

The Essence of the Church: Gospel – Witness – Partnership

We've begun the first three weeks of 2022 considering the Essence of the Christian faith. The Essence of our faith is about identifying the key characteristic of who we are and why we exist, determined by that which identifies, defines, and characterizes our daily life. This is the key issue that I have wanted to address in this series. We began with the Gospel, the power of God to save and through which we receive both our identity and commission. We then looked at two ordinances that Jesus gave the church to define our witness, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Today we consider what our third characteristic, Gospel Partnership.

Whereas water baptism identifies a person who has been made new by the faith in Jesus through the gospel. Gospel Partnership identifies a person with God's people for His mission in the world through Covenant Membership. Baptism should be followed by Church Membership. Just as you publicly identify with Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord in baptism, so you should identify with a local body of believers as your spiritual family. When you are baptized into Christ, you are baptized into his people. [Covenant Membership in a local church demonstrates among the world what God has done for you and how you are united in partnership with His people to take the gospel to all people.](#)

Gospel Partnership: The Purpose of Covenant Membership in the Church

MPS Christians embody life together through gospel partnership to bear a faithful witness and serve God's Kingdom mission as the Church.

OBJ Every person can understand the purpose of Covenant Membership by **Four Embodiments** of Gospel Partnership.

ILLUS **Disembodied Future** We are quickly moving to a disembodied existence in this world, where you can be with anyone without being with anybody. Now we typically think about the way social apps have stripped us of most all interpersonal skills and ability to relate. And that is true. But we have moved much farther than only failing to inhabit our bodies because we are distracted by smart phones. As Facebook continues its advance to take over reality, it announced recently the METAverse where you create your own reality and interact purely on your terms, or how you want the world to perceive you.

In his new book Post Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought And Culture, Christian scholar Gene Edward Veith Jr. shows the progression from humanism toward a disembodied existence in transhumanist world when he writes,

"The secularist ethical ideology that prevailed through most of the modern era was humanism, the quasi-religious exaltation of humanity. You don't hear much about humanism any more. Human beings, after all, are destroying nature, cause wars, and are radically limited. They have bodies and will eventually die.

Humanism today has been replaced in cutting-edge circles by transhumanism. The goal is to go beyond being merely human. This will be accomplished when human beings are merged with machines. The goal is to become a posthuman. As a transhumanist website explains it: Posthumans could be completely synthetic artificial intelligences, or they could be enhanced uploads, or they could be the result of making many smaller but cumulatively profound augmentations to a biological human. The latter alternative would probably require either the redesign of the human organism using advanced nanotechnology or its radical enhancement using some combination of technologies such as genetic engineering, psycho-pharmacology, anti-aging therapies, neural interfaces, advanced information management tools, memory enhancing drugs, wearable computers, and cognitive techniques. . . . Radical technological modifications to our brains and bodies are needed. Again, the body is expendable, something to overcome with technology."¹

TRANS It sounds ridiculous in one sense, but it is NOT far-fetched!

We now live in a world where young adults eschew any permanency to life, opting rather to remain in perpetual movement to "capture as many gold coins" (Think: "video games") as possible (aka life experiences), and any investment of actual revenue is more likely to purchase virtual real estate in the METAverse for virtual-experiential immersion over real dirt.

¹ Gene Edward Veith. Post Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought And Culture. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), p134-135.



What I propose today is an absolute, radical diversion from this billowing “transhuman Tsunami”. Embody this life to the fullest to demonstrate the goodness and grace, and redeeming power of God in this world that tells us of the hope we have for eternity. Get a job, get married, buy a house, plant a tree and mow the grass, make babies, a whole gaggle of them, and raise them to love Jesus and walk humbly in obedience to Him in this world! And right in the middle of this embodied existence, partner with other Christians to reveal the greatest glory of God’s revelation, redemption through Jesus Christ. We do not have to escape this world for hope. **Christians have an eternal hope IN this world that speaks beyond this world; it’s NOT virtual but eternal, reality-defining; it’s not about escaping this world but overcoming it; it’s not about avoiding death but conquering it; its not about becoming transhuman but believing in the One who is God and Man, Jesus Christ.**

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Philippians 1:3-11 records Paul’s remembrance of his partnership with the Philippian church that was defined by the embodiment of them partaking of God’s grace together, which spurred his prayer for them to abound more and more in God’s love through Jesus Christ. Paul’s remembrance is a testimony to how the gospel embodies a people as the church.

OBJ The ESSENCE of the church is made visible by **Four Embodiments of Gospel Partnership** that define the purpose of Covenant Membership.

1. Gather regularly under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to display and build UNITY. Eph 2:19-22

In Ephesians 2, Paul teaches how the gospel breaks down dividing walls between people to make us one in Jesus Christ. He shares the “blueprint” for the church when he states,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” **Ephesians 2:19–22**

When a person comes into God’s Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ, they should join with a local church to embody the reality of God’s eternal Kingdom. When we gather regularly, we display our oneness that forms our corporate witness in the city. **From a Biblical understanding, the principal expression of the local church is the regular gathering of the body.**

The church is identified by the One under whose name they have been identified and gather. Last week we looked at two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is the public act that represents the spiritual work of identifying with Jesus in his death and resurrection. When a person identifies with Jesus through baptism, they should also identify with a local church to live as one of God’s people. This is why we require believer’s baptism for covenant membership. Every person who is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized. **God is building us into One, every person who is baptized should unite with a local church to embody the gospel under the Lordship of Jesus among people in the world.**

Gather regularly WITH the Church AS the Church, because this whole world is pressing toward transhumanism by a removal from any in-person existence. But God said, *“it is not good for man to be alone”*. **The unity of the body in our regular gathering in Jesus’ Name is the strength of the church’s witness.**

2. Hold a faithful, gospel doctrine in all preaching and teaching. Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 6:3

From the beginning of the church in the book of Acts, the preaching and teaching of a faithful gospel, doctrine was primary for the church.

