

- Systemic Teaching about Christian Life -



Fellowship of Christians in the World

Series:
The Life of the
Christian in the World

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General Considerations about Using This Material:

The subject presented in this material aims to provide support to knowledge and an in-depth study of the Bible and the Christian life.

Based on the understanding that in the Christian Bible is contained the consolidation of fundamental and formal records of the writings inspired by God for humanity and each person of it, the contents exposed in this material are not intended to add, ever, anything to the Bible, nor ever remove anything from it. The aim through this subject is to contribute to the exploration of what already was registered and passed on to us over thousands of years of history by the One Creator and Lord of Heaven and Earth.

The contents presented on the next pages, of course, intend to address just a portion of the essential themes of life displayed with such great amplitude in the Bible. On the other hand, however, this subject is presented in a grouped, colligated, organized and systematized manner with the objective to serve as an aid to knowledge and understanding of the Christian life without losing sight of the main aspects of it.

Ecclesiastes 12: 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

Related words put together, as told in the biblical text above, serve as goads and nails for fixing supports and help for the life of people that hear and receive them. Therefore, one objective of this material is to study and seek a broader understanding of the truths handed down to us by the Unique Pastor and God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

We would still like to suggest that the reading and studying of this material also should always be accompanied by prudence and proper investigation, believing that this is a very healthy habit to be practiced toward any material presented to a person.

The act of acceptance, rejection, or “retaining what is good,” is a personal and individual attribute given to those who receive the wisdom from God and which should be exercised or used by them toward all that comes into their hands.

Proverbs 8: 12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion.

Acts 17: 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Proverbs 16: 1 The preparations of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits.

3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

More details about these initial considerations are posted at www.zoominchristianlife.org.

Ronald Gortz and Irmelin Gortz, servants of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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*Revelation 21: 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."
6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.*

The free availability of this material has been just the adoption of a similar practical example of how the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, distributes life of the source of living water to those who thirst for it.

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*1Timothy 2: 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

More details about these initial considerations are posted at www.zoominchristianlife.org.

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C1. Church, Fellowship of Christians, and Meetings – Part 1

In the life of a Christian in the world, there is an activity widely supported by the Scriptures that is the relationship of each Christian with other Christians, which may also be called fellowship between Christians.

Nevertheless, before moving specifically to the theme of fellowship between Christians, we understand that it is necessary to distinguish several concepts that have come to gravitate around the practical approach to this subject over the centuries.

What we may currently observe is that, over time, several aspects that do not reflect the essential issues of the relationship of Christians have been intertwined and have become, in practice, as synonymous of the fellowship of Christians, but which are not indeed according to the instructions of the Lord.

Expressions such as *worship, services, Church, gathering or meetings of the saints, assembly of saints, fellowship between Christians, congregation, temples, membership*, and others, have been thrown into the same basket or package as if they all basically expressed the same thing.

And, in turn, the “no clear distinction” between so many expressions that have several highly distinct characteristics also generates, of course, all sorts of confusion in the practical acts that are associated with them.

When distinct aspects become improperly agglutinated together as if they all were or represented the same aspect, it is necessary to break up these terms again and review them under the light of the definitions of God's Scriptures about them.

Starting with the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the so-called Body of Christ, we may observe that the basic points or the main definitions about its constitution, according to the Scriptures, have been widely despised over the years, including by a large contingent of people who claim to be Christians.

Thus, if people do not even have a minimally adequate notion of the primary aspect that constitutes the Church of Christ, how may they properly speak of the fellowship to be carried out by the Church of the Lord?

As we discussed more broadly in the theme about The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ, in the chapter on the Glory of Christ as King and Head of His Body or His Church, **the Church of the Lord is constituted by the members that make up the Body of Christ, who are the people who believe in Christ as Lord and who stand united with the Lord in the condition that He is the Head of their lives and the entire Body of Christ**, as also recalled in the following texts:

*Colossians 1: 18 **And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.***

*1 Corinthians 12: 12 **For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.***

...

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

...
27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

As explained in much broader detail on the subject referenced above, the Church is what the Scriptures describe about it, which, in turn, far surpasses the definition that the Greek word *Ekklesia* receives in linguistic dictionaries and that basically defines it as an assembly or gathering of people for a purpose in common.

So, **the Church of Christ, singular or unique, is also called in the Scriptures as:**

- ⇒ **The Body of Christ;**
- ⇒ **The Bride of Christ or the Wife of the Lamb;**
- ⇒ **The Holy City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, or the New Jerusalem;**
- ⇒ **The House of God;**
- ⇒ **The Pillar and Ground of the Truth.**

Colossians 1: 24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Revelation 21: 9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

Ephesians 5: 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,
26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Revelation 21: 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.

*1 Timothy 3: 15 **But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.***

As the Body of Christ, the Church consists of one body, with one Head, and with many members.

In the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, we find that all genuine Christians are baptized into one Body of Christ. That is, Christ does not have several bodies scattered over the Earth.

Christ does not have several brides on Earth either, but He is the bridegroom and the Head of one body and one bride.

When someone is born again by the grace of God, and through faith in Christ Jesus, that person already comes to belong to the one Body of Christ and to be a part of this Body, one becomes an expression of the Church of Christ, regardless of whether one is going or not to meetings with other Christians.

Through the spiritual birth given by the Spirit of the Lord, a person who is born again ceases to be world to be associated with the Body or Church of Christ from the moment of this new birth.

The Church of Christ, then, is an assembly of saints in the sense of the spiritual grouping *in Christ* of all those who have come to believe in Him and continue to believe in Him as Lord of their lives.

Therefore, **the Church of Christ is not the “meetings of brothers and sisters in the faith” held by people who believe in Christ. The assembly of Christ is not the fellowship meetings that Christians promote between themselves, but it is the group of all individuals who, by grace and through faith in the Lord and His work of justification, have become the group of people made alive spiritually by the Spirit of God and who, thus, have come to be united through the Lord's grace to Christ or God.**

*Hebrews 12: 22 **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,***

23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

It is the personal association to Christ, carried out through the New Covenant, which has as reference the blood of the Lord shed on the cross of Calvary, that makes a person part of the Church of the Lord, and not the affiliation to a group, institution, or regular attendance at meetings between Christians or who call themselves Christians.

Whoever is born of God through the new birth is part of the family of God, and automatically also becomes part of the Body or Church of Christ.

So, since it is through believing in the Lord and receiving Christ that a person places oneself in a position also to become a spiritual and eternal child of God, the expression *Church of Christ* is also a way of referring to the collective or group of all people who believe in Christ, receive Christ as the Lord of their lives, and who personally remain united to the Head Christ.

*John 1: 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

There is no Christian Church dissociated from the group of people who believe in Christ Jesus and remain united to Him or have Him as the only Head of the Body of Christ.

The Church of Christ has never been and will never be a building, a material or legally constituted institution, a merely human grouping, or some people meeting.

The Church of Christ has always been and always will be the group of people who were “freed or saved from the world” to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and who continue to have Christ personally as the Head of their lives.

*Colossians 1: 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,
14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

*John 17: 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."*

It is the people who unite with Christ that the Lord sends into the world to be His witnesses and as those who left the world to be associated with the Lord, and not the institutions or gatherings of people that want to define themselves and manifest themselves as the Church of Christ through so many aspects not valid before God for such a purpose.

*John 17: 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

*16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.
 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the
 world."*

The way or means for someone to become a member of the body of Christ, as we have already mentioned, is only one: The new birth in Christ Jesus, through which a person comes to have his or her name listed in Heaven where the only, true, and complete list of members of the Body of Christ is.

A person's membership in a human ecclesiastical structure or participation in meetings of Christians does not imply that one becomes a member of the Body of Christ or the Church of Christ.

A person may have been listed as a member of an ecclesiastical institution and may have attended from early childhood its meetings or the encounters of the so-called Christian groups, but if one has not received Christ as the Lord into one's heart and has not gone through the new spiritual birth through the Spirit of the Lord, this person is not part of the Church of Christ.

The Lord Jesus did not die in favor of human institutions, legal entities, or the routine meetings of groups of people. The Lord Jesus died for people, for human beings, for individuals, whom He saved and saves through what was accomplished by the work on the cross of Calvary and the provision made for people through His precious blood that was shed on that cross, and through the faith of each individual in the grace and justification the Lord offers them from the heavenly kingdom.

The mistaken concept that the Church of Christ is or could be a meeting place, a building, a human institution, or even the gathering of people, even in homes, comes from the remnants of the construction practices of material tabernacles or temples and the congregational concepts adopted in the Order of Aaron, or the Priestly Order under the law of Moses, and in the various religions of the world.

In the structure in line with the law of Moses, there was a "tabernacle of meeting," there was the idea of temples and human tabernacles to gather people around these buildings to seek God there, and concerning which, the Bible teaches that they were only a figure or as a shadow of the true place foreseen for God to manifest Himself to human beings.

Christ, however, revealed to the world that His Church is composed of living stones, which are freely built as the sanctuary of God, where the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, dwells in each of these living stones at all times and everywhere these living stones are.

*1 Peter 2: 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men,
 but chosen by God and precious,
 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a
 holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God
 through Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 3: 16 **Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

1 Corinthians 6: 19 **Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?**

Every Christian, that is, every person who has indeed received Christ as Lord and remains united to Him, is a living stone and sanctuary of God.

Every Christian is a part of the Lord's Church and not of an earthly and human building or institution.

Because they are Christians and family of God because of being born again through the Spirit of the Lord, Christians themselves are the very Church of Christ, whether they are gathered together or whether they are physically distant from each other.

Just like Christ in His condition of foundation or the great fundamental rock of the whole Church is not a stone or material rock of human construction, but is the rock that lives, that can support everyone, that expresses Himself in the life of every Christian, and who freely manifests Himself or moves wherever He intends, so also the Church of the Lord is composed of living stones, which are the people who believe in Christ wherever they are.

No person can join Christ's Church without, first and individually, associating oneself with Christ. There is no way for a person to join the Lord's Church or become a member of this Church through human association or by the mere fact of becoming a participant in meetings with people.

When someone teaches that a person needs to associate “horizontally” with an earthly group, one is offering an alternative path that is not the true way for a person to become part of the Church of Christ or through which one can truly achieve this purpose.

The New Covenant, of which Christ alone is the Mediator, is only established between Christ and people, and not with groups, formal and organized institutions, or even informal gatherings, even if they call themselves the Lord's Church.

As mentioned in the subject on the Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ already referenced above, the Lord Jesus Christ does not have “sub-agencies or branches” by which people may access the New Covenant with the Lord.

The Only Mediator of the New Covenant is Christ. That is, this mediation is something that the Lord has not delegated to a person, to any group, or some institution so that they could do it in His name.

Hebrews 9: 15 **And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**

To become part of the Church of Christ, a person needs to associate with Christ Himself. And once this has been done, one is already the Body of Christ, one is already the Church of the living God, not needing to complement this association by any other association with other people, institutions, or meetings.

A person becomes part of the Body or Church of Christ “by consequence or right of spiritual birth” *in Christ*.

Thus, when the Lord Jesus declared that He Himself would build His Church, He was referring to the edification of Christian people, for they are the Lord's Church or the members of the Eternal Body of Christ.

***In Christ*, people are the central or primary focus of edification, and not buildings, human associations, or institutions.**

For this reason, building temples is not building the Church of Christ, but only building material buildings and which action may still express an attitude of some “stiff-necked” people or their high degree of resistance to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 7: 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

49 ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest?’

50 Has My hand not made all these things?’

51 “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.”

Establishing organizations and institutions is not synonymous with building the Church of Christ, but it is the creation of human institutions, which often turn into principalities that create high resistance to the Lord's true fellowship with Christians, as well as between Christians themselves.

To build up the Church of Christ is to edify those who belong to the Body of Christ. It is to build up those who indeed are members of the Body of Christ.

To reach the point where the Church will stand before God “***not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish,***” is to reach the point where each member of the Body of Christ will be presented before God purified by the blood of Christ and by the washing of water by the word of the Lord.

Therefore, asking a Christian to which Church he or she belongs may express a striking ignorance of what the Church of Christ really is.

In the world, there is a high number of “churches or groups” that carry their own names or flags. However, as we have already mentioned, Christ has only one Church or only one living Body.

A Christian may meet with other Christians who come together customarily in a city, neighborhood, or home, and who use natural or material places as a reference point for their meeting place. However, regardless of where they meet, Christians are the Church of Christ that meets in these places, and it is not the places that are the Church of the Lord.

Before his personal encounter with Christ, Saul, also called Paul, persecuted the Lord's living Church wherever there were Christians or wherever they were, and not a specific group or a specific institution because all Christians were seen by him as being the Church of Christ. The Church that Saul was persecuting did not exist institutionally in order to be persecuted as an institution.

Thus, we may note that in the case of the persecution mentioned above, saying that Saul persecuted the Church of Christ and saying that Saul persecuted people who believed in Christ are equivalent expressions.

*Acts 8: 3 **As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.***

*Galatians 1: 13 **For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.***

The people who were dispersed by Saul did not cease to be Church because they could no longer remain close to others. They did not cease to be the Body of Christ just because they could no longer meet in the same place or in the same way as they had done for a certain period. On the contrary, knowing that they were the Church of Christ at all times and in all places, those who were scattered only increased the sphere of preaching the word of the Lord or the word about the Gospel of God.

*Acts 8: 4 **Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.***

Furthermore, no one can “open or close a Church of Christ” or “plant Churches of Christ” because, according to the Scriptures, this does not make any sense concerning the Body of Christ, for the Church of Christ is essentially made up of people and not structures and proposals for gathering around these structures.

No matter how simple a natural structure is, even if it is only in a house, it is never or can never be the Church of Christ, for the Church of Christ is the people connected to the Lord Jesus wherever they are and not where they come together.

The propositions that speak of “opening churches” or “planting churches” do not refer to the Church of Christ but to the multiplication of human projects, their institutions, and their structures.

