

BODY OF PROOF: WEEK SIX
THE PRIORITY OF THE GATHERING

If we've surrendered to Jesus, we each have a personal relationship with Christ. We must never lose the simplicity and wonder of that intimacy. But many of us have so emphasized this personal part of our relationship with Jesus that we've lost sight of how essential The Church is. The early Church understood that relationship with Jesus could never be only personal. Relationship with Jesus was relationship with the 'Jesus' in His followers – especially those He called to be together. They knew that they simply could not separate from each other, The Church.

The New Testament seems to put it this way: **The Holy Spirit is in me; Christ is in us.** That meant that if believers pulled away from each other, they were diminishing their own relationship with Jesus. Jesus simply could not be *fully* experienced apart from the Church. This is why Paul landed so strongly on defining The Church as The Body of Christ.

Many of the passages in the New Testament in which the writer addresses 'you', it's not 'you individually' but 'you together.' Take Colossians 1.27, where Paul talks about ***“the riches of the glory of a great mystery, which is Christ in you the hope of glory.”*** The 'you' is not 'you the individual' but 'you all.' It's a plural you. In the south we have a perfect term: *y'all!* The great mystery is 'Christ in y'all... *all y'all!*' In fact, a good way to translate this verse is ***“the great mystery which is Christ among you.”***¹

Connection with Jesus The Head is simply incomplete apart from connection with Jesus' Body. The members of Christ's Body – you and me and those Jesus has called together – are designed to experience Christ together.

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is it difficult for us to trust Jesus in each other? Why does trusting Jesus to use someone else to minister to you feel uneasy?
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Over the next few weeks we want to look at three practical ways the first century believers actually experienced what it meant to be membered together as a society and not just a community, as Christ's Body. First, they **gathered together**. Second, they **functioned in their gifts together**. And third, they **shared in The Spirit's power together** through nine supernatural gifts that The Holy Spirit distributes to and through the members of The Body [Corinthians 12:4-13].

So, let's dig a bit deeper on the importance of gathering together. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to neglect congregational meetings [CJB version], not to forsake the gathering together. But why are we called to gather together?

Gathering unto The Lord was the ancient way of acknowledging God's authority. We get a glimpse of why gathering is important when we see how the angels responded to God even before the universe was created. In Isaiah 6, we see the angelic hosts cry *“Holy, Holy, Holy is The Lord God Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!”* [See also Revelation 5.11-14] They were not just caught up in the awesomeness of God's Presence (*Holy, Holy, Holy*), **they were reminded of His authority** (*The whole earth is full of His glory*).

If we neglect the assembling of ourselves together, we are actually dulling our awareness of God's authority. When we think of the pain, the trauma, the upheaval in the world, the challenges in our own lives, and the anxieties and angers that they trigger, wouldn't we want to walk in the full awareness that God is in control.

Just as the angels have always known, gathering together to the Lord opens our eyes to see, *“Yes! God's glory IS in all the earth! He IS The Sovereign King now over all the earth.”* We need that assurance constantly, and it is in the gathering together that we are continually filled with that revelation.

There is something about being together that helps us experience life as a body, and one of the great benefits of gathering is that in that assembly God supernaturally affirms His authority.

Another reason gathering together is important is that it is the only way we experience being The Temple [Dwelling Place] of God. Most of the references to the temple of God in the apostolic letters have to do with being together as the body of Christ. Ephesians 2.19-22, **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”** [See also 1 Corinthians 3.15-17; 2 Corinthians 6.16; 1 Peter 2.5]

The temple is The Church, the gathering of the saints together. So Old Testament imagery of the temple now finds its fulfillment first in Christ himself [John 2.19-21, in which He referred to His physical body as The Temple], then to the Church. All the benefits of God’s power and glory that we see, for example, in Solomon’s temple, are now transferred to being with each other as The Temple of God.

With this in mind, read Psalm 84:1-2 from that perspective: *“How lovely is your Church [dwelling place] Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the gathering of the saints [courts of the Lord]!”* Or 84.10: *“A day with your people is better than a thousand elsewhere.”*

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does God want us to see beyond our own personal life with Him? How do corporate gatherings open our eyes? • Why would God design our relationship with Him to include experiencing Him in community and society (function) with each other?
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There is Biblical place for gatherings of 2 or 3, but that alone doesn’t constitute a full expression of body-hood. Paul taught both in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12 that to experience being Christ’s body requires a rich diversity of gifts. Each of our individual physical bodies are many members with many different functions that together make up our physical body. So it is with Christ’s Body.

Final Take-Home Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is common for believers to withdraw from the gathering when they are dealing with anxiety, are overwhelmed, or need rest. In a healthy gathering could it serve as a place of rest for God’s people, a place to run when anxious and overwhelmed? What would that look like? • What happens when people are too busy to find time for both personal time with Jesus and the gathering of believers? What effect does this have on them individually and the local church?
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Prayer Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask God to show you any area where you have resentment towards the gathering (local church). Forgive again any offense. Renounce lies you have agreed with. Receive the truth!
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Share With The Lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an unbeliever shares their struggle with isolation, you can share God’s design in The Body. That God purposed for us to be interconnected and to need each other. That God did not design us for isolation which is why it is so difficult to live in.
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¹ Douglas Moo, *Commentary on Ephesians*