



## Behind Enemy Lines Training Saints

Written by an Inmate

### The Body of Christ

Brother Eric

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First, thank you all for coming tonight to the gathering of the church, and I hope you'll all continue to come and see the purpose and benefit in doing so. I wanted to talk a little bit about what the church actually is and why it is a vital part of being a Christian.

The church isn't some building or cathedral. Stained glass, a pulpit, an altar, a cross: these things don't make a church. The church isn't something you go to. The church is the people, and wherever believers in Christ are, there the church is.

In the early days of Christianity, the churches (the people) met wherever they could – in homes, barns, fields, even cemeteries. The church is people – brought together in faith and united by the Holy Spirit to fulfill its mission given by Christ to worship Him, spread the good news of the gospel, and to disciple – to strengthen, support, and teach – its members.

Any church service you go to will have a mix of people, some true believers and some not. Jesus warns us about this in the parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds that look like wheat) in **Matthew 13:24-30**. You can't burn down the whole field just because some weeds got in there. The tares are to be left until Judgement Day when God Himself will sort out one from the other.

A lot of people (no one here, of course!) come up with excuses not to go to a church service: the people are hypocrites/judgmental/sinners; I don't like the preacher or the format or the music. Yes, we live in a fallen world, so we're going to run into sinners in church just like we will outside of it. Being a Christian doesn't instantly make us perfect, but we're forgiven and loved by God, so we strive to sin less and live like the only one who was sinless. We're called out from the world, the culture around us, into the Kingdom of God. That's what the Greek word used for the church ("ekklēsia") in the Bible means: "the called-out ones."

Jesus created the church and wants us to be an active part of it. We can't let what anyone else does affect our own walk with God. And He clearly says through the writer of **Hebrews**, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (**Hebrews 10: 24-25**).

Jesus built the church. He is our cornerstone, and the apostles are the foundation. Generation upon generation of believers are the stones that make it up. And it is the Holy Spirit that is what unites us all. God in us. He flows in and through us creating between us all an unbreakable and inexplicable fellowship. Our faith opens the door to let Him in, and our shared faith is what creates the universal ("catholic") church.

Paul, in his letters, compares the church to a human body where Jesus is the head and we, the body, act according to His will – each in his own way and utilizing his own abilities and talents given to us by His Spirit.

Reading from **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** in the New Living Translation ...

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

Each one of us, no matter what our talents or abilities are, is valued and needed by the rest of the church body.

Thinking about Paul's analogy a little deeper, we can come to a couple of more important truths. First, like a body is kept alive by the flow of blood through our veins, in the church body it is the Holy Spirit that flows in and through all believers to give us life and unite us as we are conformed to His image. And second – this is important! – what happens when a body part is severed/cut off? It's going to wither and eventually die. It's the same with the church body. Separation from the church will starve a believer. God can keep you and your faith alive if He so chooses, but you're in a position of disobedience. And like a severed hand, you'll grow cold and lose the necessary nutrients that come from being a connected part of the body. We need the church, and the church needs us. For the body with any part cut off is weaker and less able to function.

Being a part of the church doesn't mean just going to the weekly service. There are a lot of "pew-fillers" who do that and nothing else and keep themselves apart from the body of Christ. We are called brothers, sons, children of God and part of His family – His household. And we should treat each other that way. **Galatians 6: 2, 10** says, <sup>2</sup>"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ... <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith." John tells us in **1 John 4:20-21**, "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

And finally, Paul sums it up in **Ephesians 4: 1-6, 15**, <sup>1</sup>"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ... <sup>15</sup>Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ."

So I hope you all take this message to heart and continue to grow closer to our Lord with and through the church. And I hope you can share some of this with others not here tonight who may need to hear it. I'll be posting this on [www.BELTSministry.org](http://www.BELTSministry.org) so next week or so you can share the message with any of your family and friends on the outside who may benefit from it as well.