Christ did not instruct His disciples to go all over the world and constitute “churches,” but He said to them to preach the Gospel to every

creature and make disciples of the Heavenly Father, of Him, and the Holy Spirit in all nations, for the very people who receive the Lord in their hearts are those who become the Church of Christ wherever they are and wherever they are called to express themselves as such.

So, to repeat, once again, Christ's disciples are the Lord's Church and not their meetings or highly structured or poorly structured gathering places.

Therefore, over the years of Christian history, it can be noted that one of the most prominent persecutions that have been done to the Church of Christ is the attempt to institutionalize it or try to reduce its concept to the meetings of Christians and the activities that derive from them, for thus the Church of the Lord would no longer have free expression wherever Christians are. And ceasing to be free, it would lose the essential characteristic inherent to the Church of Christ expressed in the following text:

Galatians 4: 26 ***But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.***

Each or every genuine Christian is part of the Body of Christ.

Every individual who truly is a Christian is the Church of Christ.

Therefore, the matter of asking a Christian to which Church he or she belongs is somewhat meaningless, for the only Church God calls an individual to belong to is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ or the Unique Spiritual Body of Christ.

In this way, **once it is understood who the members that make up the Church or the Body of Christ are, the question regarding fellowship among Christians becomes another. The point becomes whether a Christian relates or not to other Christians, whether one meets or not with other Christians as the Lord instructs them to do, but it is not a meeting or fellowship with other Christians that makes a Christian the Church of the Lord.**

A Christian may attend meetings with other Christians in a specific location, but as for belonging to the Church, one is called to belong only to the One Heavenly Church of the Lord, regardless of where one is or meets with other Christians.

In the book of Hebrews, we find an exhortation for Christians not to stop meeting with other Christians, but it is particularly relevant to note that this text refers to the meeting between Christians and not to the participation of an institution or meetings as if they would define what makes up the Lord's Church.

Hebrews 10: 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.

It may be crucial to take a closer look at this last text mentioned above. It addresses the purpose of fellowship among Christians, the mutual encouragement of love and

good works, and it makes reference to the act of meeting together, gathering with one another. The text, however, does not say that the Christian “should not leave the congregation,” but says that one “should not fail of assembling or meeting with other Christians.”

Some Bible versions inappropriately mention that Christians “should not leave the congregation,” but these are influenced by the idea of the Old Testament congregation or the Priestly Order according to Aaron or Moses, and they, therefore, are not precise as to what indeed is exposed in the text in reference.

The concept of a Christian “gathering” with other Christians is highly different from the idea that some claim as attending a “specific congregation,” a “congregation instituted by men or women that some even call a Church of Christ” and which establishes men and women as heads of other people, an action that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Head of His Church, never authorized to be done.

The concept of a congregation, pre-established with its “tabernacle of meeting,” is a concept similar to the Old Covenant with its mediating priests and Levites, as well as its religious rites and their associated material structures.

In Christ, the concept of Christians coming together is aimed at the meetings of the members who are previously of the family of faith in God, the meeting of brothers and sisters who respect each other, who want to serve one another, and who should not have the objective of one aspiring to rise above the others or some work to dominate and subjugate those who are supposed to be their brothers and sisters of faith in the Lord.

Unlike life *in Christ*, the concept derived from the priestly structure of Aaron or the law of Moses has its emphasis on the place and rites of its meetings because it does not offer the true life of God within each heart, making people have no newness of life to share with one another, subjecting many to the few who direct them and to rituals that cannot improve the lives of those who participate in their services, as mentioned below:

Hebrews 9: 9 ***It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.***

In this way, any system of meetings and services that aims at the “well performance” of rituals and their meetings, as if they were the supposed Church of the Lord, do not diverge from what Christ came to revoke by declaring the Old Covenant as obsolete or outdated.

The concept of Christian encounters to which Christ calls those who are His own has its emphasis on simple fellowship among Christians, for mutual encouragement of one another to serve as an admonition or exhortation to every Christian to seek continually to be under the direction of the Lordship of Christ, and where everyone has the opportunity to share part of what the Lord has accomplished in their lives.

The concept derived from the law of Moses is a liturgical and ceremonial concept directed by a few, while the principle of fellowship in the Church of Christ is the inclusion and participation of the entire Church of Christ, that is, of all Christians.

The Church of Christ is called to come together because the people who compose it are the family of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and because the one who is born of God also loves the others who are born of God, that is, the fellow believers who have God as their Heavenly Father and who do not need to come together to become the Church or the family of God.

If the gathering or the encounter of Christians constituted or would be the definition of what the Church of Christ is, people could be saved by the human work of participating in meetings or institutions created by themselves, and so they also would not need justification according to the grace that can only be achieved through personal faith in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, when people confuse the work of going to meetings or being a member of a group or institution as the means to be part of the Church of Christ or as the means to be justified before the Lord, they have already strayed too far from the essential point that eternal salvation and becoming a child of God occur by grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, and because of His work of justification of sinners, seeking again to establish the idea that human righteousness, through human works, could justify them.

*Galatians 2: 16 ... **knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.***

Just as membership or attendance in a group cannot cause someone to be born again, for what justifies an individual before God for the new birth is the Lord's righteousness and grace, which can be received through personal faith in Christ and His redemptive work, so also the association of a person with a group or an institution cannot make him or her part of the Lord's Church.

Those who proclaim membership in groups or institutions as the means for a person to be part of the Church of Christ propagate the principle symbolized by carnal circumcision, even though they do not use literal circumcision as used by the Hebrews in ancient times, as it is approached in more detail in the subject on the Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ already mentioned above. Remembering, yet, that the association with groups or institutions, under the principle that the association with them could make them Christians, not only has no value before the Lord but can also distance an individual from the Lord, including those who were already associated with Christ by grace and through faith in God.

*Galatians 5: 1 **Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.***
*2 **Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.***
*3 **And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.***
*4 **You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.***

- 5 *For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*
- 6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*
- 7 *You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*
- 8 *This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.*
- 9 *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*
-

Becoming a child of God through Christ is what makes a person part of His Church. And, in turn, being part of the family of God is what causes a child of God to be called to fellowship with those who also have the same Eternal Father and the same Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, fellowship between Christians is only possible because of what they first came to become in Christ Jesus before God.

1 John 5: 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

1 John 4: 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

The love necessary for beneficial and true fellowship among Christians does not come from someone's willingness to meet with others, but it comes from the association of each person, through the Holy Spirit, with the Heavenly Father and His Beloved and Eternal Son Jesus Christ.

- 1 John 1: 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life*
- 2 (the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us)*
- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

John 17: 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."

C2. Church, Fellowship of Christians, and Meetings – Part 2

We saw in the previous chapter that the Church is the Body of Christ, which, in turn, expresses the group of people who have received Christ in their hearts and remain connected to Him, having Him as the Lord of their lives and recognizing Him as the only Head of His whole Body.

Thus, ***Church of the Lord*** is the name given to the group of individuals who are members individually and directly of the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12: 27 ***Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.***

If an individual is a Christian indeed, one is the Body of Christ. And if one is the Body of Christ, one is the Church of Christ.

A genuine Christian, not just nominal, is Church of Christ or Body of Christ regardless of whether one meets with other Christians or not, for if a Christian is prevented from meeting with other Christians, one does not cease to be a Christian by this nor does one cease to be part of the Body of Christ, because what, above all, unites a person to the Lord's Church is one's union with Christ and not with other people.

Nevertheless, **we have seen that it is God's guidance and desire that Christians may have fellowship with other fellow believers if this is within one's reach, just as Christians are also called to meet with other Christians or other members of the Body of Christ in the condition of already individually being the Body or Church of Christ.**

So, fellowship or the meeting of Christians, the meeting of brothers or sisters of faith in the Lord, does not define the Church of Christ, but defines the carrying out of an action that the Lord guides His Church, which are the Christians, to practice and which also demonstrates that God's love is in them.

On the other hand, when people confuse belonging to the Church of Christ with the action of coming together to become the Church of Christ through the gathering, they are at high risk of coming together not for a fellowship motivated by love for other Christians but out of an obligation or fear of not being considered part of the Body of Christ.

Currently, many people even go so far as to say the absurdity that an individual who is not included in the list of members of a specific group or who does not attend regular meetings of the same group is a "without-Church person" or "a strayed or backslid individual," attesting, with this, their ignorance of understanding what the Church or the Body of Christ is and that it is not the work of membership or participation in a group that makes a person a child of God.

As seen in the text of the Book of Galatians chapter 5 presented in the previous chapter, those who are at risk of disconnecting from Christ and falling from grace, thus becoming a "without-Church or strayed person," are those who use external actions of association with groups (symbolized by the idea of circumcision), for they move away from the simplicity that exists in the association with Christ, which does not occur

through complementary human works of participation or association with specific groups, but through grace, faith, and the new birth.

When it is possible to practice them, fellowship between Christians and their meetings can be of esteemed value before God and aim at great benefit to Christians themselves. However, when the propositions for practicing this fellowship and the encounters begin to adopt corrupted principles and motivations that are strange concerning the purpose that the Lord established, these serve rather for drawing people away from the freedom that is in Christ for them to come together and may also become arduous, heavy, and destructive for those who join them.

The so-called Christian meetings or gatherings that seek to instill in the participants the thought that it is their adherence to them that makes them part of the Church of Christ express the result of strategies of those who aim to confuse people to subdue them to the need to go to their events, trying to rob them of the essence of the Christian encounter, which has as a basic principle the willingness, freedom, and love that moves true Christians to meet with others.

As members of the Body of Christ, Christians are the family of God. And as members of God's family, they are brothers or sisters to one another. And even though a family coming together and promoting the fellowship between its members can be a means of bringing many benefits, an individual's right to be a member of a family is conferred upon him or her firstly by the membership through the right of birth or adoption.

Even if living far from their parents or other siblings, a son or a daughter remains a son or daughter by the right of birth or adoption.

Thus, fellowship between Christians and their encounters as members of the Body or Church of Christ may be associated with many valuable purposes, and of which Christians who have the opportunity to practice them should seek to be a part. However, from the moment that the practice of these acts is confused with the definition of what the Church of Christ is and how someone becomes associated with it, a whole series of distorted definitions about the Body of Christ starts to be created.

When people begin to confuse their meetings with others or their associations with groups with the concept that through these actions they become part of the Church of Christ, they also open up to give more importance to their groups, to their meetings, and the propositions defended by them than to the Gospel of Christ and Christ Himself. In this way, they lose focus that they should belong to Christ and, through Christ, to the Church of the Lord.

When people start to confuse their meetings or associations with groups with the aspect of being part of the Church of Christ through them, they begin to hold meetings to fulfill an agenda, not for fellowship and for the purpose for which the Lord wants His Church to meet.

When people begin to confuse their meetings between them or their associations with groups with the aspect of being part of the Church of Christ through these practices, people move towards forgetting that they should be the Church of Christ at all times and everywhere, and soon start to take different attitudes when they are in meetings and groups and when they are in everyday life.

People who want to value meetings, encounters, or association with groups beyond what is due begin to proclaim all sorts of precepts and thoughts to justify what they hold dear, even going so far as to present misleading and terrifying precepts to keep people associated with them even out of fear.

The spirit of bondage is the spirit that frightens people to keep them captive and to make them insecure about their status as children of God. This spirit acts contrary to the Spirit of the Lord, who, in turn, acts in opposition to the spirit of slavery by testifying to Christians of their firm condition in God through faith in Christ.

Romans 8: 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Repeating once more, **the Church of Christ, that is, the members of the Body of Christ, is called to come together for fellowship between its members. However, the Lord's Church is not the meeting itself, just as it is not the participation in the meetings that can associate a person with the Body of Christ.**

The Church of Christ is called to practice fellowship between those who previously make up the Lord's Church. And true fellowship testifies who is part of this Church. However, it is not fellowship with others, in itself, that makes one a member or not of the Body of Christ.

In the Scriptures, there is no confusion between what the Church is and what is a practical action performed by the members of this Church, therefore:

- ⇒ 1) **The Church is the group of all people who call on Jesus Christ as Lord and who remain united to Him.**
- ⇒ 2) **The act of gathering people who already belong to the Church of Christ is an action, a work, an activity, a functional movement of the members of the Church, it is a mobilization of the members of the family of God, of the members who previously are part of the Body of Christ.**

Let us see below two more texts through which we may note the distinction between being part of the Church of Christ and practicing actions of meeting with others as someone who already or previously is part of the Church of Christ:

1 Corinthians 1: 1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

*1 Corinthians 14: 26 **How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.***

There is a very significant and explicit difference between what the Church is and the actions or work of the Church, an aspect that we will try to mention again below to highlight it even more briefly, namely:

- ⇒ 1) **The Church is the group of people who are genuinely Christian or who belong to Christ.**
- ⇒ 2) **The meeting of the Church is a meeting of Christians; it is an action or a work of this Church.**

The Scriptures exemplify the Church gathered in different places, showing its meetings as one of its activities. And even if it is only a part of the Church that is gathered together, it is called the gathered Church because it is expressed by those who have come together. However, once again, the individuals personally associated with Christ are those who are the Lord's Church and not their meetings.

*Acts 14: 27 **Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.***

If attending the meeting constituted the Church of Christ, would the person who is traveling cease to be Church for the duration of one's trip, and would he or she only return to be Church after coming back? Or would someone dare to set rules for how long a person could travel in order not to stop being Church?

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ are the individuals who have Christ as the Head of their lives and who, even separated by physical distance or scattered in various regions, continue to be the Church of Christ, for when a Christian remains united to Christ, one continues to be the Church of Christ also in one's personal activities or when one is living and walking in what God has directed him or her to be doing in daily life.

Therefore, **any proposition that does not allow all people to come to Christ and become part of the Church of Christ simply by the grace of God, and through faith in the Lord and His redemptive work, are propositions that do not express the truth about how a person becomes part of the Body of Christ. These are propositions that seek to put the act of gathering together or associating with their groups above the gift of God's righteousness, which is offered freely by grace and can be accessed through faith in the Lord.**

Although members of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ are called to relate to other Christians for the purpose of fellowship between the members of the Body of

Christ, if people had to go to meetings to be part of the Body of Christ, those who had any impediment to coming together with others, as is the case with many people who are in prisons, cultures, and human conditions that prevent them from doing so, also could not associate with Christ for salvation, which, of course, contradicts God's declaration about the salvation He offers to all human beings, as exemplified below:

Romans 10: 9 ... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

The one who saves a person is the Lord Jesus through His grace, and through faith in Him, and not the participation in meetings, although someone, eventually, may come to meet the Lord as a result of attending some meeting.

