
Men of the Word
Ekklesia
SPIRITUAL
FELLOWSHIP



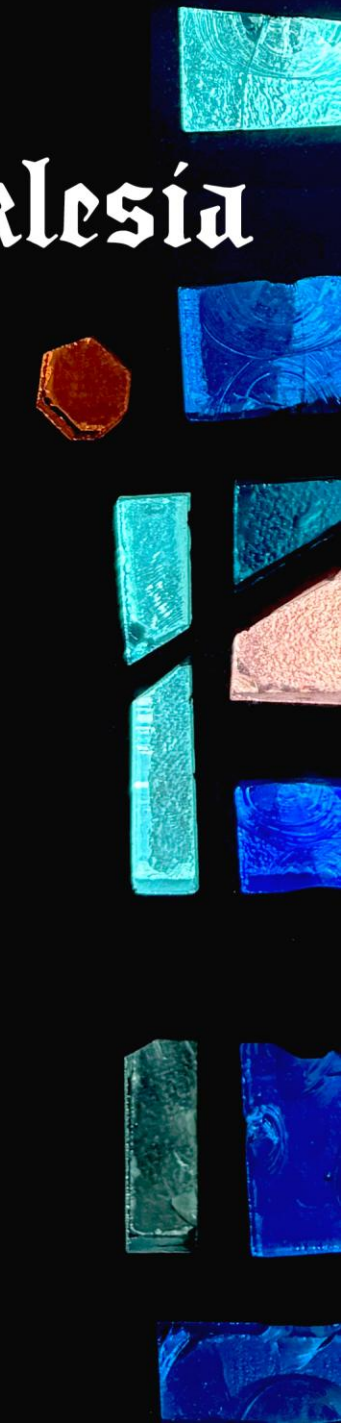
Romans 16

- ✓ “Greet” – mentioned eighteen times
- ✓ Twenty-six personal names are mentioned
- ✓ “In Christ/in the Lord” – mentioned ten times
- ✓ Three different local churches referenced
- ✓ Filled with affirmations and affection.
- ✓ In the middle, a strong warning against dissention (v. 17).

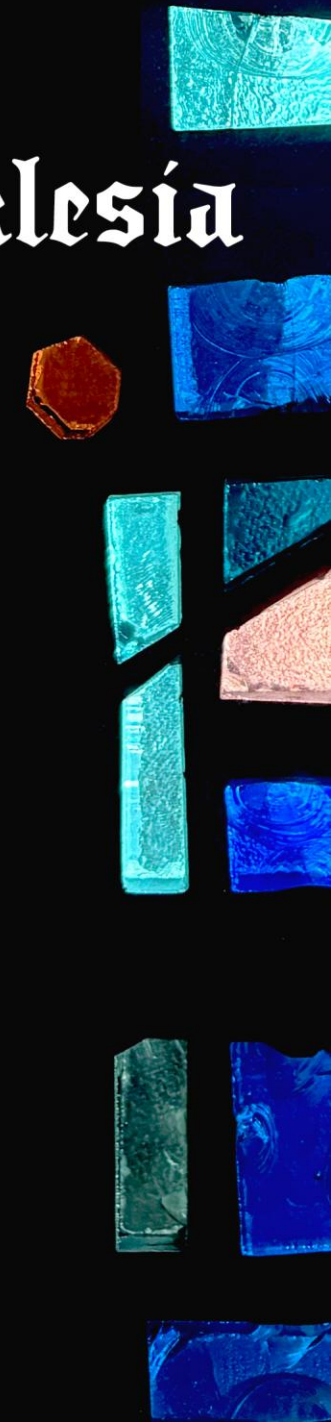
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"I believe in . . . the holy catholic church,
the communion of the saints."

—The Apostles' Creed



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"One great evil existing in our congregations, especially in large towns, is that many of the members don't know or take an interest in each other. It is a blessed hope that we shall recognize our friends in heaven, but let us begin by first recognizing them on earth."

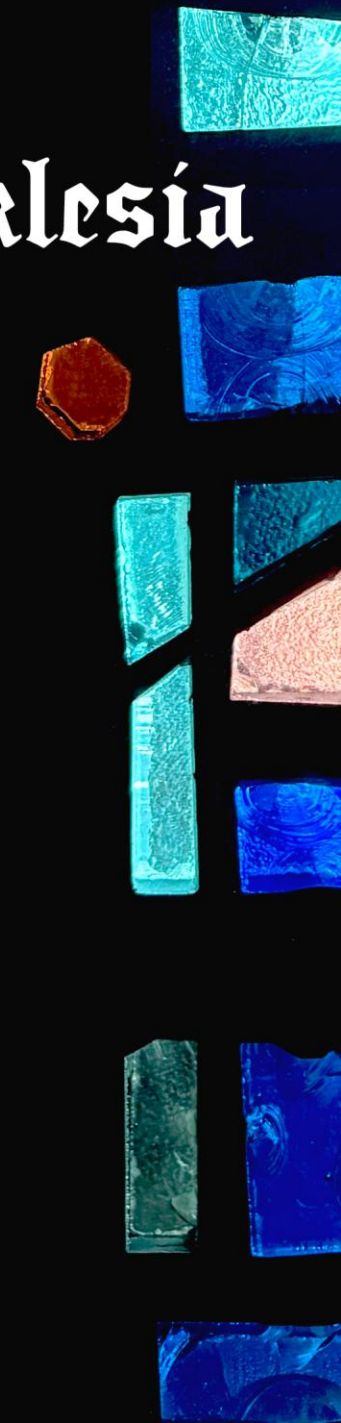
—David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work*, 108

(19th cent. Scottish pastor)

Seven Characteristics of Spiritual Fellowship

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I. A MEANS OF DIVINE GRACE



- **“Grace”** – “unmerited favor,” free and undeserved.

- **“Means”** – “the instrument by which something is accomplished.”

- **“Means of grace” –** “certain means through which the Holy Spirit works to convey blessings into the life of the believer. . . . The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 950).

