

How to Benefit from the: **Means of Grace**

The corporate means of God's grace to His church are four-fold: preaching, prayers, fellowship and the Supper.

Acts 2:42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The church doesn't always reap the benefits of the Spirit's ministry to us in corporate worship. It is my hope this little booklet will assist us. This is designed to accompany the preaching of *Acts*.

Beloved, each Lord's Day, the Spirit of Christ condescends upon us in love to give more of the saving and strengthening grace of the covenant. Do avail yourselves of this amazing ministry and be blessed!

Heaven soon,
Pastor Gabe

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To Benefit From Preaching

WHAT DOES THE SCRIPTURE SAY?

Like the other means of grace, preaching seems so common or ordinary, right? But when we go to God's word, we see He chose the preaching of the Word to be the main way He saves and sanctifies.

Paul writes of this in 2 Timothy 3:1. He sets the conditions for the ministry of the church:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

The situation in the last days is grave—sin abounds, sinners prosper and violence spreads over the land. How does Paul instruct Timothy (and us) to handle this?

*^{3:16} All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

Preach the word for it is the power for teaching, reproof, correction and training. Preaching empowered by the Holy Spirit is the tool of the church to live in and thrive in these last days of darkness.

Preaching is very important! There is no other ministry of the Spirit quite like it. This makes our interest and openness to the preached word very significant!

In the Reformed faith, we have believed the biblical preaching of God's word *is* God's very word to us. The emphasis of preaching in the Lord's own ministry (Mark 1:38¹) and that of His servants (e.g., the book of *Acts*) indicates it is very important that when we come to corporate worship, we are **ready to hear from God** through His preached word.

John Calvin, in commenting on Isaiah 55:11 wrote:

The word goes out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goes out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as his instruments.²

Calvin observed of the people of his day (the mid-16th century) that if a sermon was preached to 100 people, only 20 would receive it by faith and be edified by it. The rest would dismiss, ignore or be distracted by other things. In the mid-16th century!

So, how can we in our time be prepared to be most greatly edified and God most glorified?

PRINCIPLE 1. We must have a **prepared** spirit. In other words, we need to be ready to listen up! We should remember three things.

#1: God has something to say that we need to hear.

We all like to hear what we all like that hear. In other words, too often we think we know *best* what is needful for us and so we minimize what others—especially God—might have to say. But only our Creator and Redeemer knows us perfectly and can provide for us what we truly need to flourish and glorify Him. This happens in preaching.

#2: As saved human beings, each Sunday we bring our souls *and* our flesh to worship—that means we bring the war to worship.

¹ And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

² See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 4:11.

In Romans 7:15-16, Paul makes it clear the soul saved by grace wars against the old man that remains.³ This is true at all times but *especially* in corporate worship. We must be ready for it: we *will* have moments of distraction, of fatigue or disinterest. These are normal but they must be battled—God speaks to us in preaching: He sets forth the path of life and we must hear it.

#3: Realistic preparation is critical. A prepared spirit, therefore, is a praying one, a realistic one, one that desires to hear from God. But also, we recognize our spirits come in physical bodies that need adequate *sleep* beforehand and proper *nourishment* for the moment. Beloved, be intentional and prepare.

PRINCIPLE 2. We must have a **perceptive** ear. The biblical preaching of God’s word is God’s word to us. As the Scriptures are unpacked, we must be listening to it. We must strive to follow its logic. We need to pay attention to the key words, Bible references and sermon points.

Each passage in God’s word was specifically selected by the Holy Spirit so that when the preaching of *that* word happens, the Spirit intends for each of us to be impacted.

Each of us has a need to be taught by the Spirit (informing our minds), moved by the Spirit (impacting our affections)—even if the preacher’s work is less than it could be (e.g., boring or confusing) the Spirit is *still* at work.

1. That is, there is something for us to hear no matter how challenging it might be to discern. Stand ready with pen and paper to hear His instruction.

PRINCIPLE 3. We must listen to the word with the **people** of God. Before armies go into battle the commander parades in front of the

³ “¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

whole unit exciting them to fight together, to fight for each other, to make the sacrifices of the man next to you worth your own.

It would be one thing for the commander to speak to a rifleman or a swordsman or a bowman to exhort him to courage. But that won't win the battle: armies must hear the charge and fight together!