We likewise remember here that **it is not the Church that saves a person, but all its members are equally saved by the One Lord who saves all who receive Him in their hearts through faith.**

If a God-fearing person could not be sustained by the Lord when physically distant from other brothers or sisters of faith, Joseph could not have remained steadfast in the Lord while he was in Egypt, Daniel could not have been a witness to the most potent pagan peoples of all times according to the Scriptures, and so many other Christians could not have been faithful to God until the end when they were isolated from others, even because of their faith in the Lord.

The Lord's Church is the people who believe in Christ and are linked by the Holy Spirit to the Lord, whether they are together or spread out doing what the Lord has called them to do in their daily lives. And from this concept, Christians, who are the Church of Christ, should never allow themselves to be dissuaded by propositions that inappropriately point to earthly works as being a possible means for one to become part of the Body of Christ.

Fellowship between Christians and their meetings can become actions of inestimable value and benefits, but never of greater value than salvation by the Lord's grace and through individual faith in Christ and the love that the Heavenly Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit offer each person who receives Christ as the Lord and Head of one's life.

C3. The Personal Life of the Christian is also the Life of the Church

*1 Corinthians 12: 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.
27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

After we have addressed the aspect that the Church of the Lord is made up of those who believe in Christ as their Lord and who have Christ as their Head, it is evident that to love the Church of Christ is not to love buildings, plaques, flags of institutionalized churches, or the denominations created by men or women, nor is it to love the meetings of Christians themselves without loving first the One Head of the Church and the people who are the members of the Body of Christ.

Furthermore, because they have in mind that the Lord's Church is structures, buildings, or meetings, or because they think of the Church only from the perspective of an impersonal collective, many people who call themselves Christians end up making references to supposed problems of the Church as if they themselves were not the Lord's Church, as if they were not part of how the Lord's Church is expressing itself in the world or as if the individual position of each member is not representative before a collective form of the Church.

Nevertheless, when we start to pay attention to the fact that the Church of Christ is composed of Christ as the Head of His Body and by the people who have Christ as Lord in their hearts, we can also notice that another very significant point to be observed is that the Lord does not see His Church according to impersonal aspects or only according to its collective points, but also in the individual aspect of each of its members and what the condition of each member represents individually and for the collective, as exemplified in the text presented at the beginning of this new chapter.

Therefore, it seems to us that before a person wants to understand various aspects of the collective expression of the Lord's Church or fellowship with members of the Body of Christ or the family of God, one should probably seek to know or be aware of the fact that the personal life of every genuine Christian is also the life of the Church or that it is the first place where a Christian can see the Lord's work in His Church and can also see what the Lord personally instructs this Christian as a member of His Eternal Church.

Thus, considering that each genuine Christian is individually a member or a part of the Body of Christ, the life of the Church is also expressed, or expressed primarily, through the Lord's action in the life of each Christian and through the care that each Christian has for one's own life in the sense of being aligned with the novelty of life, will, and instruction of the Lord for him or her.

If a Christian understands that one is also individually the expression of the Body of Christ, regardless of where he or she is, the first contribution one can make to the Church of Christ is to expose oneself to the work or edification that Christ wants to do in him or her and to walk in one's own life according to God's will.

In other words, considering that a Christian is also part of the Lord's Church or His Spiritual Body, when the Lord Jesus builds up this Christian, the Lord is also automatically edifying His Church, a point also addressed in the subject on The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ in the chapter that deals with the aspect that Christ is the Head of each member of His Body or His Church and also addressed in the later chapter on the position of Christ as the Head who is all in all and who nurtures His Church nurturing each member also personally or individually.

And if we pay a little more attention here to some practical aspects that a Christian is called to adopt in one's life regarding one's performance as the Church of the Lord and one's relationship with the Church, starting with the love that should permeate all one's relationship with the Lord and with the Body of Christ, we can see in the Scriptures that the Lord instructs each Christian to first pay attention to one's own posture of love towards the Lord and towards other members of the Church of Christ or the family of God, as follows:

1 John 5: 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

1 John 5: 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

1 John 3: 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 4: 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Looking at the texts quoted above in the order they are presented, we can see, then, without a doubt, **that the love of a Christian, in the "first place," should be one's love for the Heavenly Father who showed us the Son of His Love and for the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to us by God.**

When through His words, narrated by John in the book of Revelation as a letter to the Church in Ephesus, the Lord Jesus calls Christians to be attentive to abiding in the *"first love,"* it is primarily the love for the Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that the Lord is referring to.

It is God who bestows love to a Christian's heart. And the Lord gives it so that each Christian first may love God who has granted him or her salvation and the newness of eternal life, for it is only through the relationship with the Lord that a Christian can have heavenly love in one's heart.

1 John 4: 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Romans 5: 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

1 John 1: 3 That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

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

Because they see the Church as something external to them, because they do not see themselves primarily as the Church of the Lord, or because they do not understand that they themselves are the first targets of the work of love or edification that the Lord Jesus Christ wants to accomplish, many Christians do not pay attention to the fact that their participation in the Lord's Church begins, first of all, in the individual relationship of each member of the Body of Christ with the Head of this Body, and that without this first relationship, there really is no way to reach a proper fellowship with the other members of the Lord's Church.

John 15: 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

It is through the love received from God and loving God with the love that the Lord places in the heart of a Christian that one becomes able to love the brothers and sisters of the Church of Christ.

Therefore, before expecting other Christians to love him or her, every Christian should first check on oneself if one is in a fellowship of love with God to actually love the other members of the Body of Christ of which he or she is also a part.

Many people say that they go to their Churches because they want to be loved by others there. However, the Lord teaches us that the cooperative work of a Christian towards the Church of Christ begins with one's love for God and the attitude that the Christian has to be willing to love others.

And if we go back here to the first list of verses we mentioned in this chapter, we may see that the Lord shows us that there are some very particular ways for a Christian to investigate one's love for the other members of the Body of Christ, starting with the verse which we repeat below and one more text that we add from Peter's first epistle:

*1 John 5: 2 **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.***

*1 Peter 1: 22 **Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,***
*23 **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.***

Bearing in mind that a Christian concerning one's relationship with other Christians is called to love others and not only seek to be loved by them, the Lord also teaches a Christian how to check if one is in a proper condition of love for others, which again is turned to the Christian's love for God and now presented also as the practice of the Lord's commandments or obedience to the truth as the basis for an unfeigned or sincere love.

In other words, a Christian's love for other Christians is only unfeigned if one first loves God and personally practices what God directs him or her to do in one's life.

A Christian who does not follow the will of God for one's own life cannot contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ, for, in the first place, one finds oneself in opposition to the Lord of the Church, who is the Head of His Body of which the Christian oneself is a part.

A person who opposes the instructions that the Head of the Body of Christ gives him or her does not cooperate with the living body of the Lord or with parts of this body. On the contrary, one opposes the Lord, but also the other members of the Church of Christ.

*Luke 11: 23 **"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters."***

A Christian who loves God practices God's will for one's life. And through this practice, one presents oneself to the Lord to be a well-built member of the Body of Christ and knows that one also loves other Christians, for by following the instruction of the Lord also as a member of the Church of Christ, one automatically cooperates with the whole body of Christ.

The One who instructs individually what each member of the Body or the Church of Christ is called to follow or do is the Head of the Body, not the other members of the Body or Church of the Lord.

Therefore, it is in first accepting the instruction of one's One Lord, Mediator, Eternal High Priest, Pastor, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace that a Christian begins to act for the good of the whole Church of Christ.

A Christian's cooperation and love for the Church of Christ begins first when one loves God, loves God's will, and when one loves oneself to the point of wanting to do God's will.

On the other hand, if a Christian opposes God's love and the Lord's will for one's life, one automatically acts contrary to what is beneficial to him or her, and, as part of the Lord's Church, by harming oneself, one also resists what is good for the Body of Christ.

So, to repeat once more: **The life of a Christian on behalf of the Body or Church of Christ begins with one's love for God and His will to the point of practicing it in one's own life.**

If here we also return to the point that the Church of God is not a meeting, a natural sanctuary, or a human institution, but it is the people who individually are part of the Body of Christ or the family of God, we may note that a Christian does not depend only on the collective meeting to be able to contribute to the Church of Christ, but one begins to do so when one seeks to know God's will for one's life and when one practices it daily as the Lord reveals it to him or her.

Ephesians 5: 14 **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."**

**15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.**

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The groups of people who come together but who do not individually seek the love of God and the will of God for their lives as individual members of the Body of Christ also do not walk in obedience or the light of the truth available to them in the Head of the Body. And by not walking in the light, but according to their own understanding, people disassociate themselves from the possibility of offering or sharing the love of Christ with others.

When, however, people love God, and therefore seek and practice God's will for their lives, they are free to act in God's love also for other people. The love of God that becomes available to them is even offered to them not to be restricted to some individuals, for it can, above all, already be widely practiced before the Lord towards all the saints, as exemplified below:

Ephesians 6: 10 **Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.**

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 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.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

- 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*
- 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*
- 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;*
- 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*
-

When a Christian seeks to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might, and personally puts on Christ, His Gospel, and His living word, knowing that Christ is the truth, one's righteousness, and one's salvation, this Christian is also moved by the Lord to care "for all the saints," and this, starting in a practical way through prayers and supplications on their behalf before God continually even if one will never personally come to know many of them or even the majority.

- Psalms 16: 1 Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.*
- 2 O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."*
- 3 As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."*
-

When a Christian puts on the Creator and Lord of His life or when one puts on one's Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, one is called to love the whole Church of Christ because one has also become one Body in the Lord. And on behalf of the entire Church, or all the saints, this Christian is called to make prayers and supplications to God.

Even before attending meetings with other Christians, a Christian who loves Christ and His Church already demonstrates one's love for the Lord and His Church by personally making prayers and supplications before God on behalf of the entire Church of the Lord on Earth.

Love for the Body of Christ begins, then, (1) by the love that the Lord places in the Christian's heart, (2) by the love for God that this Christian practices, (3) by seeking the will of the Lord to follow it, and (4) through the Christian's love "before God" for the people or so-called saints who constitute the Lord's Church.

Thus, if we remain in fellowship with Christ, since love for the saints is first cultivated in a Christian's fellowship with Christ and in practicing God's will, the Lord will strengthen and instruct us to walk in His love poured out in our hearts so that we too may love the other members of the family of God.

If a person does not love the Lord of the Church and the Lord's will, one will not have a genuine love for the Lord's Church either, for, repeating once more, the ability to love the Church comes from the Heavenly Father, the Son of His Love, and the Holy Spirit of God.

In yet another part of the Scriptures, Christ declared that the one who loves Him keeps the instructions He gives him or her. And therefore, as we saw above, the one who practices the word of Christ loves one's brothers and sisters of faith in the Lord indeed, for when one fulfills the will of God, one does what is good before the Lord for him or her and the other members of the body of Christ.

*John 14: 23 **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.***

*24 **He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."***

Finally, in this chapter, we understand that it is worth emphasizing at this point that keeping the word of the Lord or following the commandments of God has no connection with keeping the law of Moses, for Christians are not called to be subject to it.

Keeping the word of the Lord is keeping the instruction the Lord gives according to the New Covenant and not the First or Old Covenant, as amply explained by the subjects on Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, Knowing about God or Knowing God, and in all themes concerning the Gospel of the Lord, and of which we recall the following texts:

*Romans 3: 19 **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***

*Romans 6: 14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.***

*Romans 10: 4 **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

In large part, it is also from the subjection to the law of Moses that derives the thought that a few people should provide the instruction of God for the rest, where the people paid for others to do what each one should do towards the Lord. However, Christians are not called to have any association with the subjection to the law of Moses and the forms of services and gatherings that were practiced in the Priestly Order of the Old Covenant or similar to it.

In the Body of Christ, each Christian first is the object of the love of Christ and the direct edification that the Lord performs in each member, as well as one is called to personally follow the will of God as a member of the Lord's Church.

Mentioning this point again, when the Lord told His disciples that He Himself would build His Church, this statement, in the first place, applies to the edification that Christ promotes in Christians who individually are members of His Body. And this, so that

each one may also have first received something from God so that then one may offer it to the other members of the Body of the Lord.

Every person built in the Lord, by the Lord, and who walks according to the will of God that Christ instructs and strengthens to be practiced is the way for the Church of Christ to manifest itself to the world and the Church itself, and “against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail.”

The Church of Christ or the saved of the Lord, above all, are called to be built upon the One Foundation or the Living and Eternal Rock that can provide them with the newness of eternal life, namely, once again, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Therefore, when we come across texts presented at the beginning of this chapter that teach us that those who love God also love their fellow believers in the Lord, and that the fact that they love the saints shows that they have already passed from death to life, we may understand that (1) salvation in the Lord, (2) love of the Lord, (3) love for God, and (4) obedience to the truth are the bases for a Christian's love for other Christians.

When the Lord teaches us that the one who has heavenly love in one's heart and loves God also loves others who are of the Lord, He shows us that love for the saints is a typical result to be manifested in those who love God and His word.

When someone loves Christ, the Heavenly Father, and the Spirit of the Lord, love for the saints has no burden of obligation, but it is an aspect that God brings forth in the hearts of those who love the Lord or which absence is a warning that a Christian is moving away from the love for one's Eternal Creator and Redeemer.

*1 John 5: 2 **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.***

Receiving the love of God in the heart and loving with this love first of all the Lord and His word results in a heart willing to love the saints of God, just as living and walking in the Spirit of the Lord results in the fruit of the Spirit's working in the one who allows His action in one's life, and which, in turn, is also based on love.