- “They are the instruments through which God’s Spirit graciously grows believers in Christlikeness as he fortifies them in the faith and conforms them into the image of the Son (2 Cor 3:17–18)” (MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 780).

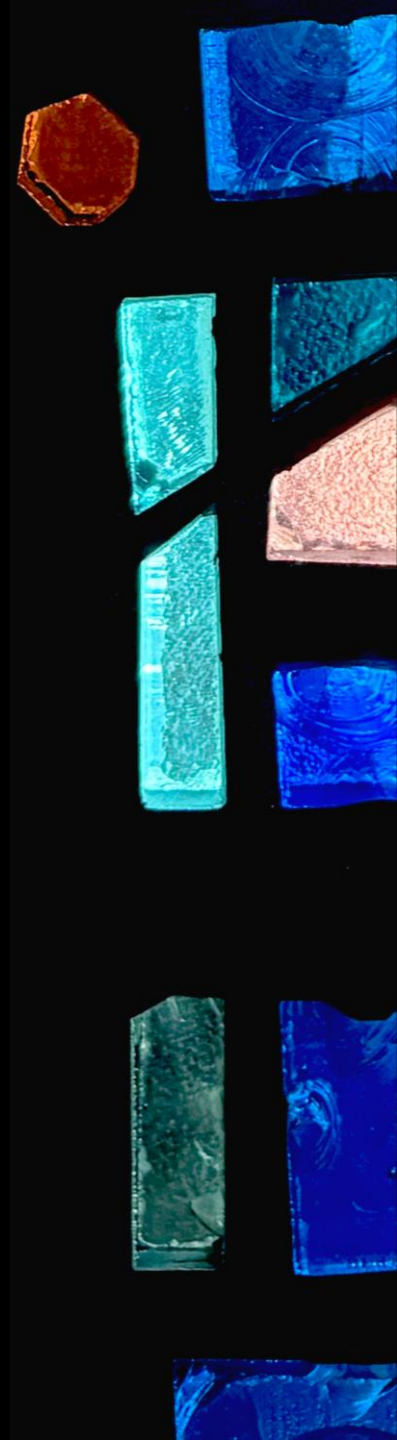
- ✓ Baptism
- ✓ The Lord's Supper
- ✓ Preaching
- ✓ Prayer
- ✓ Singing
- ✓ Giving
- ✓ Church Discipline
- ✓ Service
- ✓ Evangelism
- ✓ Fellowship

- **Acts 2:41–42 –** "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

- **Ephesians 4:15–16 –** "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

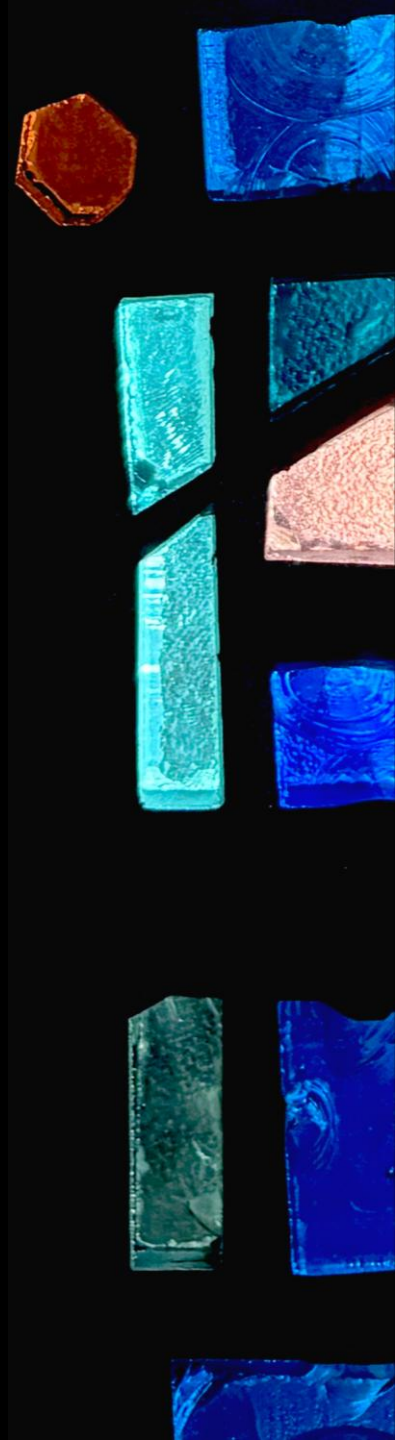
“Fellowship between Christians is a gift of God. It is a true means of grace. Christians are spiritual people and they feel comparatively isolated in this world. But God gives them this compensation, that the fellowship they enjoy with like-minded brothers and sisters is marvelously therapeutic and sweet.”

—Maurice Roberts, “The Fellowship of Saints,” 1



“The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. . . . How inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who, by God’s will, are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians! . . . Let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 19–20



II. DEFINED BY SHARED LIFE



- **“κοινωνία” (*koinōnia*)**– “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”



  - “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship”
  - “participation, partnership, impartation”

- **Biblical *koinonia* implies an active participation in the life of another through the sharing of one’s resources for his spiritual benefit.**

  - ✓ It is *active*, not passive.
  - ✓ It is *participating,* not spectating.
  - ✓ It is *contributing*, not merely *consuming*.
  - ✓ It dedicates personal resources.
  - ✓ It finds joy in the betterment of another.

- **Acts 2:46–47 –** “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”



- **Romans 15:1–2 –** “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.”