When we sit in the midst of the covenant community and hear the preached word together, it is a corporate call to action not simply an individual mandate. The Spirit advances the point of the message in the midst of the congregation and He does so with power.⁴

Hebrews 3:12-15 tells of the power of the preached word in the corporate congregation. Notice the corporate words in **bold**:

*Take care, **brothers**, lest there be in any of **you** an evil, unbelieving heart, leading **you** to fall away from the living God. But exhort **one another** every day, as long as it is called “today,” that **none** of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For **we** have come to **share** in Christ, if indeed **we** hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, “Today, if **you** hear his voice, do not harden **your hearts** as in the rebellion.”*

PRINCIPLE 4. We must **practice** what is preached. This is critical. We do this when we how of and learn a new skill: we practice it to make it second nature.

It is the charge of the preacher to lead the congregation from the meaning of God's word to its application. Yet, each of us must be committed to put what is preached into action whether the preacher leads us there or not.

Why would God preach His word to us through the preacher if He did not want us to apply what we hear? Applying the text is the Spirit's work and His goal yet it is ours to partner with Him to see

⁴ This is why “virtual church” isn't church: the Spirit who condescends upon the congregation to bury the word preached acts differently than when a sermon is viewed online or heard via podcast.

it done. He will give us the insight and the power to do so—He is committed to the glory of Christ and He will lead us.

To Benefit From Corporate Prayer

Corporate worship is a “dialogue” of grace between the Lord and His people. When we consider the liturgy of Lord’s Day worship, we find this back-and-forth between the Lord and His people:

Call to Worship: the Lord invites us

Invocation: we respond asking for His presence

Singing: we praise His name

Affirmation of Faith: We affirm what we believe

Confession of Sin: We confess our sins

Assurance of pardon: He reminds us we are forgiven

Community Greeting: we pass peace to one another

Giving: We give to His work

Scripture Reading: He reminds us of His mission

Corporate prayer: We ask for His help

Preaching: He tells us how to live

Lord’s Supper: He gives us sustaining grace

Benediction: He sends us on mission

The Lord *acts* and we *react*—this is the dialogue of worship. Worship is so much more than a performance we view or words we say; it is an active interaction with the Lord where, in the end, He multiplies His grace to us.

Corporate prayer is in the midst of our worship where, in response to His words of assurance and word of instruction, we seek His help. He has long woven this intimacy into His worship. Jesus entered into the Temple expecting prayer and He found something else. He then cites a prophecy from Isaiah 56:

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants...these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

The Lord intends His people from all nations to draw near to Him corporately because He plans to meet them in their prayers to provide for them and bless them. When the apostle Paul lays out healthy congregational living in Romans 12, he says:

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.⁵*

Before investigating corporate prayer, what is **prayer**? The WLC 178 answers, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit; with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.”

1. Our desires: “We are to pray for all things tending to the glory of God, the welfare of the church, our own and others’ good; but not for anything unlawful” (WLC, 184).
2. In the name of Christ: “In obedience to His command and in confidence of His promises, to ask mercy for His sake not by just mentioning His name...but by His mediation” (WLC, 180).
3. By the help of His Spirit: depending on His prayers for us (Rom. 8:26-27), leaning on Him for wisdom for our praying and depending on Him to make our prayers fit for God’s throne room.

What then is **corporate prayer**? This is praying *church* desires in the name of Christ by the help of His Spirit during the Lord’s Day worship.⁶

More than simply a prayer offered in the corporate gathering, it is prayer led by the elders on behalf of the needs of the church and the glory of Christ through the church.

Corporate prayer as a way God has chosen to draw near to His people is important for church life—**why**?

⁵ Plural verbs!

⁶ It is one of the four means of grace the Spirit has given to the church. See Acts 2:42.

PRINCIPLE #1: to teach us we are part of something larger than ourselves. The many exhortations to pray in the Bible include private prayer, but the Bible also tells us God always gathered His people together to pray corporately because we are a single *people* not just a gathering of many *persons*.

There is precedent for this!