*Galatians 5: 22 **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.***

C4. Fellowship Between Christians and Christians Meetings

Once the separation of what the Body of Christ is from the activities that this body performs is done, we may also move towards the more specific objective of this material, which refers to the fellowship of a Christian with other members of the family of God who are equally still in the present world.

As we saw in the previous chapter, a Christian may manifest the love in him or her for other Christians by following the Lord's will in one's life, for since he or she is also the Church of Christ, if he or she walks in the will of God, he or she also cooperates with the Lord's Church instead of opposing or resisting it.

Likewise, we saw that another way that a Christian may cooperate, and a lot, with other Christians in the world, as has also been seen, is the work of prayers before God on behalf of all the saints who everywhere also call on Christ as Lord of their lives.

Nevertheless, the fellowship between those who constitute the Church of Christ also includes actions of relationship and more direct contact between them, as shown in the following text:

*1 John 1: 7 **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.***

And, in turn, a Christian may practice fellowship with other Christians in various ways, such as keeping in touch with them, helping them in what the Lord directs them to do, helping those in need of support, sharing some topics learned from the Lord's Scriptures, offering friendship to one another, and so on, but also through meetings that have a specific nature to be Christian meetings or meetings of the people of the Lord's Church who meet specifically to talk about their Christian life and about the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name the children of God are called to come together.

Thus, one of the most frequent and intense ways of expressing the fellowship of Christians also happens through the meeting or encounters of those who believe in Christ Jesus and who gather specifically because of this faith they have in the Lord and because they understand that they are the Church of Christ called to fellowship with other children of God who are in the present world.

In this way, although Christian fellowship can be expressed daily through contact between Christians, there are Christian gatherings that have the purpose of bringing them together not only when they need each other, but to share their life of faith in the Lord and to share the love of the Lord for one another, seeking that all may also be edified by what the Lord shares to His Church through its different members.

The meetings of Christians, with the specific purpose of encounters to testify about their life of faith in the Lord, is an encouragement to meet specifically to talk, witness, and praise the Lord, just as a family also gathers to keep their members close to each other and mutually encourage and support each other.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, **no one becomes a member of the Church by attending meetings with other Christians, but contact with other Christians also allows a Christian to see more often how God works in the diversity of situations and people who are part of His Church, showing him or her the variety of gifts and operations that the Lord is carrying out in the world through His living Body of many members.**

Yet another aspect with which Christian meetings or gatherings may also cooperate is the testimony of the unity they have in the Lord to the point that they long to come together so that the world may recognize that those who are in Christ are also enabled by the Lord to love and respect **each other**, according to the will that the Lord Jesus expressed in the following prayer:

*John 17: 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."*

Since Christ, as the expression of the Gospel of the Lord, came in the flesh into the world to offer all people the possibility for them to be reconciled with God, it is also to be expected that those who already enjoy this reconciliation will practically manifest its results in their lives, which, in large part, can be done by the appreciation that Christians should have for one another.

C5. Christ is the Head that Nurtures His Church, and Christ is All and in All Individually and Collectively

Colossians 3: 11 (In Christ) where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Colossians 1: 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

*19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,
20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

An essential and fundamental condition for the functioning of the Lord's Church and the meetings or gatherings that its members seek to carry out lies in the fact that Christ is the Head of His Body and that to Him belongs the primacy or preeminence over every Christian, as well as of their meetings, for the Heavenly Father has designated Christ to be all and in all who are associated with Him.

When people do not understand, begin to disrespect, or start to put aside the principle that Christ is the Head of every Christian, but also of the collective and the meetings of people, all sorts of confusion may start to happen among Christians, which may lead them to incur in meetings that do not edify them, as Paul shows us in the following text:

*1 Corinthians 1: 4 **I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,***

5 that you were enriched in everything by Him (or in Him) in all utterance and all knowledge,

6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Meetings of Christians begin to lose their beneficial character if Christ does not have exclusive preeminence over the people of His Church, even when they come together.

Without an understanding that Christ is the personal Head of each individual member of His Body, it is very unlikely that Christian meetings may benefit their participants.

If the reader of this material has already accessed or still comes to access the subject about The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ already mentioned above, one will be able to remember or see in it the principle mentioned in the previous paragraphs more broadly, realizing that there are aspects which God has attributed exclusively to Christ and which no other person is called to try to use regarding the individual lives of others nor in their encounters with one another.

One of the central revelations of the Lord Jesus to His Church, and which was not part of the Old Covenant according to the law of Moses, is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of each one of the members of His Body, and yet, that each one, as a child of God, has personal, free, and direct access to Him, without the need for any other mediator.

It is not the purpose here to repeat the contents of the points already exposed in other subjects, so, at this moment, we only emphasize once more that **the healthy life of the Church of Christ is entirely dependent on the principle that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Only Head of each one of the members of His Body, but also of the collective actions of His Body.**

Many groups that call themselves Christians like to emphasize the theme of Christian unity, but we emphasize here again that unity among Christians needs to go through the understanding that it cannot occur where people are not in the condition that Christ is their Head, Lord, and King, for it is only through the Lordship of Christ in the lives of Christians that they can walk in truth and love that lead them to an appropriate unity of purpose and love, as also seen in previous chapters.

Therefore, **also regarding the unity of Christians, we may note that it, like the love between them, is not primarily in the relationship between them, but in that each one is united with the One Head of the Body of Christ.**

The love of God to love the saints and the sufficiency for true unity between Christians are in Christ, as the Lord Jesus shows us in His prayer to the Eternal Father on behalf of all who would come to believe in Him:

John 17: 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.

- 24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***
- 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.***
- 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."***
-

Unfortunately, when it comes to fellowship between Christians, there are people who want to get all their food and spiritual discernment from the meetings or encounters with others, and not from the source of eternal life that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is neither appropriate nor possible to be accomplished, for it is not the vocation of the Church, nor its meetings, to grant its members what each of them should obtain through a personal relationship with their Lord and Savior.

Christ is the Head of each member of His Body and of His Body as a whole. And the Church, through its members, is not a substitute for the Lord Jesus and which supposedly could assume what the Heavenly Father exclusively assigned to Christ.

Just as a person cannot be fed physically by what another person eats, so an individual who does not feed on Christ personally should not want to feed oneself through others of the food the Lord wants to give him or her directly.

- John 6: 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.***
- 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead: He who eats this bread will live forever."***

Therefore, **fellowship between Christians or members of the Lord's Church is a form of cooperation or an addition to the personal fellowship that each Christian should already be cultivating individually with Christ.**

Fellowship between those who are the Church of Christ is intended to support and admonish one another that none of them should personally walk away from the Lord and the continual fellowship with Him also to be continually provided first by the Lord.

Just as a father and a mother cannot feed themselves in the place of their children, no matter how much they love them and are close to them, so it is also in the relationship of Christians with each other.

Christians may meet to witness how beneficial the life of fellowship with the Lord of the Church is and how continuity in this fellowship builds and strengthens them. However, substantially feeding on the Lord is a decision and action that every Christian, ultimately, will have to do oneself before or in the Lord.

There are Christians who do not nurture a personal life of fellowship with God and the word of God, and consequently, they also do not expose themselves to instruction on how to live and walk personally *in Christ*. So, when they meet with other Christians, they are debilitated and hungry for spiritual food and think that the other fellow

believers are obligated or responsible for providing them with all their needs, not paying attention, however, to the fact that basically what the other Christians can do for them is to tell them about the source from which they feed and that they cannot feed themselves in the place of others.

Unlike what has been tried for centuries under the Old Covenant or priesthoods such as Aaron's or similar, in the New Covenant of which Christ is the only Mediator, every person who joins the New Covenant with the Lord is called to know God personally, as has been approached in the themes Letter or Life, Knowing about God or Knowing God, The Core or Central Principle of Life for a Christian, The Gospel, the Good News of God, and of which we recall the following text:

Hebrews 8: 10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."

First, the Christian life is a life *in Christ* or with God through Christ, and then with other Christians. And even if someone feeds on the Lord during an encounter with other Christians, it is worth emphasizing that also in this, it is from Christ that one becomes nourished, for Christ is also present among those who gather in His name.

When Christians share gifts that the Lord grants them to share with others, the Christians are only messengers or carriers of the gift that God is sharing, and they are never the source of God's good and perfect gifts.

In this way, **it is from Christ, the Head of His Body, that the whole Body is supplied, which is why remembering this principle is also a manner by which a Christian may encourage another to stand firm in the fellowship with the Lord.**

The Lord explicitly calls Christians not to allow anyone or anything to separate them from being supplied from the One who indeed grants the growth that comes from God.

Colossians 2: 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

The one who supplies each member of the Church of Christ is the Head, whether the members are in their personal activities in their homes, in their professions, or whether they are gathered in the name of Christ.

Who gives growth to a Christian is God.

Christians, therefore, are called to speak the words of the Lord to one another to encourage or even to admonish one another about the crucial importance of believing in Christ and the Heavenly Father. But once they believe in the Lord, it is from the Lord that growth comes to their lives as children of God.

*1 Corinthians 3: 5 **Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?**
6 **I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.***

There are Christians who have not yet experienced with understanding the personal provision of Christ for their lives, and so, others may instruct and encourage them in their faith to seek strength in the Lord, may show them the Scriptures in which the Lord promises to attend those who seek Him with faith, but always aiming for everyone to advance to feeding on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

On the other hand, there are Christians who are uninformed, negligent, or lazy and are unwilling to be in fellowship with Christ directly. And yet, some of these even dare to attribute weight to the others, saying that they must provide them with food, trying to attribute condemnation to others concerning what they themselves are neglecting.

Similarly, even though the Lord may come to count on Christians to share with others a prophecy, a word of knowledge, wisdom, or discernment of spirits, the instruction to apply in personal life what has been said is something that every Christian will need to be instructed in one's heart by the Lord through the Holy Spirit in the adequate moment in which one will need to practice what was shared with him or her.

The fact that a member of the Lord's Church has the possibility of cooperating with God to speak a word to another, or to others, does not constitute one who spoke the word of the Lord as a guide for others in their daily lives when they will need to carry out what the Lord has said to them.

*Isaiah 48: 17 **Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go."***

Thus, personally seeking the presence of God is also working in the work of believing in Christ, as the Lord has directed us to do, for instance, in the following texts:

*John 6: 28 **Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"**
29 **Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."***

*Colossians 3: 1 **If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.**
2 **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***

**3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
4 When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.**

1 Corinthians 11: 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

2 Thessalonians 3: 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work (or does not want to work), neither shall he eat.

Proverbs 20: 4 The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing.

We emphasize here only that the above text from Thessalonians, chapter 3, does not say that he who cannot work does not eat either, but he who does not want to work does not eat either. There are times of difficulties, struggles, and tiredness where a Christian needs more support from others, but unfortunately, there are many individuals who do not play their personal role and want to burden others, judging that the others are responsible for nurturing them spiritually.

In the subject on The Core Principle of Life for a Christian in the World, we mentioned that Christ told us that He is the true vine and that every Christian should abide in the vine, and not that the vine branches should seek to live dependent on other branches.

Some people understand that the Church is there to serve them, but they do not pay attention to the fact that if they indeed belong to Christ, they should also see themselves as the Lord's Church and that, therefore, they are, primarily and equally, called to have personal fellowship with the Lord and to serve others who also belong to Christ.

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

Several times we find in the Scriptures the expression *one another*. And *one another* is highly different from "a few in relation to many others."

Christ taught that He did not come to be served, but to serve. And similarly, He instructed His disciples to learn from Him *to serve one another* and not for some to be the ones who always put themselves in a position who want to be served.

The Church in which *people serve one another*, for example, is not a place where a family goes to be served and to let their children in the care of others while the parents sit down to receive what they think others "should" pass them on. This is not the Church according to Christ, for, to begin with, the Church is not even a place.

The mentality of going to a place to be served by a few who step forward is also a mentality of the Law of Moses and Aaron, under which people paid tithes of their crops and the increase of their livestock so that others would offer their sacrifices to God and speak of God to them, but whose law was revoked by God because it was not according to the so better covenant that there is *in Christ Jesus*.

In Christ, every Christian is called to serve “one another” for that which is useful in edifying the Body of the Lord, that is, those who are members of the Body of Christ.

The ***“effective working by which every part does its share,”*** first by abiding personally in Christ and then serving ***“one another,”*** is a condition that cooperates for the growth of the Body also as a whole.

Ephesians 4: 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.***

And if a person does not present oneself before the Lord or does not have fellowship with Christ to know what gift from heaven is bestowed on him or her, and how he or she can serve others by this gift, how may he or she serve others as a good steward of the manifold grace of God?

1 Peter 4: 10 ***As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.***

The little or the no abiding of each Christian in Christ in one’s personal life has undoubtedly been one of the central aspects of such a lack of love among those who should have a fellowship based on love, for since they do not approach the One from whom heavenly love comes, they also lack the relationship with the love of the Lord to be able to share it with others.

1 John 4: 7 ***Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.***

Thus, one of the principal collaborations that a Christian can give to other Christians is to continue presenting and declaring to them, in various ways, that faith and relationship with Christ is the Lord’s primary source of supply for everyone who is thirsty and hungry for the novelty of life from God and His heavenly kingdom.

And once the testimony that Christ is the primary source of the newness of eternal life is announced, it is also up to each individual to relate personally or have fellowship with the Lord indeed.

*John 6: 35 **And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."***

*John 7: 37 **On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."***

Nevertheless, how may a person who does not perform the practice of feeding on Christ witness to others about the benefits of this practice?

If someone personally does not feed on the Lord, is not nourished by His love, and does not walk according to God's will, how may he or she speak appropriately to others about the way of truth and the newness of life in Christ?