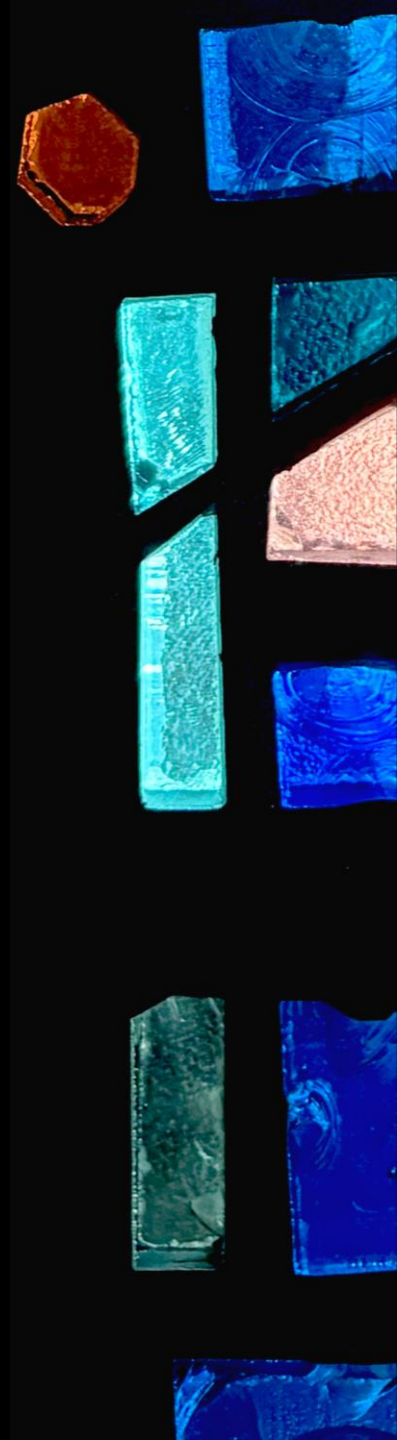
- **Galatians 6:2 –** “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

- **Philippians 2:1–4 –** “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

- **1 Corinthians 12:26 –** “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

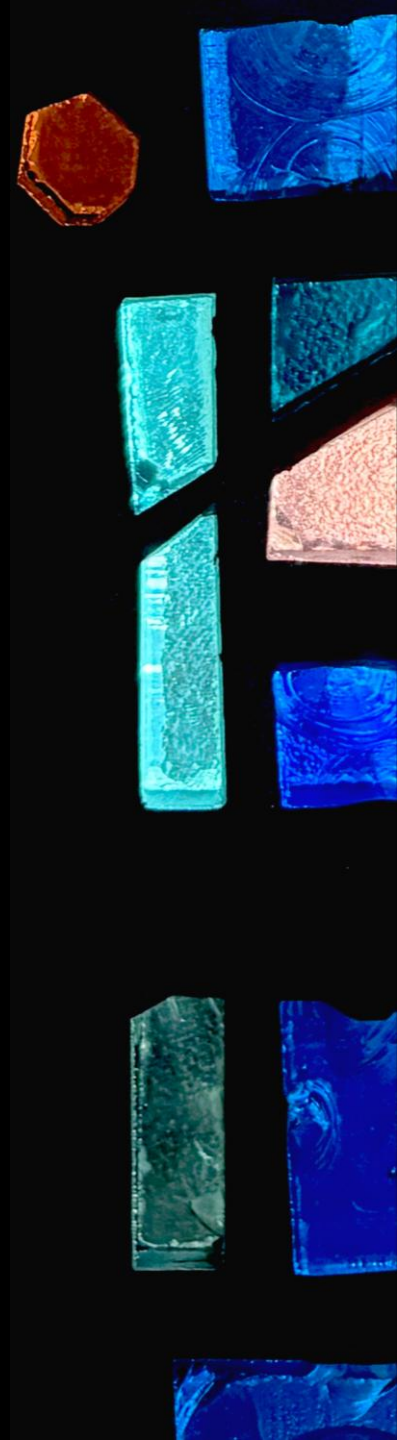
“When the world thinks you are worthless, no one can build you up as well as a church family can. No one is more likely to pick you up when you fall than those who share in the forgiveness of God with you. No one will listen more patiently and compassionately to the stories of your pain than the people of God in the church. No one will pray for God to heal you or guide you or provide for you as will the church. No one will stick by you when you are alone as the family of God will. No one will help you when you are in trouble or in need as those with whom you have *koinonia*.”

—Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, 157



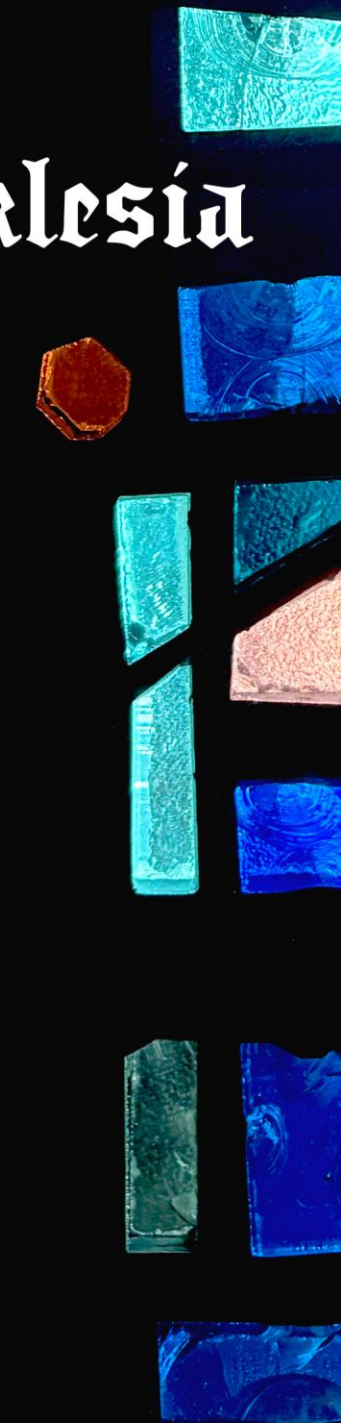
“Only Christians can have the rich banquet of *koinonia*, but too often we settle for little more than the fast-food kind of socializing which even the world can experience.”

—Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 230



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III. BASED ON UNION WITH THE TRIUNE GOD



- Our social privileges and obligations within the church are not based in human ingenuity, preference, or tradition.

- They find their basis in something far more profound and transcendent: our union with the *triune God*.