- a. Moses (Exodus 15).
- b. The high priests in Israel (Leviticus. 16:21).
- c. The nation under threat (e.g., Judges 3:9).
- d. The psalmists called the people to pray (see the Psalms of Ascent: Pss. 120-134).
- e. King Solomon dedicated the Temple (1 Kings 8).
- f. this was the practice of the early church (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:31⁷).

In corporate prayer, we are reminded in His covenant of grace through Christ, God is saving *a* people not simply *some* people.

PRINCIPLE #2: That God might draw near to us **as** His people. This is related to the first principle: in corporate prayer, the elder gathers the assembled church together and, with one voice, utters the concerns of the whole; he is the spokesman on their behalf.

He meets with the Lord in a hand-off: to Him, he gives our concerns and hopes as His people. In return, the Lord puts promises in the hands of the church (John 14:13-14):

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

When the people assemble themselves to pray, we demonstrate to God we belong to Him as a corporate body. We united ourselves with each other in His name—we affirm our place in His Body.

How do we do it?

⁷ “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

PRINCIPLE #3: There are some steps to take in common with private prayer. When the elder gets up to pray, that is not the time to check your phone, take a nap, get a snack or take a bathroom break!

We are being summoned together as one people having chosen a spokesman to pray on our behalf—we give ourselves to those moments wholeheartedly.

PRINCIPLE #4: In cooperation with the elder, we might agree out loud or in our minds with what is prayed. Knowing that the elder speaks for us and on our behalf, we work hard to “squeeze our minds” so that each word prayed becomes our prayed words; concentrate on them; respond to them; join them.

Beloved, actively join in the corporate prayer during worship. As God’s beloved people, He hears. He is pleased. He will act.

To Benefit From Covenant Baptism

In the history of the Reformed faith, covenant baptism didn't simply function to unite a Christ-confessing person (and his children) to the church—that's true. Using the waters of baptism, the Lord declares "This one belongs to Me." That is a great and precious promise! The sacrament of baptism is also a means God uses in corporate worship to call us to (or back to) living in a way a baptized person should live: a faithful Christian.

PRINCIPLE 1: REVIVING OUR FAITH

What is "covenant baptism"? Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* defines baptism as a:

Sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church (1); but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace (2), of his engrafting into Christ (3), of regeneration (4), of remission of sins (5)...

Unpacking this, the baptized are:

- 1) In the covenant community of the church
- 2) God's by a gracious and irrevocable covenant
- 3) United to Christ
- 4) No longer dead in our sins
- 5) Purified from all transgressions

We have wonderful gospel promises in these four statements! Every time someone is baptized these truths are proclaimed and we have the opportunity to have our confidence in who we are revived. It is easy to forget what the Lord has done for us—the Supper is one great reminder but so is baptism. Baptism tells us we are no longer of the world but of God's kingdom no matter what we feel!

It was great Reformer Martin Luther who, when he was beaten up by the devil, the world or his own sins would say to himself, "I am a baptized man!" Baptism was God's marker on him and it was precious.

PRINCIPLE 2: IMPROVING OUR WALK

The *Confession's* definition of baptism continues...

...and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life (6). Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world" (WCF 28-1). And, "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents are to be baptized (7)" (WCF 28-4).

In other words, when someone is baptized, he or she is brought into the covenant fellowship. Normally, this is done by taking vows: the one who expresses his faith in the Lord declares so along with his pledge to live in a manner worthy of being identified with Christ. For the parents bringing a child to baptism, they take vows to raise him in a manner that will provide many opportunities for the child to pledge his faith and fealty to the Lord.

Three things are true, then:

1. Baptism is a *once-for-all* sacrament that takes the baptized person into the covenant community
2. To be in the covenant community brings the blessings and the obligations of that community
3. Every baptism reminds those who are already baptized about those commitments

This is why the Puritans would speak of "improving" our baptism. Turning to the 2nd Helvetic Confession (Swiss, 1566), consider what that means:

Moreover, (a) God also separates us from all strange religions and peoples by the symbol of baptism, and (b) consecrates us to himself as his property. We, therefore, confess our faith when we are baptized, and (c) obligate ourselves to God for obedience, mortification of the flesh, and newness of life. Hence, (d) we are enlisted in the holy military service of Christ that all our life long we should fight against the world, Satan, and our own flesh. (e) Moreover, we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all

members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services.