Before aiming for "better" meetings with other members of the Church of Christ, Christians, for instance, should also take steps of learning from the ants, as the following text shows us:

*Proverbs 6: 6 **Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, 7 Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, 8 Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest.***

A church, a group of people supposedly united in the same purpose, who think they have everything they need in the group or in the meetings, is an unqualified group before the Lord. It is a group that claims to act in Christ's name without feeding on Christ. It is a group that may come to think that it is rich in what people in this group have, without, however, sticking to the fact that the whole source of life does not come from themselves and that people dissociated from personal fellowship with Christ are subject to be compared to the wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Those who come together only claiming that they do it *in the name of Christ*, but do not do it around Christ and from living and walking daily *in Christ*, if they do not repent, are those that Christ said they are under the risk of being rejected so that they will no longer be declared as children of God before the Heavenly Father.

Remembering here the text of Revelation 3, **we may see that the essence that a person needs for eternal life and a life according to God's will is always first in Christ. And this is the proclamation that every Christian is called to make to one's neighbor, to one's brother or sister of the Church of God, through testimonies, words, songs, and teachings so that everyone is encouraged to personally remain united continually to the Head of the whole Church of the Lord, namely once again: The Eternal Lord Jesus Christ.**

Revelation 3: 15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

20 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."

C6. The Church of Christ Has Only One Husband

*2 Corinthians 11: 2 **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.***

Another way of expressing the condition of the Church of Christ having only one Head over each member of the Body of Christ is also to say that the Church only belongs to the One Bridegroom or Husband.

When he mentioned his work for the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist introduced himself as the friend of the bridegroom and clearly defined his position regarding his Lord, but also what was Christ's position concerning His bride, as follows:

*John 3: 29 **He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.***

Every Christian should know very well the concept that the Lord's Church is the bride of one husband, who is Christ.

In other words, **the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ belongs exclusively to the Lord of the Church.**

Just as a natural body is not made to have more than one head, so it is not accepted by the Lord that His Church comes to be divided and split into several parts, and so that several “bridegrooms” or “sub-bridegrooms” exercise dominion, even if partial, over her.

When people use the expression “the church of the pastor, the father, the leader, or the priest X, Y, or Z,” they affirm with their own mouths that the church they are referring to is not the Church of Christ, since, by this, they are saying that the group that they are associated belongs to their respective “bridegrooms” or “sub-husbands.”

Churches that belong to men or women, or in which men or women are on the forehead, are congregations or associations created according to them. And the people who are part of these institutions or churches, when they say they are meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus, act to shame the name of the Head of the One True Church of Christ, for Christians are not called to take cover from other men, women, or institutions upon themselves.

*1 Corinthians 11: 4 **Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.***

Churches or groups of people who join together for some purpose in common and who gather around human heads rather than Christ, but who insist on using the name of Christ for their meetings, are adopting more the posture of an adulterous woman

who wants to carry the name of a husband, but who lives in conformity with other companions, becoming a destroyer of the lives that come to her, as described in the text of Proverbs presented below:

*Proverbs 5: 1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding,
 2 That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge.
 3 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil;
 4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.
 5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell.
 6 Lest you ponder her path of life, Her ways are unstable; You do not know them.
 7 Therefore hear me now, my children, And do not depart from the words of my mouth.
 8 Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,
 9 Lest you give your honor to others, And your years to the cruel one;
 10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, And your labors go to the house of a foreigner;
 11 And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed,
 12 And say: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction!
 13 I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!
 14 I was on the verge of total ruin, In the midst of the assembly and congregation."*

The Lord Jesus Christ never committed Himself to guide and protect the churches that are of men and women and that are subject to them, for Christ builds the Church that is His or that is also His bride exclusively, remembering here again that the Church which Christ edifies are the Christians or the saints who are united with the Lord.

When churches of men and women go to ruin or shipwreck, it is not the Lord's Church that is going down, for being "assemblies, congregations, or institutions of men and women," it is their projects that are shaken.

The Church of Christ is the Church that is built on an unshakable foundation and concerning which the Lord Jesus alone is the Christ, the Eternal King of Righteousness and Peace, the Head of His Body, and the exclusive Husband or Bridegroom.

Many people have longed to take possession of the "Bride of Christ," the most beautiful bride in the entire existence of the universe. However, from the moment a group of people accepts to submit to other bridegrooms or other heads, they put themselves in a position to be disconnected from Christ and fall from the Lord's grace, as we are taught in the book of Galatians and already shown in the opening chapters on this subject.

Moreover, the Lord clearly warns that adulterers do not inherit the kingdom of God. And this can also apply to the adultery of those who defend and associate with groups that claim to be Christians, but who submit to other names and rulers who place themselves in a position of preeminence in these groups.

The Church or the Bride of the Lord, that is, the group of those who believe in Christ as their Lord, is beautiful, but the Church of the Lord is also mighty to the point that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her with their intentions of infidelity, for its Unique Husband watches over her and takes care of His Bride.

In the world in general, many people aspire to have the service and the strength of the members of the Church of the Lord channeled to themselves and their visions and projects, but concerning these, it is not up to a Christian to submit to them even for very short periods, as Paul well-exemplified below:

*Galatians 2: 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),
5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

In the world, many aspire to dominate Christians and subjugate them to their service under the supposed banner that they are called to lead the lives of other Christians so that these become more productive in their lives for the Lord, but, in reality, they do so with the goal of drawing people away from the fidelity to Christ Jesus to take from them what is not due to the despoilers.

*Matthew 24: 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.
24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.
25 See, I have told you beforehand.
26 Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.*

Those who want Christians to be their disciples, and not exclusively Christ's disciples, are those who aspire to have churches as "their brides." And concerning whom, the apostle Paul directs Christians to watch not to become entangled by them, for as voracious wolves they are not like the Good Bridegroom and Shepherd who takes care of His flock, but, instead, they are those who approach the sheep with subtle voracity and do not spare them from their destruction if they understand this as necessary to achieve their intent.

*Acts 20: 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.
30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.
31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

For three years, Paul warned Christians throughout Asia to watch concerning those who would come in among them. They should be attentive and refrain from those who would come to try to rob them of Christ to make them subjects of their own and of their congregations, institutions, or churches, which, in turn, are often presented as clothed in subtle cloaks to appear to be Christians.

If a particular church has a human head and who has the autonomy to preside over it, this church no longer expresses the bride who only has Christ as her husband. And already only because it has another commander, a Christian should not approach this church or remain associated with it if one has already done so.

The Lord Jesus Christ, many times, taught that if someone wanted to be great, if someone wanted to be the greatest among the fellow believers, one should be put to serve the others, one should be placed last, so that he or she does not exalt oneself above the others, showing that in His Church neither the position of primacy nor the mediation of this preeminence belong to human beings. (According to Matthew 20: 26 and 27; Mark 10: 43 and 44; Luke 22: 26; John 13, and Matthew 23).

The fellowship of Christians around the position of Christ as the One Head and Bridegroom is precious or priceless. Therefore, this fellowship is also worthy of being guarded with zeal and attention, for there are those who think they can take the Lord's bride for themselves and disregard the words that John the Baptist told us about the fact that the Bride of Christ is exclusive of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Christian should never depart from the position that belongs exclusively to Christ in one's life because one's protection against those who act against the Lord and who try to entangle this Christian is in one's personal abiding *in Christ*, where Christ is one's exclusive Lord.

Revelation 17: 14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.

Presenting Christians as being the Church, Body, or Bride of Christ expresses different ways to show what kind of association a person has with the Lord when one joins Christ through the New Covenant and so that no misleading proposal may drive a person away from “such great salvation” and “union with the Lord” granted him or her through the grace of the Heavenly Father.

2 Corinthians 6: 16 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."

17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."

18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

C7. Putting On Appropriate Spiritual Garments and Attitudes for the Encounters with Other Christians

When we come to approach specifically the meeting of Christians, in the sense that they come together as already being members of the Church of Christ, we find in the Scriptures that their encounters should strive for simplicity, but, on the other hand, those who aspire to meet for this purpose, should also come to understand that these meetings are not just mere casual encounters between Christians.

As an encounter held in the name of Christ or a coming together of people who belong to the Church of Christ, the meeting of Christians is not a mere social event or a mere being together with other Christians.

Although Christian encounters should look for simplicity concerning the natural aspects or should not aim for haughty or ostentatious things, the Scriptures teach us several very precious factors that Christians should keep in mind or the heart when meeting with fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, even before talking about Christian meetings such as the gathered Church of Christ or the meeting of Christians in the name of the Lord Jesus, it is also highly relevant for Christians to understand that their participation in these meetings should already start even before going to this kind of encounters with other Christians.

Although all the people who make up the Body of Christ are individuals who have already, through grace, at their disposal the provision of forgiveness of their sins before the Lord through the gift of the righteousness that God provided in Christ on the cross of Calvary, the Church of the Lord is also the set of people who were bought at the high price that Christ paid to allow those who believe in Him to be cleansed from their iniquities and filthiness.

Christ was faithful to the work on the cross to the end to redeem people from their life according to the flesh, law, and darkness. Christ is the living gift given by God as an expression of His love for every human being. However, Christ also gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice so that those who believe in Him may live in newness of life and, although still in weakness, may have postures or attitudes according to the righteousness of Christ that came to dwell in their hearts.

Therefore, **meeting with other Christians, in the sense of expressing the gathered Body of Christ, is an action that brings together people who, first of all, are loved by God and for whom the Lord has a great appreciation, which should teach us that every Christian should also have an appreciation for each of those who are born of God in or through Christ Jesus.**

Every person is highly precious before God, and every Christian should also know this in one's heart about oneself and each of one's fellow believers in Christ.

God shows no partiality regarding persons. God loves all His children. Christ did not shed special drops of His blood for some people specifically. When someone is *in Him*, Christ has no preference for the poor or the rich, the short or the tall, the men or the

women, the adults or the children, the old or the young, the able or the incapable, the prisoners or the free.

And if God, who is the Sovereign Lord over all, has such great love for each person, how much more should every Christian also not have one's fellow believers in Christ in appropriate consideration?

Thus, the focus of Christian meetings should not primarily be the meetings themselves, but the people who attend them.

A meeting of Christians around the name of the Lord should be a meeting where there is the esteem for God and where there is the esteem for others, as everyone being precious to the Lord.

1 Peter 2: 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Nevertheless, a Christian's due regard for other Christians is not something that is built only on meetings between them, for just as a person puts on natural garments before going to a meeting in which one will participate, so a Christian is also called by the Lord to meet with other Christians already dressed in the spiritual garments that God grants him or her.

We are not talking here about external and sophisticated clothes according to the world, but garments that are worthy for a Christian to always wear in one's life and which should also never be put aside when they meet with other fellow believers in the Lord.

Let us see initially, then, a text that instructs us about what clothes a Christian should wear and what garments one should also put on to be in the company of one's fellow believers:

Colossians 3: 5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.

Therefore, keeping the text above in mind, we may note that a Christian meeting or an encounter where Christians meet as the Church of Christ should, then, be a meeting of mutual respect, but which, to be a respectful meeting, also depends on each participant making personal decisions about how one wants to present oneself at these meetings.

Every Christian who wants to meet has the task of deciding whether one wants to present oneself clothed according to the domination of one's flesh or whether one wants to present oneself dressed according to the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which, in turn, expresses the same characteristics exposed in the last text above concerning what a Christian should have putted on.

Another way of exposing what we are trying to present in this chapter is what was said earlier about a Christian *abiding in Christ* and allowing oneself to be guided by the Lord as the Head of one's life, which may also be expressed as *putting on Christ*.

Romans 13: 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.
14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

The Christian meeting or a meeting where Christians meet as the Church of Christ is intended by the Lord to be a meeting where Christians already present themselves to this meeting clothed in the Lord so that they may walk worthily before God and other Christians, and not as meetings in which they think they can manifest the most diverse dissolute and inappropriate behaviors.

Considering that the gathering of Christians that is held in the name of Christ has the Lord's name as a reference, it aims to be a meeting of the Church belonging to Christ, and it aims to edify one another of those who were bought by the redeeming sacrifice of the Lord, it is also up to the Lord to define what the participants of these meetings should be willing to wear so that the purposes of their encounters may be achieved.

Recalling once again the text of Revelation chapter 3, we may note that **it is in the Lord that a Christian acquires garments to meet with the other fellow believers. And if one does not do so, one is subject to having the shame of one's nakedness exposed before others.**

Revelation 3: 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

With the same clothes that a Christian wants to be found by the Lord to have access to the tree of life and to enter the city of the Lord through its gates, one should also be willing to meet one's fellow believers in the Lord, since Christians, as being the Church of Christ, are also the expression of the Lord's heavenly city.

Revelation 22: 14 **Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.**

If in His position as Lord over everything and everyone, the Lord Jesus Christ knows how to treat people with cordiality, with love, even offering to have fellowship with them through an invitation for them to open the door of their heart to Him voluntarily, and not by imposition, how much more should not Christians treat other members of the Church of Christ in the same way?

If the Lord Jesus Christ does not invade hearts, it also means that a Christian should not want to invade the heart of another child of God to impose one's will and to exercise dominion over him or her.

Many people express a lot of anxiety about wanting to establish regular meetings with those they call brothers or sisters of faith, but it is not rare that they do not prepare themselves in advance with the spiritual garments that the Lord gives them for their lives and also for their encounters with other Christians.

Many individuals who claim to be Christians express a lot of anxiety about wanting a place to go or routinely meet, but, unfortunately, many of these do not routinely prepare to see their fellow believers with dignity, politeness, honor, and love, often letting animosities arise between them simply because they have not prepared themselves beforehand to meet with one another.

Some people go to meetings so-called Christian thinking of fulfilling an “obligation” of getting together, but they no longer realize that the goal is to get together with the fellow believers to love them and to be loved by them, having others in great honor.

By not preparing in their hearts to meet with other Christians, many people offend others and allow themselves to be offended, entirely going astray from the purpose that should be associated with their meetings.

If at some meeting a Christian offends another, it is possible that the quarrel might be put away by forgiveness. However, it is not because there is a propensity for Christians to forgive one another that they should be fleshly and offensive towards those who are part of the same Body of Christ.

Inclusive, if someone would be willing to make a poll on how many Christians consciously clothe themselves inwardly to meet with the other members of the Lord's Church, one would most likely be amazed at how many people would probably never even have thought of doing it.