- **John 17:20–21 –** “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

- **1 John 1:3 –** “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

- **1 Corinthians 1:2, 9 –** “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours . . . . God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

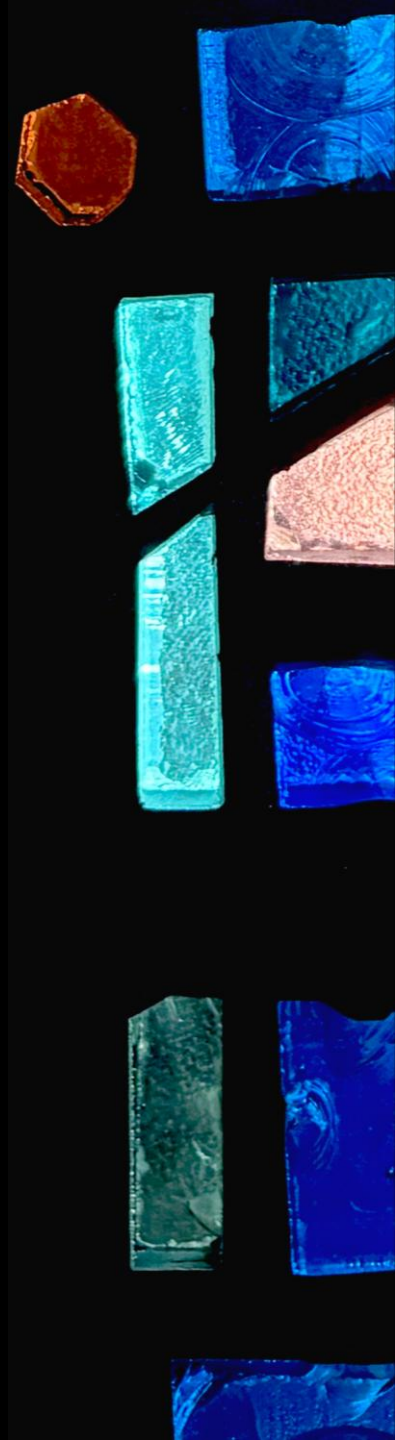
- **2 Corinthians 13:14 –** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

- **Philippians 2:1–2 –** “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

“Anybody in fellowship with Jesus Christ is also in fellowship with anybody else in fellowship with Jesus Christ. This is our common ground. It is not social, economic, intellectual, cosmetic, or anything else superficial. *Our common ground is that which is pulsing through the life of every Christian—the heartbeat of God*. Our common ground is that we possess a common eternal life and are children in the same family.”

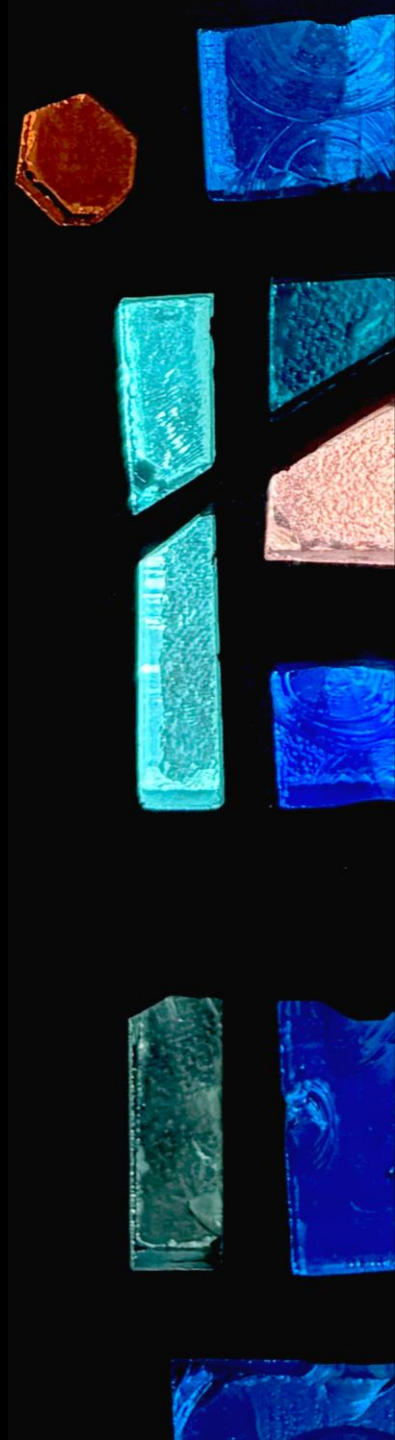
—John MacArthur, *The Church: The Body of Christ*, 51

Union with the Triune God → Communion with the People of God



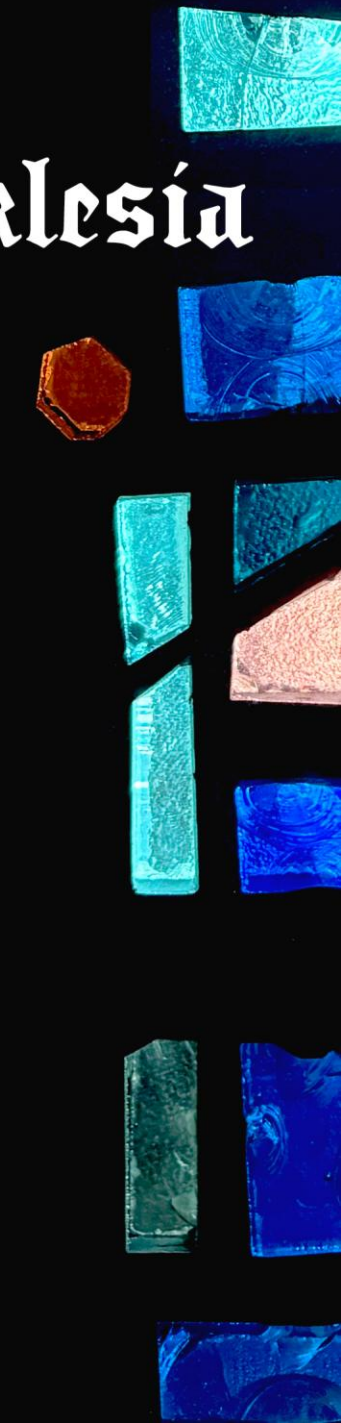
“It is not the fact that we are united in common goals or purposes that makes us a community. Rather, it is the fact that we share a common life in Christ.”