In this paragraph, several duties are incumbent upon those who are baptized and those who have been baptized.

(a) Separation from the world

The waters of baptism separate us from the unbaptized. We are no longer “of” them but are “of” a different people. “Improving” my baptism then means:

- Does my lifestyle more closely resemble the world from which I was saved?
- In what ways have I consented to live that are inconsistent with my confession?

(b) Consecration to the Lord

The necessary 2nd step of separation from the world is consecration to the Lord. “Set apart” is another way to consider this. “Improving” my baptism means:

- The Lord has bought me with a price: do I live as if I belong to Him?

(c) Obligation to mortification (put to death) and vivification (make alive)

To wear the waters of baptism signifies that one has been washed clean from sins by the blood of Christ. “Improving” my baptism means:

- Am I regularly “putting to death the deeds of the flesh” (Colossians 3:5)?
- Am I putting away those things that provoked the wrath of God: anger, malice, wrath, slander or obscene talk (Colossians 3:8)?
- Am I putting on, then, as God’s chosen one the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-14)?

(d) Serve in spiritual warfare

The world, the flesh and the devil compose the triumvirate of enemies to the people of God. The apostle Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God:

... that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

“Improving” our baptism means we are:

- Standing having fastened on the belt of truth;
- Having put on the breastplate of righteousness;
- As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.
- In all circumstances taking up the shield of faith;
- Wearing the helmet of salvation;
- Wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;
- Praying at all times in the Spirit

(e) Work for the spiritual welfare of the church

This is wonderfully captured in the PCA membership vows #'s 4-5, which are about “improving” my baptism:

- Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
- Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to pursue its purity and peace?

Each time we celebrate a covenant baptism in worship, we have both the opportunity to remember the grace of God that has made us part of His covenant community and the obligation to “improve” our baptism and thereby always receiving more spiritual benefit.

To Benefit From The Lord's Supper

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

The Lord's Supper is an indescribable gift He uses to impart His grace to His people—as we eat by faith, He gives us grace. This has been the understanding of the Reformed churches for centuries.

This is *not* the only way the Lord's Supper has been understood. In baptistic denominations, the Supper merely reminds us of what Christ has done for us; we eat to remember but it is *our* action. God doesn't give us anything except mindfulness of what Christ is done—whatever benefit there is to our souls is based on what we have created in our contemplations of the body and blood of Christ. Others have taught that as we eat, we eat His body and blood and so He is re-sacrificed for us once again.⁸

These are vastly different ways of looking at the Supper and, as a result, participation in them. How should we approach this means of grace?

PRINCIPLE 1: WE EAT BELIEVING HE IS GIVING US GRACE

The grace He gives us is *not* saving grace—we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But the **way** we received grace at the Supper is the same: by faith.

When we first came to Jesus, we *believed* the truth He told us in His word, right? We had faith it was true so we made it our own and we were saved.

- When He told us He forgave us: we believed Him.
- When He told us we were adopted as children of God: we believed Him.

⁸ This is the Roman Catholic view. They have taught although the bread and cup still taste as bread and as wine, their “substance” has been replaced by the actual body and blood of Christ. We eat the “accidents,” that is, what we experience with our senses, but the “substance” is His body and blood. The Lutherans believe something closely related.

- When He told us we were no longer condemned by the law: we believed Him.
- When He told us heaven belonged to us as a gift: we believed Him.

So, when He tells us He gives us grace at the Supper table how do we receive it? We *believe* Him—it's the same! We have faith that as He's promised He'd do, He'll do it even if it's just through morsels of bread or cups of wine.

Let's consider two principles based on Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11:29:

*For anyone who eats or drinks without **discerning** the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

Properly “discerning the body” is key to receiving the maximum grace in the Supper.

PRINCIPLE 2: LOOK TO JOIN WITH HIM SPIRITUALLY

The Bible teaches that our eating is far *more* than a remembrance and far *less* than a feasting on Him physically but it is still focused on the Body and Blood of Jesus!

He has chosen to commune with us by His Spirit as we eat the Supper. We meet with Him spiritually. First Corinthians 10:16:

¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

First, when we eat and drink by faith, we “participate” in Christ. Think of incense or a strong candle as an analogy. When one of these is lit and burning, when you walk into the room we take in the smell: this is a “participation” or “sharing” or “joining” in the scents. For the one coming into the room to smell it, he can't ignore it but will “join” in it.