Therefore, it is urgent to stress repeatedly that Christian meetings, as meetings of the Church of Christ and in the Name of the Lord, should be seen as spiritual meetings for which there are also spiritual garments that should be used for these occasions.

The Body of Christ is not a material body, but it is a *spiritual body*. And the ability of the members of this body to act appropriately, or according to the will of God, comes from the Lord who works all and in all.

The wisdom for Christians to act appropriately towards one another is not related to natural human capacity, which is why a person needs to put on what is offered to him or her from heaven also to relate to the other children of the Heavenly Father.

A Christian who knows the redemption that the Lord prepared for him or her while one was still a sinner should also know how to clothe oneself inwardly with humility and know that he or she before God is no more deserving of salvation than anyone else, for if one does not put on humility before the Lord, one will also not do it before one's fellow believers, carrying instead with him or her the Lord's resistance towards him or her when one goes to meetings with other Christians.

Both before God and the Lord's other children, each Christian is called to live and walk continually girded with humility and to treat with consideration those to whom proper respect is due.

1 Peter 5: 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

A Christian who has known the deliverance the Lord has given him or her from the darkness in which he or she found oneself knows that he or she has been the target of Christ's saving mercy. And just as one needed and still needs heavenly mercy, one should also conduct oneself in humility before other Christians to equally relate to other members of the Body of Christ through the mercy and grace of the Lord.

The Christian meeting, also called the meeting of the members of the Lord's Church, should be according to an external simplicity where no one is constrained by outward aspects, as we will see later. However, or at the same time, the Christian gathering should be a gathering where the highest virtues, which every Christian can put on, should always be in evidence and being expressed for the benefit of those who gather, for the virtues of the spiritual garments are equally available to all members of Christ's Church.

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

Revelation 19: 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.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Although there will be a great event in the future where all the members of the Church of Christ will be together for a joint supper with the

Bridegroom of this Church, it is every day, in every act of one's life, in the way a Christian dresses oneself to be with other Christians, and at each meeting that the Church of Christ clothes herself to be presented before her unique Husband, for Christians themselves are the Church that is also the Eternal Bride of the Lord.

C8. The Minimum Size of the Meetings of the Church of Christ and Their Simplicity in Natural Demands

Once addressed the aspect (1) that Christ is the Head of every member of His Body, (2) the only Bridegroom or Husband with preeminence over all the members of His Bride, (3) that Christians are called to be found clothed in the Lord or having put on Christ, an aspect also expressed by putting on the virtues of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and (4) that Christians are called to prefer one another in honor, treating them with kindly affection, mercy, and love, we may advance even more about some specific aspects concerning the meetings of Christians as a meeting of the Church of Christ and their conduct in these meetings or gatherings.

And one of the first aspects that might be important to note also to understand other points related to meetings between Christians, such as a meeting of members of the Church of Christ, is the number or amount of people needed for a meeting of Christians to be considered a meeting of the Church of the Lord.

Thus, depending on the number of people needed for the Lord to see them as gathering in His name or as the Body of Christ gathered together, we may observe that the meetings of the Church of Christ can be very simple and entirely devoid of special material structure for these meetings, for just two or three Christians who meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are already considered sufficient for the Lord to be in their midst or for the Lord to see them as a part of His Church that is gathered together.

Matthew 18: 20 "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Therefore, **a genuine Christian + another genuine Christian, gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is already equal to a “gathering” of members of the Church of Christ in which the Lord is among them.**

The fact that the Lord says that He is already among His disciples when two meet does not mean that the meetings of the Church of Christ should be limited to two or three people, nor that they should want to remain meeting with only one more Christian, but, on the other hand, it means that 1+1 is already enough to establish a meeting “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We remind here again that meetings do not constitute the Lord's Church. God's Church is the set of genuine Christians, whether they meet or not. The meeting is an action that the Church performs. And this, in turn, is recognized as a meeting of Christians in the name of the Lord Jesus whether it brings together many Christians or just two individuals who have Christ as Lord in their hearts.

Two or three do not need a temple to hold a meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus. Two or three do not need to establish clergy and laity. Two or three do not need to install leadership over one another.

“Two or three” shows us the simplicity that can be in the natural structural issues necessary for Christians to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the fact that the meeting mentioned in the previous paragraphs is “in the name of the Lord Jesus” also shows us, as we have already mentioned above, that even the meeting between two or three, as a meeting of the members of the Church of the Lord, is not a casual or social meeting, but it is a meeting to serve as cooperation for the edification of the members of the Body of Christ. And for this to occur indeed, there are also specific attitudes to be adopted.

Christians, of course, may have social encounters with each other. However, this type of meeting may not characterize a gathering or a meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus. Instead, a meeting in the name of the Lord is a specific coming together that also has the particular purpose of sharing specific aspects of the Christian life.

While the gathering of Christians, as a meeting of the Lord's Church, does not require any structural complexity, it, on the other hand, should also focus on achieving the purposes the Lord directs to be pursued by those who come together in His name, as approached in more detail in the next chapter.

C9. The Purpose of Christian Meetings and the Submission to the Spirit of the Lord Should Always Serve as a Compass to Gatherings of the Church of Christ in the Lord's Name

Even though the Church of Christ can meet under very simple conditions or that do not require complex structures, which hugely facilitates the meeting of Christians in the name of the Lord Jesus, there are some issues of order and purpose that the Lord instructs us to seek to achieve in these meetings, as exemplified below:

1 Corinthians 14: 26 **How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.**

Between the matters of order and purpose, purpose, of course, should never cease to be the main focus of Christians who gather together so that they do not come to believe that their goals for meeting as members of the Church of Christ would be order and repeat meetings.

The support of Christian meetings that do not target the purposes established by the Lord have no reason to exist in the way they are carried out and may become mere meetings to fulfill pre-established agendas. For lack of proper purposes, these meetings end up becoming little productive or even unproductive works, besides stealing the precious time of life of those who attend them.

The meetings of the Church of Christ should aim, clearly and objectively, at those purposes that support and strengthen the Christians who attend these meetings.

The activities of Christian meetings should not overlap the purposes for them to take place so that the principle of the Lord's freedom is not overridden by works and routines as if these were rules and laws to be followed.

2 Corinthians 3: 17 **Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**

On the other hand, also aiming to keep the focus on the purposes, it is worth emphasizing that the freedom of the Spirit that exists where the Lord is, is freedom according to God and not according to the behavior of human beings when guided by their flesh or their passions.

Freedom in the Spirit of God includes relying on God's provision so that lusts that militate against the will of the Lord do not prevail against the person who sets the goal to live and walk in the Spirit of the Lord.

Galatians 5: 16 **I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

17 **For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

...

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

A Christian who is subject to the Spirit of God also manifests the fruit of the Spirit of the Lord. And it is according to this guidance of the Spirit of the Lord that a Christian is called to behave when meeting with the fellow believers in the Lord. It is under this direction of the Lord that the instructions on the personal conduct in the meetings are taught in the Scriptures, and not to become rites, liturgies, sacraments, or actions to be practiced without the purposes being placed as the primary target.

Ephesians 5: 8 **For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light**

9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Moreover, also in the following text, we may see exemplified the importance of Christians walking in the aspects of the fruit of the Holy Spirit such as, for example, self-control:

1 Corinthians 14: 32 **And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.**

We emphasize here that the prophets mentioned in this last text do not refer to the type of prophets that there were until John the Baptist. They refer to Christians in general who speak some word of God, showing us that it is up to everyone who says a word from God to others also to keep oneself in subjection before the Lord and keep one's own spirit subject to oneself and the Lord.

People who seek the Lord and fellowship with other Christians should be received with love even though they have many weaknesses. However, this does not mean that each one may behave in front of others without setting limits of behavior for oneself, for all Christians are granted the same access to the Spirit of the Lord and to the fruit that results from living and walking in the Spirit, as already mentioned in the chapter on putting on the Lord for fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ.

Finally, in this chapter, to further exemplify that the purposes of the meetings towards the fellow believers are the reason for their meetings and that the activities of the meetings and the way to carry them out are described to cooperate with these objectives, we present below two texts from the Scriptures concerning which we suggest that the reader may carefully look into them to understand more particularly what are, then, the purposes listed in them:

Ephesians 4: 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.***

...

17 ***This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,***
 18 ***having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;***
 19 ***who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.***
 20 ***But you have not so learned Christ,***
 21 ***if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:***
 22 ***that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,***
 23 ***and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,***
 24 ***and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.***
 25 ***Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.***
 26 ***"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,***
 27 ***nor give place to the devil.***
 28 ***Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.***
 29 ***Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.***
 30 ***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***
 31 ***Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.***
 32 ***And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.***

5: 1 ***Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.***
 2 ***And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.***
 3 ***But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;***
 4 ***neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.***
 5 ***For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.***
 6 ***Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.***
 7 ***Therefore do not be partakers with them.***
 8 ***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light***

- 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),
 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.
 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.
 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.
 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.
 14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."
 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,
 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

- 1 Corinthians 14: 1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.
 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.
 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.
 5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.
 6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?
 7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?
 8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?
 9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.
 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.
 11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.

- 12 ***Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.***
- 13 ***Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.***
- 14 ***For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.***
- 15 ***What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.***
- 16 ***Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?***
- 17 ***For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.***
- 18 ***I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;***
- 19 ***yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.***
- 20 ***Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.***
- 21 ***In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.***
- 22 ***Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.***
- 23 ***Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?***
- 24 ***But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.***
- 25 ***And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.***
- 26 ***How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.***
- 27 ***If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.***
- 28 ***But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.***
- 29 ***Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.***
- 30 ***But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.***
- 31 ***For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.***
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When Christians come together for the purposes of the meetings in the name of the Lord Jesus, they will realize that only under the direction of the Holy Spirit can they achieve mutual cooperation with such noble goals that the Lord wants to accomplish in their midst. Only if they seek to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord will they be able to share with other fellow believers what comes from the heavenly kingdom for mutual edification.

Before Christians become so eager to express themselves in meetings, they are called to present themselves in submission to the Lord to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord in how to be instruments in the Lord's hand as needed by the Body of Christ and for what the Lord sees fit to be more necessary and profitable for His Church, and so that they may be helpful to the fellow believers rather than being inconvenient.

Ephesians 5: 18 ***And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,***
 19 ***speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,***
 20 ***giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,***
 21 ***submitting to one another in the fear of God.***

1 Corinthians 14: 26 ***How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.***

1 Corinthians 12: 4 ***There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.***
 5 ***There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.***
 6 ***And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.***
 7 ***But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:***
 8 ***for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,***
 9 ***to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,***
 10 ***to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.***
 11 ***But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.***
 12 ***For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.***
 13 ***For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.***

C10. You Come Together Not for The Better but for The Worse

1 Corinthians 11: 17 **Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

Although Christian encounters, as meetings of the Church of Christ, are for the purpose of mutual edification and witness to the world of their love for God and each other, if those who attend the meetings do not remain attentive, they may soon be found coming together not for the better but for the worse and even for mutual destruction, as also exemplified in the following text:

Galatians 5: 15 **But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**

The meetings of Christians or members of the Lord's Church, when held without dependence on the Spirit of the Lord, mutual love, and respect among the participants, may become meetings of severe mutual damage and profound sorrow.

Therefore, also at this point, noting first that Paul addresses genuine Christians as the Church of God whether they are gathered or not, and to whom he writes mentioning their meetings as one of their activities and not as a point that makes them Church, we may see that all members of the Church of Christ are called to be attentive to be prepared to meet other members of the Body of Christ, but also to learn to discern what tries to get in the way of healthy and edifying relationships with other members of the family of God.

Although some Christians have learned to meet adequately in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it may happen that over time they begin to become unaware of the proper purposes and behaviors they should cultivate in their meetings with other fellow believers, thus allowing aspects that are not suitable for meetings between Christians to begin to infiltrate their encounters, as exemplified in another text below:

2 Corinthians 12: 20 **For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults.**

In the text above, and as may also happen in our days, Paul shows us that over time some Christians were allowing their human attitudes to begin to take the place of the posture they should have in life according to the direction of the Holy Spirit and the fruit resulting from this direction, making their meetings become scenarios of disagreements instead of opportunities to be edified in the Lord.

Thus, as a first example, Paul shows us that some Christians began to go to meetings to drink and eat as if these meetings were aimed at fellowship around food and drink,

similarly to what happens in other celebration meetings held by the most diverse people.

1 Corinthians 11: 20 **Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.**

21 **For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.**

22 **What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.**

In the light of the fact narrated above and others similar to it, Paul, then, proceeded to teach that the gathering of Christians, as a meeting of the members of the Lord's Church, also called a meeting of the Lord's Supper, does not consist first of natural food and drink, just as the kingdom of God does not consist in drink and food but rather in the righteousness of God, in the peace of the Lord, and the joy in the Holy Spirit. Paul, therefore, further stressed that the matters of natural food or drink should not be a reason for fellow believers in Christ to create animosity and opposition to one another, a point also described in some of his other epistles, as exemplified below:

Romans 14: 15 **Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**

16 **Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;**

17 **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

18 **For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

19 **Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.**

20(a) **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.**

Thus, the Christian meeting *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, also called the Lord's Supper, is the fellowship of Christians with one another, in the sense of sharing the life or the gifts of Christ that are in all those who have received the salvation granted by the Lord through His work of offering Himself so that His blood was shed on the cross of Calvary and through which a person may have a covenant of spiritual life in the Lord. And fellowship between Christians should never seek to constrain someone who has limited resources to bring natural food to their meetings.

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

Natural bread and wine are symbols of true fellowship and not fellowship itself. True fellowship in the Lord is established in what the symbols point to and not around the figures themselves.

The fact that every Christian can have life in the Lord because of the forgiveness that has been provided by the blood of Christ, as a part of the gift of God's righteousness, is what allows this Christian to have fellowship with others who are equally saved in Christ. Thus, giving a testimony about what the Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ provide each person through the Holy Spirit is one of the points that effectively characterizes the fellowship between those who believe in the Lord.