—Jerry Bridges, *True Community*, 3



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IV. OBLIVIOUS TO EARTHLY DISTINCTIONS



- The “fellowship” experienced in the world is based upon earthly commonalities; the fellowship experienced in the church is based upon transcendent, spiritual commonalities.

- **Acts 2:9–11 –** “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs . . . .”

- **Acts 2:38–39 –** “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’”

- **Acts 2:41–42 –** “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

- **Acts 2:44–46 –** “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.”

- **Acts 6:1–6 –** divisions in the church removed between Hebrew Jews and Hellenistic Jews.

- **Acts 8:4–24 –** divisions in the church removed between Jews and Samaritans.

- **Acts 8:25–40; 10:1–11:18; 11:19–24 –** divisions in the church removed between Jews and Gentiles.

- **Ephesians 2:14–16 –** “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall . . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”

- **James 2:1–7 –** “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. . . .”

- **Colossians 3:11 –** Paul speaks of the church as a community "in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

ethnic

religious tradition

linguistic

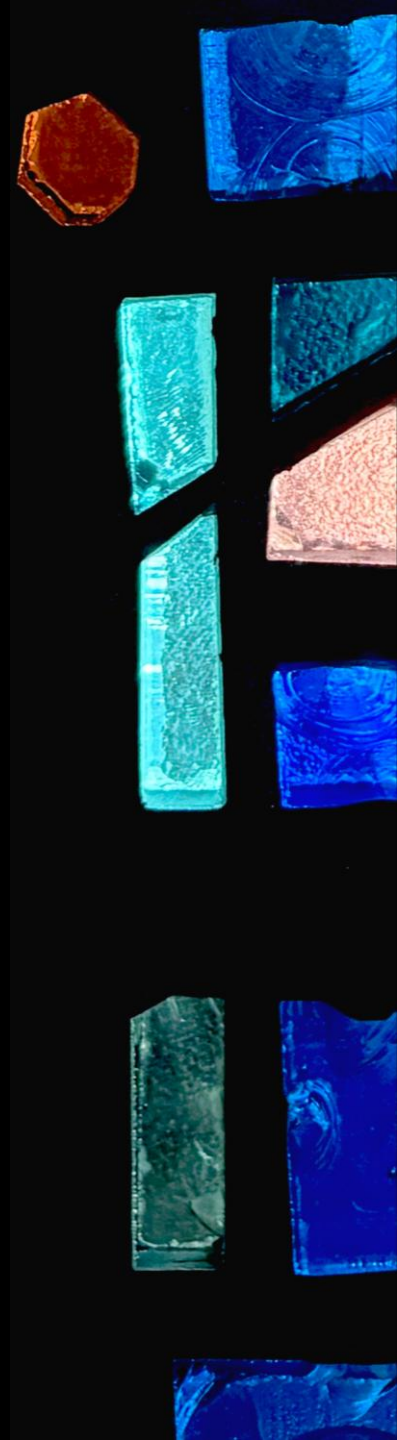
socio-economic

"Outside the Christian fellowship those barriers stood as high as ever, and there were Christians on the one side and on the other. From the viewpoint of the old order these Christians were classified in terms of their position on this side or that side of the barrier. But within the community of the new creation—"in Christ"—these barriers were irrelevant; indeed, they had no existence. . . . Where cultural differences exist, the gospel ignores them."

—F. F. Bruce, *Colossians,* 149

“Christian fellowship is unique. No other relationship compares with it—not the bond between parents and their children, not the love between husbands and wives, not the kinship between brothers or sisters, not the closeness between dear friends. These share the best intimacies of earthly life, but even unbelievers experience them.”

—Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, 150



V. IMPOSSIBLE WITH UNBELIEVERS



- There remains one necessary divide for fellowship: the divide between those “outside” and those “within” the household of faith.



- **2 Corinthians 6:14–15 –** “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”

- Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11 that this divide does not mean we cannot “associate” with those in the world: “for then you would have to go out of the world” (v. 10).

- But “our people” are not people of this world, however similar those of the world may be to us on the outside, or according to temporal things.

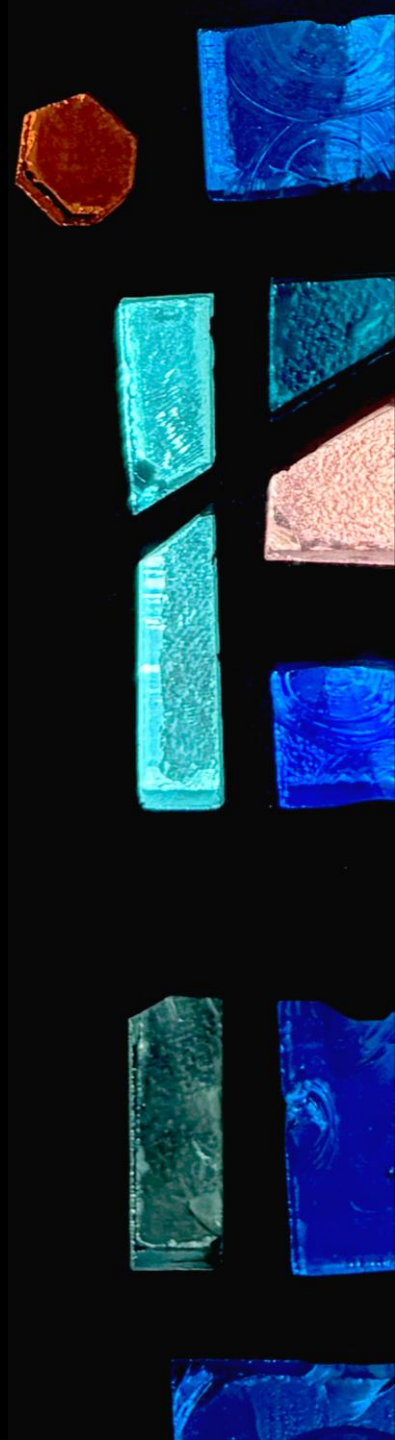
- **Ephesians 5:6–8 –** “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.”

