

February 12th, 2017

—The Church—

## THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH PT. 1

Psalm 16:1-3

Thus far in this series on the church, we have looked at the meaning, the mission and the ministers of the church. This week and God-willing next week we are looking at the members of the church. Specifically, we are asking the questions “What is Christian community? What is it supposed to look like?” What expectations should we have concerning how we relate to each other? The Bible speaks glowingly about the unity of God’s people.

**Psalm 133:1** “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”

**Psalm 16:3** “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.”

Paul writes to Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:4** “As I remember your tears [Why did Timothy cry? Because he was being separated from Paul], I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.”

To the church in Thessalonica, Paul said that he prayed “...most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face.” (**1 Thess. 3:10**)

The Apostle John said “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” (**2 John 12**) John’s joy was not complete, when he was separated from God’s people.

### **The Heavenly Community**

We were made to be in community. Christian community is patterned after the mutual delight and joy that the Father and Son and the Spirit have always enjoyed. Community is not an accident. It has been part of the plan of God for as long as He has been God. And when we truly experience it, oh the joys that we taste. We are strengthened, refreshed, reminded of God's grace through Jesus Christ, filled with delight, and energy and innumerable other riches.

### **The Heartbreaking Community**

And yet, there is almost nothing messier than being in community with one another. We modern Christians can often have this romanticized notion about the first Christian community in the book of Acts. 'If only we could go back there, then we would have real and satisfying Christian community.' Remember after that first sermon Peter preached, thousands put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and we read that "all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people." (Acts 2:44-46) No doubt, this type of community is satisfying and glorious. But we forget everything else in the book of Acts while these things were happening. The scandal of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. The racism and neglecting of widows in Acts 6. The murder of Stephen in Acts 7. The ravaging of the church by Saul in Acts 8. The controversial Jerusalem council, and the ministry split of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. And on and on and on.

### **The Community of Confusion**

And so we live in this incredible tension. Community can be both heavenly and heartbreaking. There are two mistakes that we can be guilty of when we consider the Christian community. The **first mistake** is that we can adopt an idealized view of Christian community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the

German Pastor who shepherded the underground church during the Nazi regime said this in his classic book on Christian community called *Life Together*:

“Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it has sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian...is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try and realize it... But God’s grace speedily shatters such dreams...we must be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves...Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God’s sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.”<sup>1</sup>

How ironic. Only when we begin to be disillusioned about the church will we begin to understand what we ought to be.

The **second mistake** is that we try to build our community around something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ alone is what unites the saints together. He is our common unity, that is, our *community*. And our community will stand or fall based on we view ourselves in Christ. What is the foundation of our belonging to Jesus? All Protestants will affirm that we have been justified by faith alone. Meaning, that our sins are forgiven, and we have been given an alien righteousness—Christ’s righteousness, and all of this is received by simply trusting Him for it. “...to the one who...believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (**Romans 4:5**). All Protestants ought to affirm that. And yet when it comes to community, we often forget it. We move from that ecstasy of Acts 2 into the rest of the book, and we are perplexed. Why are we perplexed? Because we have forgotten the gospel. We have forgotten that the only reason why we belong to Christ is because of what He did. And that forgetfulness of the gospel is how Christian communities fall apart.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Trans. John W. Doberstein, (New York, NY.: HarperOne, 1954), pg. 23

## *The Big Idea...*

The communion of the saints rests upon our common union with Christ, and any other foundation will destroy the communion

- ☆ Our Union with Christ
- ☆ Our Communion with Each Other

### I. Our Union With Christ

#### **The First Adam**

None of us are born naturally united to Jesus Christ. We are naturally born enemies of Jesus Christ. Our natural union is with Adam, the first man. Scripture says that his "...one trespass [Adams's sin] led to condemnation for all men." (**Romans 5:18**) This is what is wrong with the world. This is why we see civil unrest, terrorism, and racism on the nightly news. This is why we feel guilty. Because we are sons and daughters of Adam.<sup>2</sup> God appointed him to represent the human race, and when he sinned, we fell with him.

