

**“The Communion of Saints”**  
**(WCF 26.1-3)**

**WCF 26.1 All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.**

**I. We have communion with Christ and with one another in Christ.**

**A. What does it mean that we are united with Christ by faith? God planned that we would be federally, vitally, and spiritually united with Christ in soul and body, by the Spirit through faith, from all eternity.**

**B. What are the blessings we receive from this communion we have with Christ? In union with Christ, we share in His righteousness, Father, inheritance, offices, life, and experiences; while everything we have belongs to Him.**

**C. What does it mean that we have communion with one another?**

1. We have communion in each other’s gifts and graces.
  - a. Since all true believers are intimately united to Christ as their common Head, and since He is our common source of life, we are intimately united to one another.
  - b. “For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. . . . But now there are many members, but one body. . . . And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:12-14, 20, 26).
2. Being members of one body, we are obligated to minister our resources to one another:
  - a. Our spiritual gifts.
    - (i) “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).
    - (ii) “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).
    - (iii) “For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish” (Rom. 1:11-14).
  - b. Our material possessions.
    - (i) “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:16-18).
    - (ii) “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10).

**WCF 26.2 Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities.**

**Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.**

**II. We are to share in fellowship, worship and the exercise of our gifts; and we are to share our material resources, both with those in this fellowship and outside.**

**A. What are our obligations to one another?**

1. What duties do we have together towards our common Head?
  - a. We must profess the same faith and communicate the same Gospel:
    - (i) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:42-46).
    - (ii) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).
    - (iii) “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).
  - b. We must maintain and participate in the same worship.
    - (i) “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25).
    - (ii) When we meet, we are to participate in the Lord’s Supper, a symbol of that communion we have with one another: “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor. 11:20).
    - (iii) We are to share a common worship in the way we live: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:1).
2. What duties do we have towards one another since we share a common life in Christ through the Holy Spirit?
  - a. We are to relieve each other’s burdens.
    - (i) “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need” (Acts 2:44-45).
    - (ii) “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).
  - b. We are to enter into one another’s sufferings and joys: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).
3. What are our duties to one another with respect to the world?
  - a. Because we are one body, we are honored or dishonored together.
    - (i) “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).
    - (ii) “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience,

showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

(iii) “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

b. We are viewed collectively; and so all divisions, disagreements and backbiting affect all of us.

4. What are our duties to one another with regard to our gifts?

a. Each of us has a gift and an obligation to use that gift for the common good: “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).

b. We are to build one another up for the good of the whole: “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).

## **B. What are our obligations to believers outside of our fellowship?**

1. Do the passages we’ve seen apply only to local congregations?

a. All true believers are united with the Lord and therefore with us – there is only one Church, and all true local expressions are part of it.

b. If all the saints are one and are included in this “communion,” then we should embrace all who profess the true religion and do what we can to minister to them.

(i) Jesus told His Jewish disciples that He would extend the boundaries of the church to include the Gentiles: “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd” (John 10:16).

(ii) He has given us all His Holy Spirit that we might love and care for one another: “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

(iii) This is what the Christians in Antioch did for their brethren in Judea: “And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders” (Acts 11:29).

(iv) So also the churches of Macedonia: “Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints” (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

2. How can we determine who is to be included in this “communion”?

a. That particular church must profess the true Gospel (marks of the church).

b. Individuals must have a credible profession (since we can’t see hearts).

(i) They must embrace the true religion – the things essential to the true Gospel (the fundamentals): The belief that the Bible is the Word of God, that God is Triune, that Christ is both God and Man, that He was born of a Virgin, that He lived a sinless life, that He died an atoning death on the cross, that He was raised again to life on the third day, that He ascended into heaven, that He is coming again to judge the living and the dead, that man is fallen in Adam, that he can do nothing to save himself, that the only way to receive eternal life is to trust in Jesus and to turn away from all sin, that only those who endure to the end shall be saved.

(ii) They must live a life consistent with that profession.

(iii) What groups who believe themselves to be Christians are excluded by these criteria?

**WCF 26.3 This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of His Godhead; or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.**

**III. Our communion with Christ does not make us partakers of His deity or His equals, nor does it mean that saints have no possessions of their own.**

**A. What does our communion with Christ not include?**

1. What do we share in common with Christ?
  - a. We share in His righteousness, Father, inheritance, offices, life, and experiences (as we've seen).
  - b. We share in His communicable attributes, as to His deity: wisdom, knowledge, holiness, love, mercy, will, freedom.
  
2. What are the things which belong only to Him?
  - a. The incommunicable attributes (those attributes that belong to God alone): Independence, infinite, self-existent, etc.
    - (i) "Yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him" (1 Cor. 8:6).
    - (ii) "Which He will bring about at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1 Tim. 6:15-16).
  - b. His anointing, authority, exaltation and glory.
    - (i) His anointing: "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him" (Col. 1:18-19).
    - (ii) His glory as God: "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8).
    - (iii) His exaltation and glory:
      - (a) "But of the Son *He says*, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions'" (Heb. 1:8-9).
      - (b) "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

**B. What does our communion with one another not include?**

1. We do have a right to our own possessions.
  - a. "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15) applies to Christians as well as to all men. If we had all things in common, we wouldn't be able to steal (Cf. Eph. 4:28).
  - b. Peter told Ananias that he had the right to do what he wanted with his possessions, at least until he pledged to give the proceeds of his land sale to God: "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:4).
  
2. What about the example of the early church selling their land and houses and giving the money to take care of the needy in Acts 4 and 5?
  - a. That event had to do with taking care of those converted at Pentecost until they could be disciplined and sent back to their own countries.
  - b. But even then it was purely voluntary – the Spirit was pointing to the fact that they all had it in their hearts to do this, not that they were commanded to do so.