- **James 4:4 –** “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

- Thomas Manton: “Sickness is sooner communicated than health.”

“Let those be thy choicest companions
who have made Christ their chief companion.”

—Thomas Brooks



VI. SINFUL TO NEGLECT

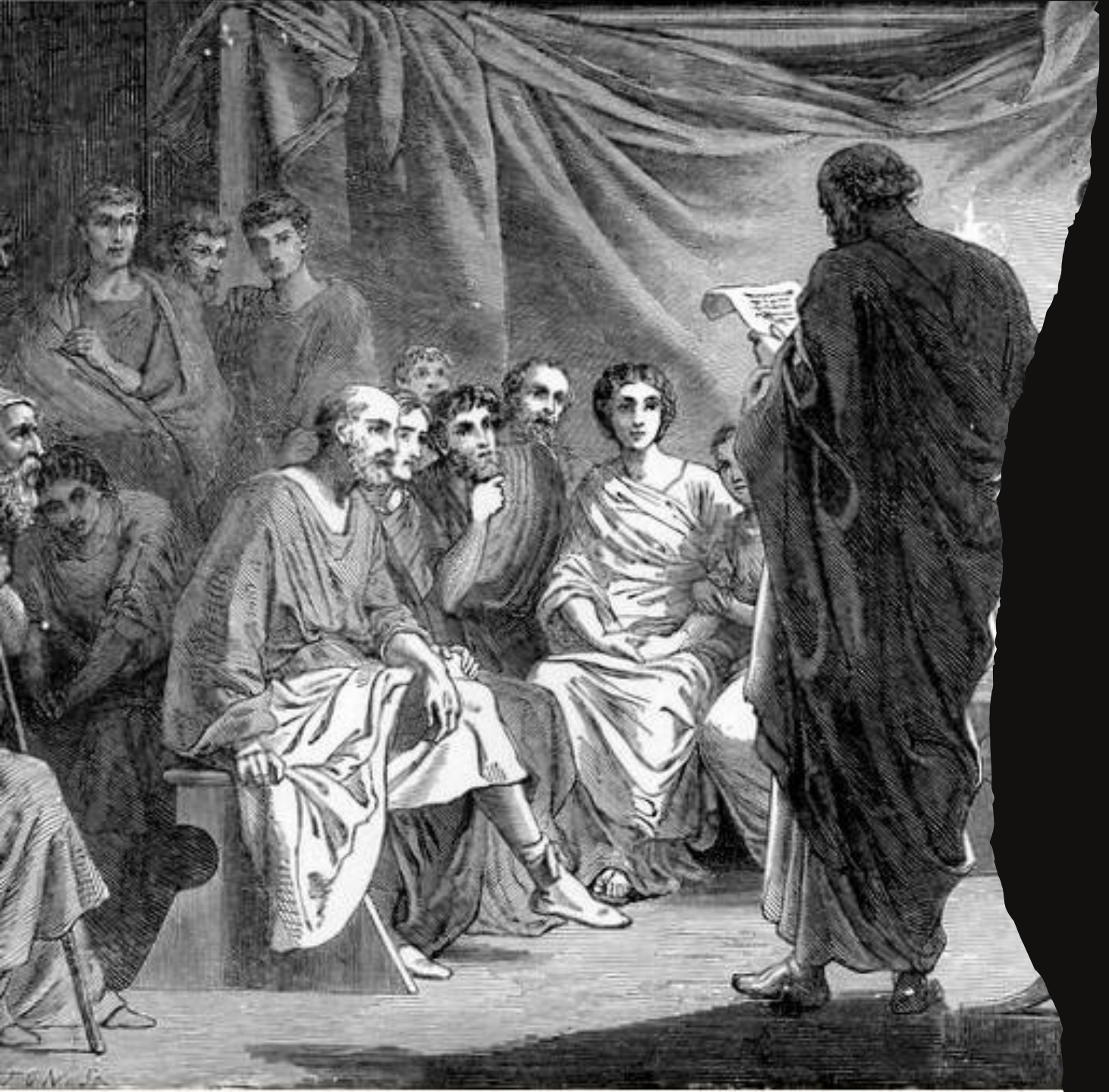


- We can only speak of fellowship as *sinful* to neglect (and thus, bind the conscience) if we have Scriptural warrant.

- Does Scripture mandate *koinonia*? Yes—by command and by example.

- **Hebrews 10:24–25 –** "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another;* and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

- **Hebrews 13:16 –** "And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

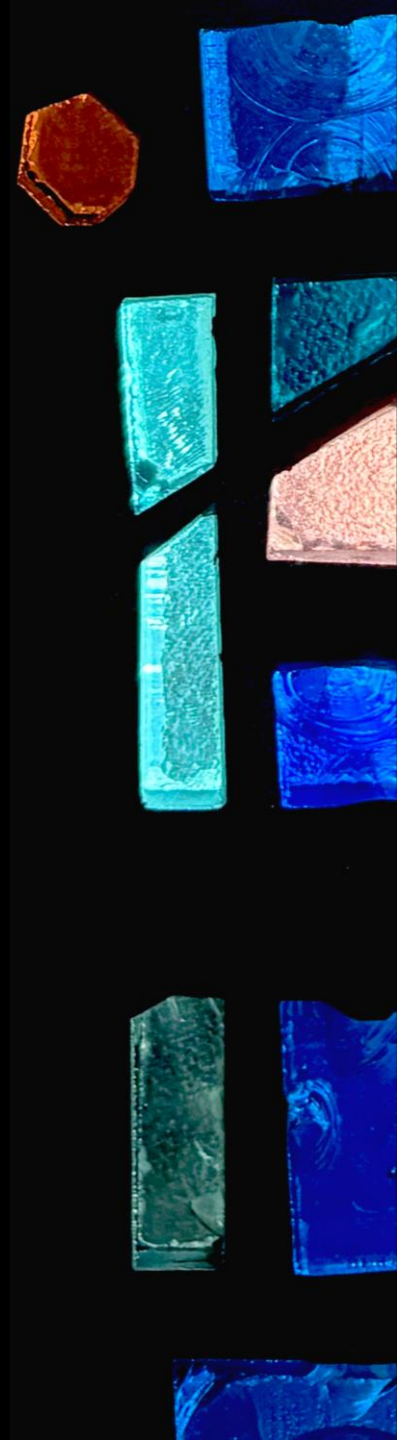


- **Acts 2:42 –** “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

- **Acts 2:46 –** “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.”