In an analogous way, at the Table, when the people of God eat—eager to receive from Christ by faith—He blesses us by

giving us participation *in* Christ, a joining in Him.⁹ The “aroma of Christ” is present and those who eat by faith take in a full measure of it. That is, they open the flow of God’s grace given at that moment by the Spirit.

In this sharing by faith, He gives us fresh outpouring of His grace by His Spirit—not to save, but to comfort, to strengthen, to revive. He refreshes the *sign* of our salvation and reinforces the *seal* of it. This work happens in our souls when we eat by faith, that is, eat trusting He is acting on our souls, giving us grace.

We are awakening ourselves to the reality that we are communing with the Risen Christ through His Spirit in which He gives us more of Himself. Am I prepared for this?

- Have I cleansed myself anew in His blood—seeking forgiveness that I might enjoy full fellowship?
- Am I eager for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit—looking for it?

PRINCIPLE 3: LOOK TO AFFIRM OUR PLACE IN THE CHURCH

But secondly, in verse 17, Paul reminds the church we eat of the same loaf. The Lord’s Supper isn’t a private meal or a meal that we would eat together where our focus is only on “me and Jesus.”

In that moment, we who are *many*, are *one*—one body, one people, one holy nation: the Body of Christ.

¹⁷Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Paul He anchors this truth in the fact that there is only one loaf—a figurative reference to the one Bread of Life, Jesus Christ (John 6:35, 48¹⁰). Because we are united to Him by faith, that we are a

⁹ As an analogy, in chapter 6, Paul warns the church not to “join” with a prostitute, to become “one” with her. He is warning them similarly here on a spiritual level.

¹⁰ “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”

Body and *not* just bodies in the same room, when we eat the Supper we must reckon with our engagement with our brothers and sisters.

We are awakening ourselves to the reality that **together** are communing with the Risen Christ through His Spirit in which He gives us more of Himself. Am I prepared for this?

- Have I joined this body of believers?
- Do I take an active part in her worship and work?
- Am I giving my time, talents and treasure to uphold her mission?
- Am I reconciled with others? Have I asked for forgiveness as I should've? Have I granted it when asked?
- Do I speak well of her and invite others to join her?
- Do I treat the Body in ways the Lord does (e.g., Ephesians 5:25-27¹¹)?

Engaging in “discerning the Body” like this will open the gates for the fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit by the Lord of the church.

We do both of these things—commune with Christ and with each other—by faith. And when we do, we open ourselves up the blessed ministry of the Spirit. Therefore, we must ask the Spirit to help us believe and trust that as we eat and drink, He acts on our souls.

To Benefit From Fellowship

Our corporate fellowship is a means of grace. From the dawn of human history, God judged isolation as “not good” (Genesis

¹¹ “Husbands, love your wives, **as** Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

2:18¹²). Interestingly, man was *not* alone—God was there. Still, God created us to be in community with Him and with each other.

The implications of this are beyond the scope of this short note.¹³ However, in Acts 2:42, “fellowship” is listed alongside the three other means of grace (preaching, prayer and the Supper [the sacraments including baptism]). Since this is true, let’s consider the purpose and the practice of corporate fellowship as a way the Lord gives His people grace.

PRINCIPLE #1: THE PURPOSES OF FELLOWSHIP

When the Lord saves us by His grace, He makes us a part of His Body, the Church. Many places in God’s word speaks to the importance of this union together.¹⁴

#1: to bring different people with a common Savior together as a single church family

For the six days prior to the Lord’s Day, we choose with whom we associate. There are times when life requires we associate with someone we do *not* choose (e.g., a teacher, a janitor, a policeman or a barista) but for the most part, we order our week around relationships we choose. Whatever benefit is gained in these acquaintances is serendipitous—*almost* accidental.

- But then, the Lord’s Day arrives and we are brought into the midst of the people *God* has chosen as our family.