#### **The Second Adam**

But God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to be the second Adam. Jesus came into the world to conquer the sin and death that the first Adam brought. Where Adam disobeyed God, Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed. Where Adam failed to save his bride Eve from the devil, Jesus Christ perfectly saves His bride—the Church—not only from the devil but from death itself. This is what Jesus accomplished in the gospel. He took on everything that we deserved—the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the damned. And we get everything that He deserves—a perfect record of righteousness,

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<sup>2</sup> He is the root of the human race, and we are the fruit. "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 51:5

peace with God, and everlasting life where we will experience the fullness of joy and pleasures at His right hand forevermore (**Psalm 16:11**). We receive what He deserves *if* we believe Him.

### **What is Biblical Belief?**

What does it mean to believe in Christ? It means that you entrust the most valuable possession that you have—your soul—to His safekeeping. It means that you simply come to him and say “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” What else? Don’t I have to show myself worthy to this God? Don’t I have to prove that my affections are hot enough, or that repentance is sincere enough, or that I will love Him like He deserves. No. You will never have hot enough affections for God. You will never feel bad enough for your sin, and you will never love God like He deserves. That’s what Jesus did for you if you believe. Jesus calls out to you: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (**Isaiah 55:1**) Do you hear that? “He who has no money, come, buy and eat!” Jesus is saying ‘I’ve already paid for sin fully. You can’t pay. You don’t have what it takes. But I do. Trust Me. I know that you are ungodly. I know that you have a wicked heart. That’s why you need Me.’

If the miracle of belief happens, you have undergone the most radical metamorphosis in the cosmos: You have become united to Jesus Christ. Meaning that when God the Father looks at you, He doesn’t see you as an isolated individual, but as a person *united* to His Son.

### **Union with Christ**

Salvation is *union* with Jesus Christ. To become united to something means that you become one with it. Stone, wood, and metal are united to form one building. Many threads are united to form one rope. “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (**1 Cor. 6:17**). That doesn’t mean that you will become God, nor does it mean that Christ will become less than God.

Union with Christ means that 1) we are **linked** to Christ, 2) we receive our **lives** from Christ; and 3) that we are **loved** by Christ.<sup>3</sup>

*Union with Christ: We are **linked** to Him.*

**Ezekiel 16:8** “When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, **and you became mine.**”<sup>4</sup> What an incredible thought. We belong to Jesus, we are His property.<sup>5</sup> That’s what it means to be ransomed by Christ. **Rev. 5:9** “...you were slain, and by your blood you **ransomed** people for God.” Jesus bought us, with His most precious possession—His own life, and now we belong to Him.

*Union with Christ: We receive **life** from Him.*

**John 15:5** “I am the vine; you are the branches.” The branch supplies all the nourishing sap that the vine needs to live.<sup>6</sup> Children if pick a flower for your mom, what happens to that flower after a few days? It begins to die. Because it needs to be connected to the branch. Being united to Christ means that all our life springs from Him. Jesus is our life. “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).<sup>7</sup>

*Union with Christ: We are **loved** by Christ*

There is no higher intimacy on earth than a man and his wife. They alone share their marriage bed. They have secret conversations, secret looks and

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<sup>3</sup> There is a 4th “L” Union with Christ: We are made in the **likeness** of Him

<sup>4</sup> **Hosea 2:19-20** “**And I will betroth you to me forever.** I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 3:12 “...because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

<sup>6</sup> Romans 11:17; John 1:16

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 3:4 “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

secret talk that nobody else knows. God designed the intimacy of marriage so that we would begin to understand the intimacy of being united to Jesus. Paul says “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **This mystery is profound**, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (**Ephesians 5:31-32**) Being one with Christ is a profound mystery because there is no greater intimacy than this.