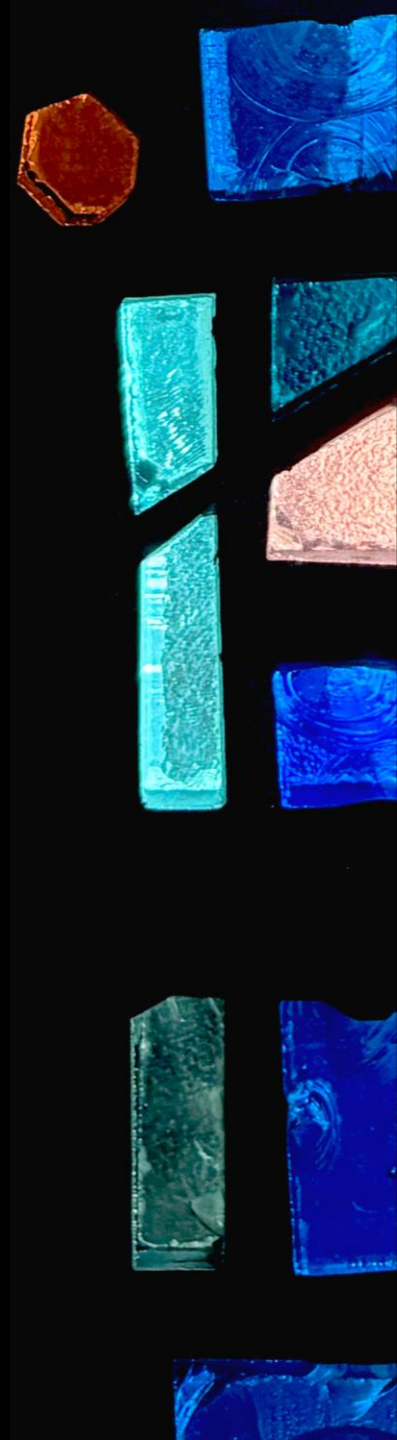
“We should not . . . think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercises of private devotion. We should recognize rather that such fellowship is a spiritual necessity, for God has made us in such a way that our fellowship with himself is fed by our fellowship with fellow Christians, and requires to be so fed constantly for its own deepening and enrichment.”