It is not the serving of natural food or drinks to all participants in a meeting that makes a meeting blessed. The fact that Christians have their eternal guilt forgiven because of Christ's redemptive work on their behalf and that they are all children of God is what allows them to share what God has given them in their hearts to share with one another.

Moving forward, a second aspect that may play a role in making a meeting not for the better but for the worse is that people forget about whom, what name, or what banner they actually should come together.

The Lord Jesus Christ says that where two or three come together “*in His name,*” there He would be among them, giving no guarantee that He would be among the people if their meetings would come to be held in their name or of any other name, even if tens, hundreds, thousands or millions of people gather saying that it is a meeting of the Church of Christ that they are carrying out.

When Christians begin to gather based on the names of other people, even if they are the names of the first apostles, or of banners bearing the names of their leaders or the churches, institutions, or denominations that these leaders created, their meetings are directed to encounter the harvests of the fruit of the flesh, for it is by their fleshly actions that they start to walk or be guided, as mentioned in a few more examples below:

*1 Corinthians 1: 11 **For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.***

*12 **Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."***

*13 **Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?***

*1 Corinthians 3: 3 **For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?***

*4 **For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?***

*Galatians 5: 19 and 20 (part of the verses) **Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: ... hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

The principle of gathering around men and women or the banners they hold up for people to follow them, or to follow their intentions, make people follow and reap what men and women offer them, which is the fruit of the flesh, showing that this type of gathering is not only for the worse but that it even may lead people to become deprived of the heavenly kingdom.

When people begin to listen to other individuals and their institutions who do not follow the truth of God revealed in His Scriptures that Christ is the Only Mediator between God and human beings and that no Christian should look to other people as leaders, guides, pastors, teachers, or spiritual fathers of their lives, they start to abstain from feeding on Christ and begin to feed on those who they elect to nourish them. And, in turn, when they no longer feed themselves personally and directly from the unique heavenly bread and the only source of the newness of eternal life, they feed on what is carnal, opposed to God, and which, consequently, makes them also act more and more moved by carnal things or the fruit of the flesh, and not in conformity with the leading of the Spirit of the Lord.

Thus, as a third and a fourth aspect, we may see, respectively, that the meetings of submission of the many to a few people, leaders, or priests, and which are proposed to be carried out through the so-called services, are also equally not for the better, but for the worst.

As a result of the undue exaltation of some names of mere men and women in their supposed leadership positions of groups that advocate to be Christians, the principle that all Christians should submit to “one another in the fear of the Lord” begins to make room for the few unduly exalted to become the referential and rulers of the others, interposing themselves to the exclusive position of Christ over His Body, as already exposed in the first chapters of this material.

Once some propose or are willing to mediate (even if only partially) the relationship of people with God, contrary to what Christ and the Heavenly Father established for the New Covenant, these individuals are not faithful in offering what is coming from the Lord to the fellowship between their followers and, thus, begin to offer options for carnal things, which, in turn, generate “carnal fellowship” and which bring people together not for the better, but for the worse.

*James 3: 15 **This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.***

In their ambitions to seek to take positions that are exclusively pertinent to Christ or to try to place their fellow men in these positions, people highlight one of the main reasons why true Christian fellowship does not occur in structures that claim to be Christian but are governed by men and or women who want to head them.

In the context in which some want to overcome others and in which those who agreed to be submissive begin to enter into disputes in defense of those they follow and their doctrines or carnal foods, there is no way for true Christian fellowship to happen and neither is there on the part of those who become entangled in their contentions and disputes any attitude of readiness or attention towards those who want and seek the genuine Christian fellowship, which is only found where there first is fellowship with Christ, the Heavenly Father and the Spirit of the Lord.

1 John 1: 3(b) And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2: 1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Matthew 11: 25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

26 Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Unlike the humility that a Christian finds *in Christ* and in the lives of those who live and walk *in Christ*, men and women puffed up by their fleshly minds, or puffed up in their understandings, begin to propose the visions of their own corrupt minds with the goal of people following them. Driven by their inappropriate ambitions, many men and women claim to act in God's name but who, in fact, act to turn people away from Christ and the benefits or reward of the true provision of heavenly newness of life, holding meetings not for the better but for what is worse for those who follow them.

Therefore:

*Colossians 2: 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,
19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*

And yet as a result of “few subjugating others to themselves,” we emphasize here once again that following the presentation of their banners or visions, in an attempt to strengthen their names, those who present themselves with feigned humility also propose doctrines and services around themselves and what they preach.

The word “angel” also means *messenger*. And the *messengers* who advocate themselves worthy of being mentioned as the holders or the greatest of “their churches,” are also those who require worship to them or around them, their visions, and their actions that they impose on the people, even if, wanting to show humility, they say they are doing what they do for the Lord.

In their propositions, many even impose restrictions and severity on the body, such as fasting and the most diverse routine disciplines. However, none of this justifies them before the Lord, for they elevated their names or their visions beyond the measure that suited them and in contrast to the exclusive condition of Christ as the Head of His whole Church.

*Colossians 2: 16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,
17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

...

*20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations,
21 (Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,
22 which all concern things which perish with the using) according to the commandments and doctrines of men?
23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

*Matthew 7: 15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.
16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?*

*Isaiah 58: 4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.
5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth*

*and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD?
6 Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?*

When those who call themselves Christians are not moved to gather with others because of the love that comes from God and no longer do so to honor Christ as the Only Head and Husband of the Church, those who move them seek to surround or enclose them with agendas (feast days, meetings repeated in cycles as the movement of the moon is cyclical, Saturdays, or other similar days) or yet other so-called special events, promising them special food and drinks, for since the people who follow them are not taught to feed themselves personally and daily from the Lord, they live hungry and eager to see if they achieve something in their meetings.

In the New Testament, there is no support for Christians to join the idea of “worship services” like in the Old Covenant or to turn their Christian meetings into “performance of services or religious and ritualistic services.”

One of the texts that we have seen above more than once says “*when you come together*,” showing that the text speaks of Christian encounters of Christ's Church as meetings where everyone is equally members of Christ and may collaborate with these meetings, not mentioning the need of carrying out “performance of services” where some command the “services” and others follow them obediently led.

Let us look again at one of the texts that use the expression “*when you come together*”:

1 Corinthians 14: 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

The idea of “performing services” comes from the religious gatherings of people called pagans in ancient times or ceremonies performed under the law of Moses.

There is, therefore, no reference in the New Testament that the members of the Body of Christ should meet to “perform services somehow like the services in the old times,” where there were some that commanded the performance of services and some who follow the instructions of those who were leading them.

When the Lord calls Christians to come together, He does it so that, in submission to the Holy Spirit, they may share or give testimony about aspects of the Christian life to collaborate in the edification of one another, always doing it for the praise of the Lord.

In several versions of the Bible, before 1 Corinthians 14, verse 26, the editors added a title with something like "Order in Church Meetings" or "Orderly Worship or Service." However, we understand that it is also worth remembering here that titles included by

publishers that publish the bibles “ARE NOT SCRIPTURES OF THE BIBLE” or “THEY ARE NOT THE SCRIPTURE OF THE LORD,” they are only complementary comments that they added in their published material. And observing the text in reference and the verses that follow, we may see that in this part of the Scriptures, no mention is made of the idea of “*performing services or worship rituals.*”

The text of 1 Corinthians 14 mentions the expression “***when you come together***” and does not say “when you hold a service.”

Christ came into the world to take away the first priesthood, the Order of Aaron, and introduce and establish the priesthood according to the Order of Melchizedek, in which no one is called to serve on a human altar or in temples made by human hands. Christ showed the so-called first priesthood outdated so that those who would become Christians would not need the entire liturgical system of “services” nor the “services officials” like those of the times of the law of Moses or laws similar to it.

Hebrews 10: 8 ***Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law),***
9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.
10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.
12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 7: 11 ***Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?***
12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.
13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.
14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.
15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest
16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.

Instead of following the liturgies “officiated” by a few, as it is done in the “systems of holding services,” because the “services systems” do not perfect, in terms of conscience, those who “perform the supposed worship,” Christ introduced a way of relationship or fellowship for the members of His Body for them to share with one another what the Lord bestows on them for this purpose.

*Hebrews 9: 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience;
10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.*

The “systems that hold services” do not perfect people for various reasons, but also because those who come to the services do not need to put on the Lord's garment for the inner man, they do not need to put on tender affections of mercy and love for others, for because of the impersonality of the services, its participants do not need to expose themselves and indeed relate to others who also attend the same “services.”

Meetings advertised as Christian but that begin to emphasize the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, even if only in some of its points, are meetings not for the better but for the worse. No matter how intense they are, these meetings are for causing blindness, putting on the veil, and drawing people away from a living and continuous fellowship with Christ.

*2 Corinthians 3: 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.
15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.*

In the Order of Aaron, the priestly order under the law of Moses, the priests and Levites were charged with preparing all things for the “services” and had the task of mediating people before God and then teaching the people.

In Christ Jesus, however, all Christians can be called by God to mutually share with one another what the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, instructs them to share with other Christians.

On the other hand, as we saw in previous chapters, the fact that all Christians may participate in sharing with one another does not mean that there is no specific order, respect, and purpose in Christian meetings, which, once again, does not mean to say that the “system of holding services” officiated by the few is part of what Christ has established for the meetings of His Church participants.

Some people even come to think that the shift from “temple services” to “home services” is enough to adjust Christian meetings to God's will. However, it is worth noting here again that it is not the size of the meeting that determines the type of this meeting, but the form of the encounter and to what it is subject.

In this way, if a group that used to be in prominent temples is now coming together in houses but maintains the liturgies and "the services officiators" (pastors, priests, Levites, and so on), even if informally, this group has not indeed promoted a profound change, but only changed the location and size of a system similar to the meetings previously carried out.

Christ presented Himself as Savior to the world also to show how outdated, weak, and inefficient is the entire system of worship of Moses, the structure of the Levitical Order, or the functioning of the Order of Aaron, or similar to it, as well as the entire system of sacrifices, offerings, and tithes that were practiced in this old order so that

Christians know that the Lord does not ask them to do anything similar to this ancient way of trying to relate to God and those who have faith in Christ. (Topic widely exposed in the subject entitled The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

Therefore, **Christ presented the world with a New Covenant. Christ revealed eternal salvation and the way to the novelty of personal life with God or in God. However, Christ also introduced the possibility of a whole new collective way for those who believe in the Lord to come together in His name.**

The propositions of meetings as supposedly being of the Church of Christ, but which do not aim in practice to recognize the Sovereign Lord as the Only Head and Husband, Master, or Guide of those who are individual members of His Body, and who still intend to maintain some form of mediation of some people towards other people before God, even if only in the collective matters, they are opposed to the fundamental aspect of how each person should build one's life and, therefore, they are not coming together for the better, but rather for the worse.

*1 Corinthians 3: 4 **For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?***

...
*10 **According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.***

*2 Timothy 2: 19 **Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."***

The Lord has always taught that the relationship between Christians can be much simpler than the complexity that religious laws and liturgies have exposed.

Thus, it is necessary that the Church of Christ comes to know the fellowship that the Lord wants the members of His living Body to practice and remain in this fellowship so that they may remain firmly in its simplicity or *the simplicity that there is in Christ Jesus*.

On the other hand, as we have already mentioned, the fellowship of Christians is not merely the expression of the opposite of the formality of the rituals of the system of services; it is not the meeting of people where everyone does what each one wants to do. On the contrary, the relationship to which the Lord calls His children is a respectful fellowship in the Spirit of the Lord to collaborate with the Lord for the edification of all.

*2 Corinthians 11: 2 **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.***

*3 **But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.***

So, all these aspects of the fellowship of Christians when they come together are not recorded in the Scriptures to discourage them from practicing their meetings but are found in the Scriptures as examples so that they may enjoy the benefits and purposes that may be obtained from a fellowship for “the better of the Church of Christ,” from the relationship of Christians carried out appropriately, and for their good and edification by the Lord.

Here again, **we understand that it is worth emphasizing that Christians should be aware that meetings in the name of Christ also are meetings of a spiritual nature and, therefore, are also targets of opposition from the flesh, the world, and the darkness.**

If fellowship among Christians cooperates with their growth provided by God, divisions and strife cooperate with the weakening of Christians. And this is what oppositions to Christ want to do by trying to distort meetings carried out by God's children.

Some people want to take control of the lives of others as if they were their servants and want them to start living around the projects and personal ambitions they develop. And this likewise is undoubtedly not the fellowship around Christ.

Galatians 2: 4 **And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage).**

Therefore, concerning themes like those mentioned above, the Lord says to His children:

1 Corinthians 7: 23 **You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.**

Those who call themselves Christians, but want to remain in the practices of their personal and selfish interests, are equated with old yeast and of malice, which is why the maintenance of fellowship with these people may destroy and leaven a whole good lump. This yeast may corrupt a portion of the members of the Body of Christ who ignore the assault of opponents and who allow themselves to be entangled by the corruption of the old leaven, and which, therefore, is subject to the risk of even ceasing to be Body or Church of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15: 33 **Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."**

Romans 16: 17 **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

1 Timothy 1: 19(b) ... having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck.

Thus, the longing for an adequate fellowship with other Christians also includes the firmness in rejecting fellowship proposals with those who claim to be Christians but who actually live for themselves rather than living for the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we note the various texts of the Scriptures of God that are more specifically directed to the Christians encounters, we also find in them the following instruction:

1 Corinthians 14: 20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

In the Church of Christ, the system of human hierarchies is not accepted. In the Lord's Church, no person has special rights to have greater or lesser access to God than others, for the meeting of members of the Church of Christ is, and will always be, a meeting of those who through Christ became children of God and who are seen equally as fellow believers before the Lord.

Matthew 23: 8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi' (Master or Teacher); for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.
9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
10 And do not be called teachers (or guide, leader); for One is your Teacher (Guide), the Christ.

Christians are called to learn to discern in God or with the help of the Lord with whom they should practice Christian fellowship and with whom not, for without understanding, a person, even being a Christian, may become a fragile target for the approach of those who want to take him or her away from Christ to exercise an undue dominion over him or her. (A subject addressed more broadly in the materials on The Gospel of God's Righteousness and the Law of Understanding).