Jonathan Edwards wrote in his journal about the intimacy that his wife Sara had with Jesus Christ: “...there are certain seasons in which [Christ] comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him—that she expects after a while to be received up where He is...being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from Him always...if you present all the world before her, with the riches of treasures, she disregards it and cares not for it...lest she offend this Great Being.”<sup>8</sup>

Oh to be loved by Jesus. To be able to say with David “Your steadfast love is better than life.” (**Psalms 63:3**) ‘Jesus an hour with you is better than ten thousand lifetimes without you. Life is not worth living without you. Jesus, you are what makes life sweet.’

### **Jesus Christ is the gospel**

Dear congregation, this is the gospel. The gospel is not some self-help, remove your guilty conscience phase that Christians go through. The gospel is not one religious theory among many. The gospel is not a neat bunch of abstract concepts—that you mark off your theological check list. The gospel—the good news—is that, if you believe, you have become united—mind, heart, and will to Jesus Christ. His destiny is now your destiny. All that belongs to Him now belongs to you. On the day of judgement you can say to God “Father, I belong to Your Son. You gave Him to Me, and I am His. Look at His satisfaction for my sin and be satisfied.” Jesus Christ is the gospel.

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards quoted in Ian Murray’s *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg.92

## II. Our Communion With Each Other

### Communion with Each Other Flows From Union With Christ

So how does our union with Christ affect our communion with each other? I have two answers. **First**, our communion with each other is already a Divine reality. Communion or community comes from the two words—common and union. All believers share a common union in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the stones in his building, **1 Peter 2:4-5**—“As you come to him... you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.” Likewise we are the members of His body, **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” So my **first answer** to how does our union with Christ affect our communion with each other *is that our union with Christ is what **created** our communion with each other.* Our community life is already a Divine reality before we do anything. Christ united us together along with all of our other brothers and sisters around the world the moment we believed. And we have a kinship with each other deeper the blood. We are all made to drink from the same Spirit. We are all stones of the same building. All members of the same body. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says on this point

“The life or death of a Christian community is determined by whether it achieves sober wisdom on this point as soon as possible. In other words, life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, or a society...but rather where it understands itself as being part of the one, holy, [universal] Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole church.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Trans. John W. Doberstein, (New York, NY.: HarperOne, 1954), pg. 37

Therefore we don't need to create a community. God has already created it when He joined us together in His Son.

### **Union With Christ Teaches Us To Maintain Communion With Each Other**

My **second answer** to how does our union with Christ affect our communion with each other *is that our union with Christ teaches us how to maintain communion with each other.* Paul says that is what our task is "...to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**)

The most dangerous enemy of Christian community is the Christian community. Dear congregation, think carefully about that which threatens us our life together the most. Is it sexual immorality? Is it Socialism. Or is it self-righteousness? Well consider that Christian communities can and do exist in socialistic and sexually immoral countries. But Christian community dies when self-righteousness reigns. Self-righteousness is the number one killer of Christian community.

Great...no problem. We all know the gospel here. We all know that we are not saved by works, but by grace alone. So then we have nothing to worry about. And that is how we are deceived. Because we can be deceived into thinking that the gospel just relates to how we get in, and not all of life. Dear congregation we can affirm the orthodox reformed faith perfectly, and yet still live very Pharisaical lives.

All sin is pharisaical sin. Every sin screams "I'm a Pharisee." Why? Because every sin, at it's core, at it's essence, is valuing self more than Christ. Every sin values my self-worth over the worth of Christ.

Why do we get sinfully angry at others?

Our flesh answers: 'Because we would never do something like that.'

But Christ answers: 'You've done infinitely worse in your heart.'

Why do we slander someone behind their backs?

Our flesh answers: 'I look good when other people look bad.'

But Christ answers: 'I was crucified because you never looked good.'

Why do we envy others of their gifts?

Our flesh answers: 'They don't deserve that gift, it should be me.'

But Christ answers: 'You haven't deserved any gift that I've ever given you.'

Why do we get bitter and choose not to forgive someone?

Our flesh answer: 'That person hurt me so bad, so I'm going to hurt them back.'

But Christ answers: 'I suffered the Father's wrath for you, nothing has caused me more pain than to forgive you.'