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

Acts 2:42



When the church holds to a faithful gospel, doctrine, its people embody that doctrine. Paul exhorts the Philippians, “*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” As you submit your life to the authority of God’s Word, through the regular preaching and teaching of it, your life is shaped by the Word.

Paul sends Timothy to Ephesus to guard against anyone teaching false doctrine.^{1Tim1:3} **Why?** Teaching false doctrine, or allowing it to be taught, leads to practicing false Christianity, entertaining myths, genealogies, ideologies, and succumbing to the ideologies, and the myriad of deceptive worldly philosophies that abound. He goes on to tell Timothy to teach and urge these things so that no one will be captured by false doctrine. And, if anyone does teach doctrine that is contrary, warn the people to have nothing to do with them.^{1Tim6:3} Church leaders must “*hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*”^{Titus1:9} so that they can “*teach what accords with sound doctrine.*”^{Titus2:1} Faithful gospel doctrine is the way one applies the whole counsel of God’s Word to any and every aspect of life to glorify God, exalt Christ, redeem people, and serve His Kingdom mission of gospel proclamation in the world. [Faithful, gospel doctrine forms the faithful witness of our message that fuels our mission by forming the lives of the people in Christ’s likeness.](#)

3. All Serve and Speak for the growth and maturity of each one. 1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:12-16; Col 3:16

Paul most succinctly articulates the purpose of our serving, and our dependency on one another, in his writing to the Corinthians and Ephesians.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:12-16

When the church embodies the gospel, we exist in serving for each other. We are not anyone’s savior, but under His Lordship we serve to see each person become more like our Savior. And our serving is not only confined to what we do, but first in what we say, or how we speak to one another. Paul writes to the Colossians,

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

This is not about a hyper-spiritual culture built from talking weird. This is about a people who serve one another by the way they speak to one another. We reject empty platitudes and vain cliches. We build one another up by reminding, instructing, admonishing, correcting, and encouraging one another with words of the faithful gospel doctrine to which we hold. [Every personal encounter among the church is divinely ordained to be one of gospel embodiment for God’s people to grow and mature.](#)

4. Partner to send the gospel to our neighbors and the nations. Matt 28:18-20

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he provided his marching orders for the church until His Second Coming. Making disciples is the mission of the church. And what we do in our “Going” to make those disciples is the very momentum that produces more disciples that go from us to multiply the Kingdom work. The best way to make disciples of all nations is to make sure we are careful to know who the disciples are that are being made among us. The gospel calls us out of a false, individualistic Christianity to partner with the local church to see the gospel advance. And as Paul states, gospel advancement naturally grows out of our shared partaking of grace and abounding more and more in Jesus’ love. [Gospel partnership in the local church embodies God’s love in Jesus Christ to see that love go to all the nations of the world.](#)

Covenant Membership in the church today is one of the most downplayed, dismissed and derided doctrines of the church. And it is no wonder when you see the progression of the world towards a disembodied transhumanity. So. We’ve substituted them for entertaining crowds, validated them by synonymous messages cloaked in Christian lingo, and trying to show people how the God can give everything the world promises. There is no doubt, Jesus gathered crowds, but He never



confused them with nor substituted them for the church. Crowds are easy to gather. Congregations demand warfare training to build.

ILLUS This last week I read of two large churches, one of which was called “the fastest growing church in history.”, whose pastors made the headlines for personal sin. One resigned for an extra-marital affair, better known Biblically as adultery. When they brought in the accountability board, they were all other pastors from outside the church. The second pastor was taking a “one-month sabbatical to refresh and return” because a dozen staff members resigned, accusing him of sexual immorality with multiple ladies in the church. He and his wife filed for divorce back in May. People were frustrated because there was no leadership structure in the church to hold him accountable or remove him. Neither are biblical, which means that neither are churches, according to Biblical teaching.

APPL LPC Membership Covenant

According to the Bible, you are not part of a ‘church’ if there is no expectation or standard for leaders or members. To say otherwise is to dismiss clear Biblical teaching. And there is no way around that. And one may ask, “Of all we are going through in today’s world, is Covenant Membership in the church really worth spending any amount of time talking about?” As the church disintegrates in unbiblical practices, and as the world migrates to dis-embodiment, the gospel embodiment of the church will become a more vital witness for the hope and reality that transcends this world that people hunger after.

APPL Three Questions for Every LifePointer to Ask / Answer every week.

1. [PRAY] Who am I praying for for more Jesus; for salvation, growth, or obedience?
2. [INVEST] Who did I meet today that is not to LPC, and how(who) can I help connect them with?
3. [ENGAGE] Who did I speak to today to encourage and build up?

Christians embody life together through gospel partnership
to bear a faithful witness and serve God’s Kingdom mission as the Church.

CLOSE Just as Jesus was “the Word become flesh”, so the local church embodies the gospel among the world for the witness and gospel impact among the nations, calling all to repent and believe in Jesus.