Hebrews 5: 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.
13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.
14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

A Christian needs an understanding both about aspects that are appropriate for the functioning of the Body of Christ when members come together and about what is not adequate for the members of the Church of the Lord, for there are people who want to be among Christians but who do not want to live as a genuine Christian.

Being a Christian, having a generous heart, and having a heart inclined to serve others does not nullify the need for discernment and spiritual understanding, for there are people who claim to be Christians, but who, because of their inappropriate individual inclinations and attitudes, may even cease to be worthy of the fellowship of Christians.

Some people want the benefits that come from Christ without a willingness to break with attitudes that are not according to a life in Christ or that are according to the flesh or wickedness. And to these, the space of fellowship should not be extended, for they want to come together not for the better but for the worse.

*1 Corinthians 5: 6 **Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?***

*7 **Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.***

*8 **Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***

*9 **I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.***

*10 **Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.***

*11 **But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person.***

The Christian's love is not a love without discernment, and it is not a love that rejoices with unrighteousness and sin, for love granted to a Christian is the love of God that is according to righteousness and the truth.

The love of God is bold and firm also for teaching a Christian to discern what does not come from the Lord and from what and whom one should even depart.

*1 Corinthians 13: 6 **(Love) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.***

Christians are called to become established on firm foundations so that they may grow in fellowship with each other. Appropriate principles and behaviors need to be known and practiced by Christians so that they may enjoy the great benefits that this fellowship may provide them.

Christ is the new and living way that God offers for each person to come to Him. However, Christ is also the One who revealed and made possible a whole new and living way for Christians to relate in the meetings they hold to be mutually edified in the Lord as the Body of Christ, principles from which Christians should never depart for their own safety.

Christ said: *I will build MY Church.* And although the Lord may do this also through mutual cooperation among the members of His Body, and indeed often He does so, it is always into Christ that a Christian should put one's eyes to discern what the Lord is giving him or her to share with others and what the Lord is granted through others to this Christian.

*Ephesians 5: 23(b) ... **Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.***

*2 Corinthians 10: 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.***

*1 Corinthians 2: 16 **For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.***

*Ephesians 4: 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.***

Yet as a final observation of this chapter, we highlight here that a broad explanation about the change of priesthood that occurred with the coming of Christ, and which also implies *a change in the manner or the law* regarding the way people may approach God, is described in the material on the theme entitled The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ.

C11. The Coming Together and the Collective Should Never Prevail over the Lord's Direction for Each Christian

Colossians 3: 16 **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

1 Peter 4: 10 **As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**

Fellowship among Christians aims at a relationship where each one of them should be willing to serve one another with respect and according to the gift that God has given them, but also with the awareness or understanding that there are limits in these relationships.

A faithful steward to God is not “lord” over those he or she serves. A steward distributes, shares, or passes on what the Lord instructs him or her to do, but this does not mean that one has the right to determine the course of life of those who the steward served.

The Scriptures explicitly teach us that each person will give an account of oneself to God, and, therefore, others may be instructed by the Lord to help them with some of their needs, but, ultimately, it is their individual decisions that will manifest the position of each person before God.

Therefore, among its main aspects, the fellowship among fellow believers should be focused on the encouragement they make to each other so that each one remains in the faith in God and the exaltation of the Lord so that all individually keep their eyes continually on Christ Jesus.

The fellowship of Christians has as one of its central points the cooperation so that everyone is strengthened in the Lord, the One who is all and in all, and the One who should be *the first love* of every Christian who is *in Christ*. However, deciding whether or not to follow a specific path is up to each person to choose through one's personal relationship with the Lord.

Similarly, a person should not be forced to meet with other Christians, nor should one be treated with threats when one does not do it, for not even the Lord Oneself compels a person to have a personal relationship with Him, let alone He forces a person to have fellowship with one's fellow believers.

Christians who have more recently received the Gospel may learn from more experienced Christians, bearing in mind that some of the latter may even come to be called elders because of their exemplary Christian life for more extended periods than those who have recently become believers in the Lord. And the elders, in turn, may admonish the younger ones, offering them the example of a life of faith in God and sharing the teachings of the Lord that are due to all Christians. However, even so, the

elders are not called to try to impose their will on the younger ones, nor the younger ones to make the individual decisions of their lives based on the elders, but on Christ.

What the Lord instructs Christians to imitate from Christians who are *faithful examples of faith in the Lord to others* is the very example of faith or trust that they place directly and individually in the Lord Himself, and not to see others as an option to become heads over their lives.

In the Church of Christ, everyone is instructed to seek growth in their One Head, Christ, and to seek to be guided by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. And this is what the more experienced should teach those who more recently received salvation from the Lord. And it is the instruction to “seek Christ personally and directly” that the more experienced ones suggest that the younger ones should follow.

And yet, just as some Christians should not try to prevail over others so that their will is fulfilled in their fellow men, so the whole group that comes together is not called to rise to collectively impose a majority's will on a minority or the life of a particular Christian.

Although some exhortation or warning of some more experienced people in the faith or some suggestion that arises from the collective may contain God's wisdom and teaching for a group of Christians, the personal decision to follow God's will is still a matter of a personal decision between a child of God and the Lord.

Romans 14: 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.

Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

...

22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

The thought of making the collective prevail over the individual is a concept of human assemblies and associations that establish their statutes and acts by vote. However, the Church of Christ is not a human assembly or association. The Body of Christ has a Head that reigns over it, and it has the Spirit of the Lord working in the hearts of each of its members to instruct and guide them in all truth.

C12. Guided by the Spirit of the Lord and Not by Handbooks or Human Creative Ideas to Fill the Time of Meetings

The appropriate fellowship of Christians can turn out to be very special and useful for their edification, for it works based on the power of God to accomplish something through His children and not on the natural capacity of the participants of the fellowship.

Therefore, as the Head of the Church, Christ may call whomever He wants and when He wants to cooperate with the edification of His Body. A point that also shows us that establishing a package of rules to control Christian meetings is not the Lord's desire for the members of His Church.

When the Scriptures instruct us to *let all things be done decently and in order*, they are not calling a few people to define what is acceptable as decent and orderly in a meeting and what is not, as if everything could be controlled by a tight set of rules. This behavior would rather be a return to the systems of pre-formatted meetings according to the Law of Moses and which never could or can perfect, as to the conscience, those who hold and who attend their services, as mentioned earlier.

If a person is exposed to a set of rules about what is or is not accepted in a meeting, one does not even need to learn what it is to do something decently or in order in the Spirit of God, for one may externally practice the required acts and yet in the heart to be distanced from God and the true direction of the Lord.

When people confuse “decency and order” with controlling what the participating people can and cannot do, instead of learning to rest in God, put on Christ, and let the Holy Spirit guide them, they too become subject to creating the most diversified rules of what should or should not be done in their meetings.

When people confuse “decency and order” with the imposition of control or actions they want to pre-define for a meeting supposedly “not getting out of control,” they start defining in their handbooks, for example, even the number of members that they find it ideal for composing their meetings, and even begin to determine where each member should go to participate in a meeting.

Nevertheless, the only instruction about the number of members that the Lord has established for the meetings of Christians, as a meeting of the Church of Christ, is the minimum number of two or three that meet in the name of the Lord, as we have also seen previously.

There are certain aspects to the coexistence of Christians and their encounters as the Church of Christ that the Lord, through the Scriptures, directs us to observe. However, going beyond what the Lord has already instructed us, and this intending to “manage” the move of God in His people, already moves towards a very different aspect, bordering on or being, in fact, an attempt to institutionalize the Church of Christ under the control of human rules and the managers of those rules.

What the Lord instructs every Christian to do is to have Christ as His Head, to be in fellowship with the Holy Spirit to be guided according to the working of the Spirit of the Lord, and not according to the flesh, and to put

on the Lord and tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering.

That is, **the Lord calls each Christian to live and walk as a Christian is called to do, which, in turn, requires teaching, patience, and love for everyone to learn from the Lord to do it and voluntarily be willing to do it, and not rules that systematize the meetings in repetitive liturgies, rites, methods, or actions that in some cases are even often pre-rehearsed.**

An individual might be highly skilled in following disciplines or rules and excel others in this respect. However, this person may still be filled with envy towards others and contempt for those around him or her, thus gathering together not for the better but for the worse despite outwardly following the established rites.

The Lord does not long for people who are orderly outwardly and who maintain an appearance of godliness but who are hypocrites about what is in their hearts.

*Matthew 15: 7 **Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:**
8 **These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.**
9 **And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.***

And after people incline their hearts to want to “manage” God's meetings with their human codes and rules, soon these codes of conduct also serve as their traditions and doctrines, leading people to follow the handbooks and norms of their congregations instead of following Christ, also conducting their meetings to be encounters according to human precepts instead of meetings of the Lord's Church held in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ indeed.

*Mark 7: 8 **"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."**
9 **He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."***

On the one hand, the coming together of the members of the Body of Christ is not meant to be an encounter of a liberal and unbridled outpouring of the passions of people's souls and flesh, but, on the other hand, it is also not meant to be a coming together restricted by the dominating and disciplinarian controls also created from the human fleshly mind.

*Galatians 5: 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.***

*Galatians 4: 9 **But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?***

*Romans 6: 14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.***

The Lord does not ask Christians to seek creative ideas in their carnal minds for their meetings with other Christians, nor does He ask them to restrain people's participation with controls and an iron fist. Instead, the Lord calls Christians to live and walk in the Spirit so that, when they meet as the Lord's Church that comes together, they may know how to relate to each other under the same direction of the Holy Spirit.

*Galatians 5: 16 **I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.***

...
*25 **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.***

*Ephesians 4: 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.***
*4 **There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;***
*5 **one Lord, one faith, one baptism;***
*6 **one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.***
*7 **But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.***

In reality, no Christian distanced from the guidance of the Holy Spirit knows how to behave in the encounter with the other fellow believers of the Body of Christ. Therefore, the search for the definition of precepts or rules to beforehand define how everything should happen in their meetings is not something for which the Lord called Christians.

“Decency and order” are the result of the Christian's inner life with the Lord. It results from modest apparel in the inner man who remains firstly and continuously in fellowship with God. And when some members of the Church of Christ turn away from proper behavior towards others, it is the return to the simplicity of placing themselves in humility before Christ and His Spirit that should be remembered and exposed to them.

*Romans 8:13 **For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***
*14 **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

+

1 Corinthians 12: 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

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1 John 1: 7 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.

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1 John 4: 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

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.

C13. The Love that Spreads Itself and Gives Testimony of God's Love for All in Christ Jesus

The theme specifically addressed in this material in no way intends to cover all aspects of fellowship between Christians in the world, for this would be something impossible to do because of the very dynamics that exist in life itself and the diversity of situations that may occur in the relationship between the members of the Body of Christ.

There are many texts in the scriptures that address the subject of the relationship of Christians with their fellow believers in Christ. Therefore, **the present material aims to awaken the attention of Christians so that they may have fellowship in high esteem and start to see this matter with love, but also with more zeal and prudence.**

There are many benefits pointed out by the Scriptures as associated with the Christian's fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ, and there are also many practical aspects described in the Bible about it.

And loving the fellow believers in Christ should not be an effort for a Christian who remains in Christ, for the love with which the Lord asks him or her to love the other members of the Body or Church of Christ is a gift that is granted to him or her beforehand by the Christian's abiding in God.

When the Lord instructs a Christian to love those who are also part of His Church, it is more in the sense of teaching him or her not to allow hindrances to get in the way of this love and to teach him or her that one should allow that love deposited in one's heart also express itself in a practical way to the other children of God.

John 17: 26 "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

1 John 4: 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.

1 John 4: 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God love his brother also. (NKJV+AV)

Saying that a Christian should also love one's fellow believers in Christ is teaching about practicing something that already has been placed in the Christian to be manifested, for many people may have come from situations where they were not taught about the greatness of the Lord's love and, perhaps, they were even taught that loving one's fellows is a demonstration of frailty or weakness.

Nevertheless, **to love is not the expression of something powerless, for love is the expression of what God is. And when someone loves one's fellow believers, one multiplies the mighty and righteous manifestation of the Lord on behalf of others also throughout one's life and despite one's own natural weaknesses.**

2 Corinthians 4: 6 ***For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***
7 ***But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.***

Furthermore, we understand that we could not conclude this material without recalling at least one more central benefit of the love that the Lord grants to His children, and which is the perfecting of the operation of God's love in the heart of those who are also willing to practice the love of God towards other members of the Lord's Church so that the practice of this love also contributes to the revelation of the love of the Heavenly Father towards those who do not yet know Christ as the Eternal Lord.

So, finally, the point that we would also like to emphasize here again refers to a text already mentioned above and which shows us that **the love of Christians for the Lord and between them still cooperates with the expression of the love of God before the world so that those who do not yet know Christ as the Redeemer of their lives may also know that God's love is equally offered to them in Christ Jesus**, as we can see again below:

John 17: 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.***

Fellowship with other Christians may often prove very challenging. However, when God's provision to practice it is understood, when it is understood that fellowship for the better depends on a person allowing God to pour love for others into one's heart, and yet that loving one's fellow believers in God can contribute to the salvation of people of the world, those who love the Lord certainly will also rejoice in fulfilling the call to love those who are also born of God and who together constitute the Church of Christ.

The love of Christians for one another is a reflection of God's love working in them for their benefit and the relationship between them. However, the love of Christians for one another is also for the world to

know that Christ is the gift of redemption and newness of eternal life offered by God in love for all people and for the salvation of everyone who believes in Him.

- 1 John 4: 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.*
- 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*
- 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*
- 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.*
- 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*
- 19 We love Him because He first loved us.*

- 1 John 1: 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*
- 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*
- 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*
- 7 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.*

- 1 John 1: 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life;*
- 2 (the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us)*
- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us;*
- and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

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Note on Biblical Texts referenced:

- 1) The biblical texts without explicit indications of reference were drawn from NKJV Bible, as indicated below.
- 2) Highlights in the biblical texts, such as underline, bold, or similar were added by the author of this study.

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