### **The Disillusionment of Community**

Remember what Bonhoeffer said: "we must be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves...Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight."<sup>10</sup>

Dear congregation, the people in this church will fail you. They will hurt you at times. And you will fail them, and you will hurt them. I promise you. But if you are never overwhelmed with that disillusionment of people failing you and sinning against you, and you sinning against them, you'll never truly taste and see how good is Jesus Christ. We are not here because we are good people. We are here because Jesus Christ is an exceedingly great God. He died for the ungodly like you and me. If you forget that when people let you down, you will be the biggest enemy to true Christian communion. Instead, as Bonhoeffer, sin in our community is a very reminder of the grace of the gospel.

"Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus

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<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Trans. John W. Doberstein, (New York, NY.: HarperOne, 1954), pg. 23

Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably [beneficial], because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together—the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship.”<sup>11</sup>

## Application

Our Doctrine: Our communion with each other depends upon our union with Christ

Please turn with me to Psalm 16. I hope that you see what I see in this text.<sup>12</sup> So look at v.1 “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.” David doesn’t just have one circumstance in view, this Psalm encompasses all of life. So he’s saying ‘Preserve me O God *merely* from this current problem.’ No he’s saying ‘Preserve me or save me O God in all of life. There is safety in no other. Every other so-called refuge will leave me exposed. If I trust in my wealth, or my authority, or my relationships, or my career, or my personal gifts, they will all betray me to danger. God it is you and you alone where I find safety.’

He says in v.2 “I say to the LORD (Yahweh—so he’s calling on Jesus<sup>13</sup>) “You are my Lord (adonai); I have no good apart from you.” David is not *merely* saying that God gives Him all good things, and that if he didn’t have God he wouldn’t have *things* that are good. That’s true, but he’s saying more. He’s saying I’m bankrupt of anything good. I possess nothing to commend myself to

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<sup>11</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Trans. John W. Doberstein, (New York, NY.: HarperOne, 1954), pg. 28

<sup>12</sup> The Apostle Peter cites Psalm 16 in his sermon at Pentecost, and he says that David has his eyes on Christ in this Psalm. Additionally, we know that David is not limiting his prayer to his present circumstances. Occasionally what David has in mind in other Psalms are his immediate circumstances (Psalm 18:20) In Psalm 16 it’s clear that he is focusing on all of life. He talks about present circumstances in v.4, 6 & 7, but by v.11 he is including all eternity.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-christ-is-yahweh#\\_ftn1](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-christ-is-yahweh#_ftn1)

you. You are everything. You are my one defense. You are my righteousness. In you is all my hope and happiness.'

**That is the foundation of Christian community.** In v.3, David is going to rejoice in the saints, but that rejoicing in the saints is built upon his union with Christ. As strange as it may sound, **Christian community is built entirely upon the doctrine of justification by faith alone.** As Luther said, Justification is the article by which the church stands or falls. There can be no true, abiding, satisfying Christian community if Jesus is not our righteousness. That's is what justification accomplishes. "Justification is an act of God's free grace, where he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."<sup>14</sup> If we rest upon anything else, if we look to ourselves for some good in us, we will destroy Christian community. Luke said in his gospel, that those who trust that they are righteous in themselves, will treat others with contempt (Luke 18:9)

The reason why is because we will do the same thing the disciples did. **Luke 9:46** "An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest." This seed is present in every assembly, and if the gospel does not slay it, it will slay us. Bonhoeffer says here "There is no time to lose here, for from the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume and hold over against that person."<sup>15</sup> The natural man within all of us is constantly comparing ourselves against others in order make ourselves feel better. 'Oh they don't have a proper view on Christian liberty like I do...Oh they don't homeschool their children like I do mine...Oh they watch those kind of movies, I would never do that...Oh they are of that political persuasion, poor them...Oh they don't sacrifice for others like I do or they don't have the same view on community life that I do, what's wrong with them.' All of these are a practical denial of justification by faith alone. Because of these attitudes betray v.2. David says "I have no good apart from you." These hearts

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<sup>14</sup> WSC Q.33

<sup>15</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Trans. John W. Doberstein, (New York, NY.: HarperOne, 1954), pg. 28

say “I have some good.” And then the argument comes “Which one of us is the greatest.”

