

Introduction

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Good morning, and welcome to BCF! Let me introduce myself for the benefit of our visitors; my name is David Kingston, and I am one of the elders at BCF and I am also a Professor of Organic Chemistry at VT. For the benefit of the students here I might mention that BCF is well-stocked with chemistry faculty; there are four of us in all, so there is a chance that if you take a chemistry class at VT you will be taught by a BCF member.

Prayer Let us begin by asking the Lord to bless His word to us

Let me begin by telling you a short story that I found in a sermon by Erwin Lutzer, the former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago. It is a parable of sorts. Dr. Lutzer grew up in Canada, and the event apparently happened many years ago in a small town there. A man was visiting with his friend, who was a medical doctor, and the doctor was called to an emergency soon after the man arrived. So the doctor had to leave and he said, "Make yourself at home. If you are hungry just take whatever you like." After the doctor left the guest opened the refrigerator to get something to eat, and there he saw a human hand wrapped in a plastic bag. And after that he realized that he wasn't hungry any more.

I am sure some of you are thinking "that's a gross way to begin a sermon! And what is the point of the story?" Stick with me if you will, and I will explain the meaning of this parable in a few minutes.

Church Slide

As most of you know, we are reaching the end of our summer series on the church, and our message today is going to focus on the question "What is my place at BCF?" But before I try to answer this question I need to address one very basic question and one sidebar, so my sermon outline looks like this:

Slide

1. Why do I need a place at church?
2. Sidebar: what if I am not a Christian?
3. What is my place at BCF?

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1. Why do I need a place at church?

At 9:05 am tomorrow I will teach my first class, an elective third semester of organic chemistry. Probably some of you are thinking "I barely survived two semesters of organic chemistry; what sort of kook would take a third semester?" The first few lectures in this class will be a brief review of some basic concepts of organic chemistry, so the students are prepared for the challenging advanced material to come. And that is the purpose of this first point; it is to lay the groundwork so we can understand what our place at this or indeed any church should be.

So why do we need a place at church? Or more simply "what is the point of the church?" Now books have been written on this subject, so all I can do here is give a brief review of some basic reasons for belonging to and attending a church.

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- a. *First let us just remember that the church is not a building.* The church universal is all of God's people, and to Satan it is an awesome and frightening reality. And the local church, as for example here at BCF, is not a building; it is a community of God's people, meeting together to worship God, to encourage one another, to be exposed to God's truth, and to serve the Lord and one another.

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- b. *The church is a body.* The Bible uses several images of the church; it is God's family, it is the bride of Christ, it is a building of living stones, and it is the body of Christ. This last image is a key to our understanding of our need for the church. As Paul writes in 1 Cor 12:27

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27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

And then he goes on to explain what this means 1 Cor 12:12-21

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

So as Christ followers we are all part of the body of Christ, and also of this local expression of that body. And we need to be connected with the body, just as the body needs each of us. Do you remember the hand in the refrigerator? Of course you do; it may be the only thing that you do remember! Well, that is an example of a member of the body cut off from the body! You can look at my hands; they are ordinary hands, but my body depends on them for all sorts of things. They are an important part of my body. But if one of my hands was cut off, the hand would be useless and my body would suffer significant loss. And it is like that with the church; a Christian who is cut off from the body will ultimately shrivel and die, and the body itself will be missing an important part of itself. You need the church, and the church needs you.

So I encourage each of you to stay connected with your local church, and if you are a visitor we would love to have you connect with BCF.

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c. *The church is the body of Christ in a community of God's people.* Our membership in the body of Christ finds its local expression in being part of a community of God's people. We meet together on Sunday mornings and in community groups around the area as people connected by our common love for the Lord and for our fellow believers.

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d. *The church is the body of Christ in a worshipping community.* We join together to express our love and our gratitude to the Lord by singing together and praying together. In addition we meet together at 9:00 am in the chapel to remember Christ's death on the cross for us and our salvation, and all Christ-followers are invited to join in that celebration.

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e. *The church is the body of Christ in a truth-learning community.* Truth is an elusive commodity these days, with politicians and even church leaders twisting truth to their own ends. At BCF we seek to stand on God's truth as revealed in the Bible, even when it is countercultural. And in addition to the morning sermons, BCF will offer several adult education options this Fall, including a college class, a class on the book of Acts, a women's study, a "Christianity Explored" class and two international classes, all meeting at 9:45 am, and a marriage class, an Old Testament history, and another women's class, all meeting at 11:15 am.

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f. *The church is the body of Christ in an encouraging community.* We seek to be a community that loves and encourages each other, with special support for those going through difficult times, and this church is full of people with a heart to encourage others. And let me add this; one of the important ways we encourage each other is by our presence. Your presence here this morning encourages everyone else as you demonstrate your commitment by your physical presence.

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g. The church is the body of Christ in a serving community. As the different parts of the body serve each other, so different individuals serve each other in the church.

This leads directly to my next point, but before we go there I want do a sidebar for those of you who are thinking “that all sounds fine for those who are Christ followers, but I am not one. Why should I bother with church?” “Am I even welcome?” Let me just share three thoughts with you.

Sidebar

2. What if I am not a Christian?

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a. Attending BCF or any other church does not make you a Christian, a Christ follower. Sadly there are many people who say or think “Yes, I am a Christian. I go to church regularly and I give money to the church, so I must be a Christian”. But please hear me when I say that sitting in church does not make you a Christian, any more than sitting in a garage will make you a car mechanic.

