an extent that we are quite incapable of distinguishing where our life ends and the life of another begins. We are saying that we have a common life, and that we “rejoice with those who rejoice” and that we “weep with those who weep” [see **ROMANS 12:15**]. How can we, having experience such intimacy as to share in the most personal worship imaginable, suddenly cease to share and turn away, except we are now confessing that we have lived a lie or that we have now begun to sin in a most grievous fashion as we exalt self as the centre of life?

There was a time when I suffered excruciating pain resulting from a bone felon in my fingertip. The infection required repeated draining and seemed never to clear up. The pain had become so severe at one point that my family physician suggested that we would need to amputate part of the finger. Certainly, I was loath to agree to this rather radical therapy.

On a holiday in the states, the infection became so severe one Sunday morning that immediately following the church service Lynda and I had attended, we sought out a doctor for emergency treatment. It was by God’s mercy that the physician had training in hand surgery. He recommended an aggressive course of treatment, that when followed brought permanent relief from what had become a chronic condition. Reflecting on that period in my life, I can say that though the infection was restricted to a fingertip, it affected my entire body. Moreover, I was certainly not eager to amputate even a small portion of my body in order to gain relief, though I recognised that such might eventually become necessary.

Something like that is true with the Body of Christ. The pain resulting from an infected member of the Body affects the entire Body; but those who are truly part of the Body are loath to excise the infected portion. Though they are prepared to do what is necessary for the health of the Body, there is resistance to the radical step of excision. The saints endeavour to restore the fallen and make every effort to make the affected member strong again.

If the church is run like a business, then infection is simply an economic issue and no particular pain is experienced save for the inconvenience that may result from decreased giving or embarrassment because of reduced attendance for a period of time. The presence or absence of members is simply a matter of counting noses, and no particular discomfort is experienced when they are absent. However, when the church lives as the Body of Christ, the infected member adversely affects every other member, and the pain is excruciating. Therefore, the Communion Meal provides opportunity for each member of the Body to seek out the sick saints, ministering to them and restoring them to health. This ministry of sharing the life of the Christ is not a ministry that is restricted to the elders and deacons, but it is a life shared by each member of the Community of Faith.

Are you part of such a congregation? If you are a Christian, you are responsible to be part of precisely such a Body. You are responsible to seek out the place where God is appointing you to serve so that you can exercise the gifts He has entrusted to you. There, in that place where He has set you, you are to labour—building, encouraging and consoling through participating in the life of the assembly, giving and receiving ministry to the praise of Christ. This congregation stands ready to receive all whom Christ appoints to serve among us and the door to church membership stands open to all who will obey the Word of the Lord.

It is impossible for someone to be a member of the Body of Christ until that one has been born from above and into the Family of God. To be born from above, one must submit to the reign of Christ the Lord. The Word of God declares that He has provided a perfect sacrifice, dying because of our sin and that He has been raised for our justification. However, you must individually accept that truth. The Word is quite clear in declaring, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is saved, and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved.” The promise of God is that “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10 13** author’s translation]. Our prayer is that each one hearing the message this day will receive the life offered in Christ the Lord. Believe this message of life and hope so that you, too, may be saved today. Amen.