Dear congregation, the only way David can say v.3, is if he believes v.2. He says in v.3 “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” David is not saying that He delights in the saints above God (cf. Psalm 73:25-26). He’s saying that the saints are the people who have been awestruck by the truth of v.2—that Jesus is their righteousness alone—that they have no good apart from Him. That is why David is rejoicing over the saints in v.3. Because they see corporately see Jesus together as their only good. And when that happens, the church community becomes the most excellent communion on earth.

**Our doctrine** is that our communion with each other depends upon our union with Christ. Therefore if we want true community, **our duty** is...

### Our Duty: To grow in communion with Christ

Notice I didn’t say “grow in our union with Christ.” You can’t. If you are united to Christ by faith alone, you already belong to Him. Union cannot be improved upon. But our communion with Christ can grow. Meaning, our intimacy with Him can grow. How do we do this?

First, by simply **beholding** the Lord Jesus Christ. We behold Him by considering who He is. The Son of God is the perfect delight of the Father. For eternity Father has found fullness of joy in the Son. And this fullness of joy overflowed into creation. God desired that others would be made so they could see the worth of Son. But God wanted all of His Son to be on display. He wanted both the holiness and the mercy of Jesus to be on display. So this world was created. And the fall was appointed. So that Jesus could put on flesh and dwell among us. So that He would be betrayed, and mocked, and beat, led like a lamb to the slaughter. But He did this willing. “Nobody takes my life from Me” he said. He tasted the Father’s wrath. He was buried in the earth. Rising from grave He conquered death forever. And now, even now, He ever lives to

intercede for us. Dear congregation, behold Christ in all His works, and then appropriate them in your communion with Him.

‘Lord You have removed every obstacle for me to commune with You. All that is mine is yours, and everything that is yours is now mine. You still have a human nature, you can sympathize with my weaknesses. You know my frame, you remember that I am dust. Lord remind me that you have clothed me with the garments of salvation and have covered me with the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). That you took on what I deserved, and that you gave me what you deserved.<sup>16</sup> Lord, you have given me Your Holy Spirit. You have not left me alone in the world, but have sent me a comforter, a helper, an encourager, a strengthener; so that when I am weak, you are strong; when I am depressed, you are my joy; when I am empty, you fill me up.’

Dear congregation, it is our duty to commune with Christ. But when we commune with Him truly, holding on to him like Jacob “God I won’t let go until you bless me,” we will discover what Sara Edwards discovered. That this duty of communing with Christ is our highest delight. We will experience her experience, that we would not trade her communion with him for all the treasures of this world.

**Our duty** is to grow in our communion with Christ. If we do that than we will discover that **our delight** is...

## Our Delight: True Christian Community

If the truth of Psalm 16:2 strikes you to the core of your being “That you have no good apart from Christ.” Then v.3 will invincibly follow. “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” Because what you will discover is that no matter how your brothers and sisters act, it will be ultimately be a cause of your rejoicing. When the saints are acting

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<sup>16</sup> “The beauty of the gospel is that we do not get what we deserve but what Christ deserves.” Reformed Heritage KJV Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), gg 1284

holy, you will rejoice that they are being made after the likeness of Christ. Oh you will delight that Jesus is displaying Himself in their lives through their service, and love, and patience, and compassion, and unwillingness to accept false doctrine.

On the other hand, when the saints are sinning, or not meeting your expectations, it will also be a cause for you to rejoice *ultimately*. You will see their sin, and although sometimes that sin must be addressed, it should make you pause and consider the wonderful patience of Christ. That Christ bore with your sin, and He still does, and now He is giving you the privilege of bearing another's burden and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Then your disillusionment with your Christian Communion will turn into full delight, because whether the saints are acting holy or sinning, Christ is on display. And then you will be able to say with David "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."