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b. But attending BCF puts you in the right place to learn about becoming a Christian. To follow up on the garage analogy, sitting in a garage and watching skilled mechanics working on cars and learning from them how to change tires and remove head gaskets and change spark plugs and adjust timing belts is an excellent way to become a car mechanic. And coming to BCF and listening to sound biblical teaching and honestly seeking to understand it and talking with Christian friends is an excellent way of learning about Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers.

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c. The only way to become a Christian is by faith in Jesus Christ and His death for us on the cross. As Paul writes in Rom 3:23-25

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for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

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And in Eph 2:1-10

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

There is too much here to discuss in detail, so let me just say that if you are seeking to know God then you are in the right place, and I hope that you continue to seek Him until you are found by Him.

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2. What is my place at BCF?

To answer this question we finally turn to our Scripture passages for the day

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Eph 4:7, 11-16

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ...11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's

people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

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14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Last week Chris Faith spoke on the subject of Christian unity from Ephesians 2 and the first part of Ephesians 4. He reminded us that our unity is important, that we are united in Jesus Christ, that unity does not mean some sort of uniformity, and that we must work to maintain unity.

In this passage, Paul goes on to show how each one of us is called to be not just a passive part of the body of Christ, but an active part. Let's look at what the Scripture says

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a. We all have a part to play.

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16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work.*

In other words, this little part of Christ's body on earth; this group that we call BCF, is only going to grow in love and in witness to the world as each one of us does our part. If you take home nothing else from this message, please take home this: *God's church on earth, and this little piece of it called BCF, is utterly dependent on each one of us using the gifts God has given us in service to the body as a whole.*

One of the things I love about this church is that so many of you have understood this truth and are putting it into practice. And so we have BCFers serving in all sorts of ways, some of which are visible and some behind the scenes. We have gifted men and women serving as musicians and worship leaders, we have men and women with the gift of welcoming others serving as ushers and greeters, we have gifted men and women serving as Nursery workers and Sunday School teachers and Pioneer Girl leaders and Christian Service Brigade leaders and gatekeepers, and these are just some of the visible parts of the body of Christ at work. Behind the scenes we have money counters and money managers and gardeners and flower arrangers and people with building maintenance skills and a hard-working missions committee and women's ministry leaders and people with AV skills (did you notice the brighter projection image today? That is because some gifted men and women spent time yesterday to install a new projector) and people with the gift of helps, people who work at the Food Pantry, people who visit the juvenile detention center, people with the gift of giving, and the list goes on and on, and this is not complete list, so I apologize if I have missed your particular ministry.

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b. We are all gifted by the Holy Spirit to play our part.

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Eph 4:7 But to *each one* of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Rom. 12:6 We have *different gifts, according to the grace given us.* Implied although not stated is the understanding that we *all* have different gifts.

1 Cor 12:7 Now to *each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

In these passages Paul is saying essentially the same thing in three slightly different ways. If he had said it once we would have believed it because his writing was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Had he said I twice we would sit

up and take notice. But he said it three times, and so clearly it was an important truth that he wanted all the churches to grasp. So with the authority of Scripture I can say to each of one you who is a Christian believer "Congratulations! You are gifted!"

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c. The part we each play will vary depending on the gifting God has given us.

Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.

But this is an incomplete list. In Rom 12:5-8 Paul lists a different but related list of spiritual gifts:

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Rom 12:5-8

6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

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1 Cor 12:27-28 27

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Do you get the picture? God graciously gives spiritual gifts to all His people, but they are different for each person. Some have gifts of teaching, others gifts of giving. Some have gifts of evangelism, others gifts of administration. And some have gifts of healing, others gifts of showing mercy.

And don't miss the point that these gifts are not ornaments, to be worn to show others how gifted you are. No, they are tools, given for us to use in God's service. Paul says in the Romans passage "If you have a particular gift, then go ahead and use it!" If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Before Beverly and I were married she was living in Boston and I was living in Cambridge, England. She sent me a weighty Christmas gift, and when I opened it it turned out to be a set of tools: a set of wrenches and pliers and so on.

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Not perhaps the romantic gift of chocolate I was expecting, but you know something? I still have that set of wrenches over 50 years later, and I still find them valuable whenever I need to do some mechanical repair. Your spiritual gift or gifts is like that set of tools; it is God saying to you "Here is my gift to you; now go out and use it for the good of my church."

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d. We need each other

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1 Cor 12:21-26 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined

the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

The bottom line here is that we are all dependent on each other. Let me give an illustration of this from Dr. Lutzer. I have a part of my body that is absolutely essential to my preaching, but it is a part of my body that you have never seen. It's my big toe, because apparently if I didn't have a big toe I could not maintain my balance. My toes and your toes are constantly sending these messages to the brain and saying, "Now you have to tilt a little bit this way and lean this way and to compensate you have to do this." And just to think all that is happening and we are not even aware of it. So do you realize today that I could not stand up to preach if I didn't have a big toe? And what about the microphone I am wearing? If it were not for the people in the sound booth turning on the microphone, you would not be able to hear me in the back rows.

So it is just as Paul says The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" We all need each other to fulfill God's design for His church\; we are all dependent on each other.

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e. The ultimate goal is Christian maturity

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Eph 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Wow! Talk about a lofty goal! Our purpose in the church is so to teach each other and serve each other and encourage each other so that we reach the unity that Chris spoke of last week.

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So in summary, what is your place in BCF? If you are a Christian believer, it is to recognize that God has gifted you not only with the forgiveness of your sins through the death of Jesus Christ, but He has also filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted you with spiritual gifts. These gifts are for you to use in service to the church and the world, so that Christ will be honored and His people will be blessed.

As Paul writes

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Eph 4:14-16 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Amen