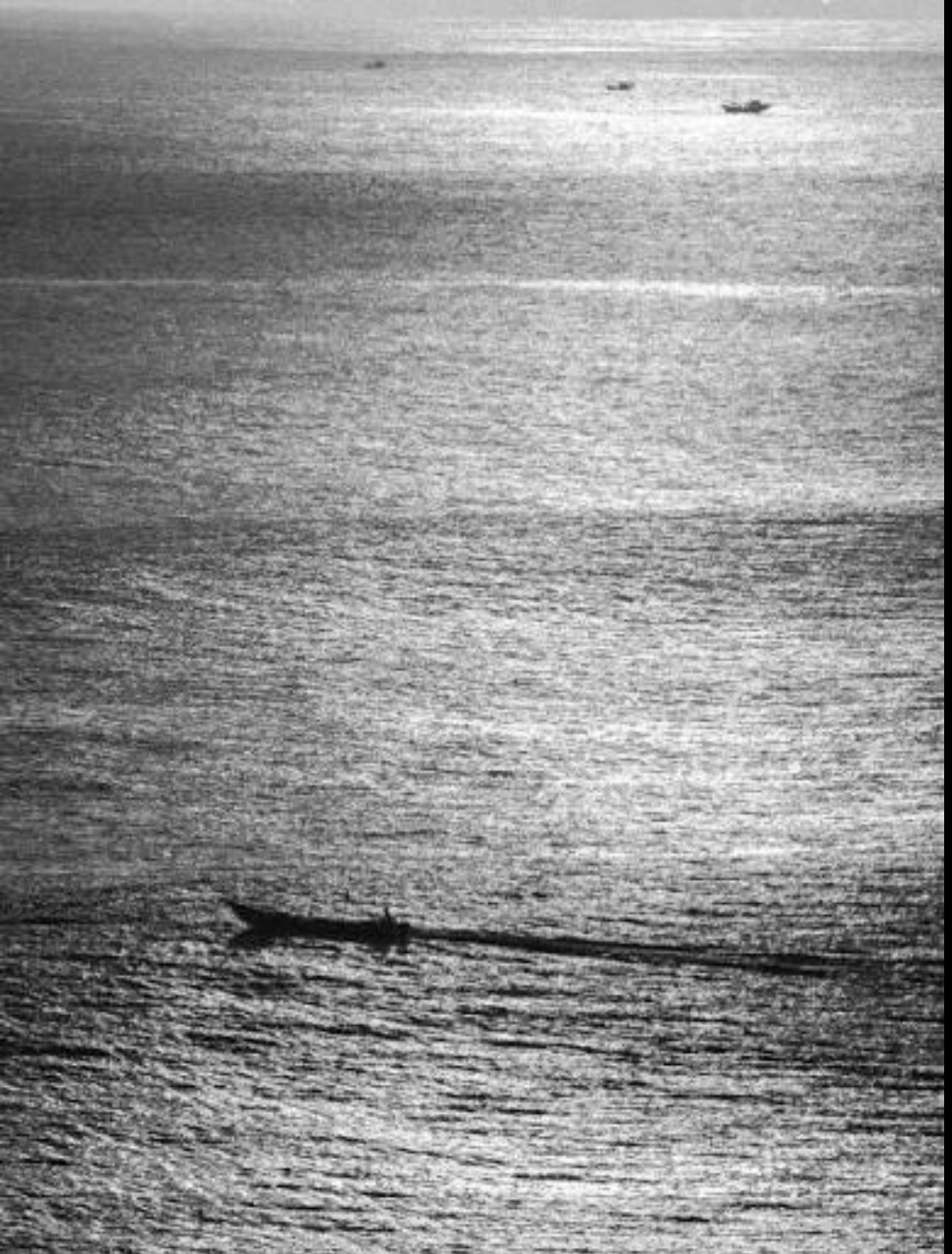
—J. I. Packer, *God’s Words*, 193



“The fellowship of believers not only provides a context for Christian service, it also offers spiritual protection to its members. The Christian life is meant to be lived not in isolation but in community with other believers . . . . Like sheep who get separated from the rest of the flock, Christians who isolate themselves from the church become easier prey to temptation and sin. Consequently, the New Testament instructs believers to regularly attend and participate in the local church (Heb 10:25).”

—MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 793





“Satan watcheth for those vessels that sail without a convoy.”

—George Swinnock

VII. A PRIORITY TO PROTECT



- That which is most precious and necessary will always be most targeted by the enemy.



- He will diminish and deface the beauty and efficacy of Christian fellowship through *slander* and *division.*

- **1 Corinthians 1:10 –** “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

- **Romans 16:17 –** “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”

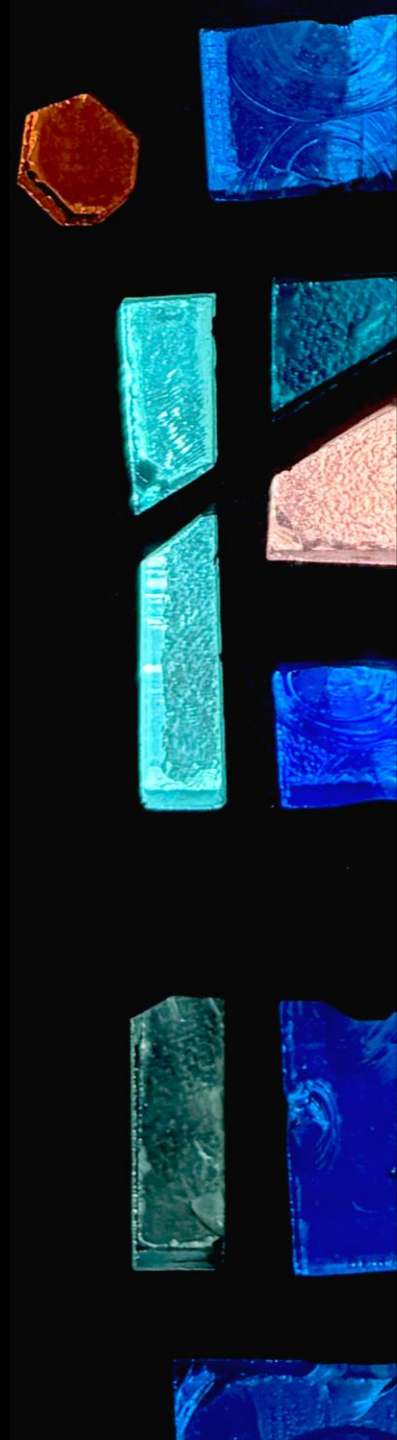
- **Titus 3:9–11 –** “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”

- **Ephesians 4:3 –** “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

- That which Christ gave His life to achieve must be deeply cherished and resolutely protected.

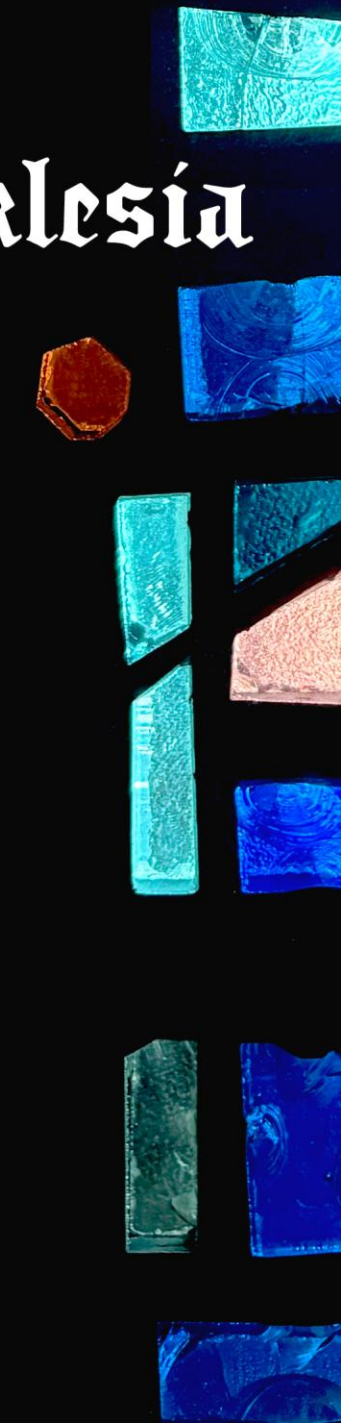
“Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in. He attaches far more importance to godly intercourse than we do. Since union is strength, he does his best to promote separation.”

—Charles Spurgeon



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IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY





1. Don’t equate your attendance with true community.

2. Move past spectator, passive involvement to active, engaged involvement.

3. Cultivate relationships that are deliberately theological in nature.

Sample Questions for Spiritual Discussions

What have you been reading in the Bible?

How can I pray for you? Here's how you can pray for me.

What opportunity for service has the Lord provided recently?

Where has the Lord been at work in your life? What encouragement or conviction has He given you recently?

Who needs our encouragement, prayer, or admonition?

Have you had any evangelistic opportunities lately?



1. Don’t equate your attendance with true community.

2. Move past spectator, passive involvement to active, engaged involvement.

3. Cultivate relationships that are deliberately theological in nature.

4. Be ready to receive.



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Tonight's resources will be posted on-line at

gracechurch.org/motw