These people may have some history with you, but not like the close friends you choose. Because God has chosen how He constitutes the church’s population, we are in the midst of those with widely varied personalities, backgrounds, interests, fears, joys

¹² “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone...’ ”

¹³ Ecclesiastes 4 reminds us, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.... Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

¹⁴ For example: for witness: John 17:21; for ministry: 1 Cor. 12:7; for vitality: Ephesians 4:4; for grace in the Supper: 1 Cor. 11:29.

and hopes. These are incredibly important to our individual spiritual lives. The Lord has worked providentially in the lives of all His people and then He puts us all together in a mish-mash that doesn't seem to make much sense to us but is purposefully done by Him.

We don't know all of what will be found in these relationships but God has so ordered His church that what we will find is *more* of His grace through the union of our differences in Christ our common Lord.

#2: for corporate worship

Hebrews 10:19-25 presents us with very important points to consider:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and ²¹since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Our High Priest is ministering on our behalf in the heavens because He has offered the single sacrifice (10:12) that opened up the doorway for the people of God to come in. He has perfected us (10:14) and now this is the foundation for the call to worship in verse 22, “let us draw near with a true heart...” Having saved each of us from our sins, we gather together to enjoy the saving work of Christ as His people.

God has always gathered His people together so we can celebrate His saving work together—this more glorifies His saving work than if we were to remain isolated.¹⁵

#3: to grow us spiritually as a church family

¹⁵ In a similar way a larger crowd at a rally brings more “glory” to a speaker than a smaller one; the size of the gathering is an indication of the impact and importance of the speaker.

He gathers us from all walks of life into one body to celebrate our common salvation which *then* grows us spiritually as a church.

Back to Hebrews 10:23-25...

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

You see the connection between our corporate gathering and our growth in “love and good works?” When we embrace this holy mish-mash as God’s providential plan for each of us on the Lord’s Day, we open ourselves up to be both *helped* and *helper*. These are the two sides of every Christian: the need to be helped (2 Corinthians 1:6¹⁶) and the obligation to be helper (Hebrews 3:13¹⁷).

Only the Lord knows what each of us truly needs and the person who shall assist us in that time—this we find in the fellowship of the saints. As the Spirit works in the corporate gathering, He orchestrates the help we need and those we need to help. In the fellowship of the Lord’s Day, the grace and mercy we must have in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16¹⁸), God provides *through* the ministry of His people.

PRINCIPLE #2: THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP

How do we do this?

#1: regularly attend Lord’s Day worship.

This is obvious, right? There is no way to receive from the Lord what He makes available in corporate worship if we do **not**

¹⁶ “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”

¹⁷ “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” This text unpacks further the point made in 10:24.

¹⁸ “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

go. “Streaming” the service is often a blessing when needed but it is no substitute for the corporate, in-person gathering. We do not gather with our family which means we do not worship the Lord as His people, we are not able to be helped and we do not help others.

The typical American who claims to follow Christ comes to church 1.3 times a month! That is hardly evidence of a love for God and His church. And, it works against all of the goals of the Lord for the people of God—we must make attendance a priority: our souls depend upon it.

#2: God has placed us together so we can be helped and we will find that help in the fellowship of the saints.

The Lord’s Day corporate gathering is where we are introduced to other believers. While there are some opportunities to pray together or to build relationships, time is often limited. So, Life Groups, Bible Studies and other outside gatherings are also important opportunities for fellowship.

But, where would we find those relationships that can assist us in our walk of faith with the Lord outside of the corporate gathering?

Corporate worship is where God arranges you to be helped and for you to help. This is accomplished when we make coming to corporate worship a priority. Then, when we greet each other; when we ask about each other’s’ weeks; when we seek ways to engage in prayer; when we share our own requests; when we smile at each other; when we are honest with each other.

#3: God has also brought us together so we can help a brother or sister.

Beloved, we mustn’t treat corporate worship as just any other gathering of people! Christ’s Spirit is active in our intentional pursuing each other. When we’re joyful in the Lord, be prepared to share encouragement. When we’re struggling, be prepared to be honest and ask for prayer. Recognize that if you belong to Christ, then you are His Spirit’s agent to bring grace and mercy to another—take advantage of this on the Lord’s Day; it is the Day

He has chosen to do this. In *Acts*, each time the early church gathered with intentionality, wonderful things happened (see Acts 2:43-47 and 4:31).