

THE Christ CONNECTION

"I am the *vine*. You are the *branches*. If anyone remains *joined to me*, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without me."

Adult Bible Study

Part 4: Connected to Serve



INTRODUCTION

In our last three sessions we have studied how Jesus Christ connects with us based on the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. We have discovered our Christ Connection is established by being created both through and in Jesus Christ. This bond is strengthened by the fact that Jesus became human in order to save us. This strengthened His connection to us. Finally, we have learned that Christ maintains and sustains this relationship through His body, the Church. The Church is where we hear God's Word and receive the Sacraments. Each of these actions is initiated and completed by God. God creates us, God sent His Son, who willingly became like us, and God gives and sustains our faith. We make no contribution in either establishing or building these connections. It is all a gift of grace.

IN THE WORLD

Many of us have heard the phrase, "A Christian is to be in the world, but not of the world." It may surprise you this exact phrase is not found in the Bible.

Look at John 17:13-15 and 1 John 2:15-17.

- How might we interpret these passages in light of being in, but not of, the world?
- In what ways are we to be in the world?
- In what ways are we to be not of the world?

Paul's definitions of what was created and the Body of Christ are the background for referring to the Two Kingdoms. The kingdom of earth is all things created. The kingdom of God is our relationship with God because of Jesus. The kingdom of earth is ruled by coercion and force, and the kingdom of God is ruled by the Gospel and grace.

- What common Church difficulty is Paul addressing in these passages?
- These passages use the body to show how the Church should function. How is that supposed to be?
- Does your place of worship function as the Body of Christ. Why or why not?

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Christians are the only ones who move between the Two Kingdoms. Although we've been told to be a witness for Jesus Christ, it is not our only job on earth. We are also used by God in our every day walks. Our vocation is the principle way in which this is accomplished.

Vocation means different things to different people. Parenthood is a vocation, as is being a carpenter. Being the sponsor of a child in baptism is a vocation, and so is being an attorney. We are God's instruments in the kingdom of earth. God provides for the needs of others through us. He blesses us to be a blessing. Our vocation gives us the freedom to serve God as who we are and where we are; it is our calling. We have all been given the gift of vocation.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17

- To what life have you been called?
- Which vocations are you fulfilling at this time?
- How have these changed over your lifetime?

Return to our theme passage, John 15:1-5.

- How might your interpretation of these verses change if you consider vocation?
- What fruit is the Christ Connection producing through you?

Both Jesus and Paul emphasize the equality of believers. Each branch of the Vine is important as long as it remains connected to Christ; every body part's contribution is essential to the well-being of the whole. Paul calls us out for our tendency to attach more importance to certain gifts, while diminishing others. We should not judge other believers based on their contributions, gifts, talents or abilities.

- What cautions against this type of behavior are found in the above passages?
- In what other ways are we tempted to judge others in the Body of Christ?

CONNECTING TO OTHERS

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:4-12

- What guidelines does Paul establish for the Christian life?
- How do these guidelines compare with the practices of Christianity in the modern world?

Our vocation determines many of our earthly interactions. It inevitably affects those He has placed around us. A Christian has no accidental relationships!

Read Galatians 6:1-5

- How can we justify the apparent contradiction between verses 2 and 5?
- How does bearing another's burden help us bear our own?
- How does bearing our own burden help us bear those of others?
If you feel comfortable sharing specific examples, please do.

Reread John 15:5

- What are some of the greatest needs you see in our world?
- What are some of the greatest needs you see in your community?
- What are some of the greatest needs you see within your congregation?
- Is the job of ministering in your congregation distributed throughout its members?
Why or why not?
- Do people with disabilities have the chance to minister to others in your congregation?
Why or why not?