

August 9, 2024

Dear Brethren and Friends,

When I was just out of college and working my first full-time job, I secured an American Express card. It was not that I needed another way to spend money that I did not have. I had been advised by my parents of the importance of building my *credit score*. Basically, this is a record of how well one does with repaying small expenditures purchased on credit. I recall clearly the tag line that Amex used: *Membership has its Privileges*.

I was pleased that I had qualified for the familiar green and white plastic card. I saw it as a symbol that I had grown up and joined the ranks of the labor force. In the years since signing up with American Express, my wife and I had to pay a fee each year to renew. Even though it really no longer made sense to keep the card, the little *Member since 1981* note on the card made me nostalgic for the days when that card was my only way aside from cash to charge a meal or make a larger purchase.

All of this fuss over a plastic card! Over the years I've taken satisfaction in being a member of other teams, as an employee of an organization, and a board member for several entities. My time and work mattered and that was important to me and gave me a sense of belonging.

As true Christians and members of the Body of Christ—His Church—we know that we literally have a higher calling. We don't have membership cards or some other physical identifier, and we know that the Kingdom that we seek is *not of this world*; it is not a church building nor a campus. As members of the *Church of the Eternal God* and its international affiliates, we pursue discernment of the Body of Christ, and this is a daily responsibility and a blessing. The quality of discernment is an important gift that we must strive to understand and fully utilize. It can help us identify and understand what is of God, and what is the work of Satan in the world. It can assist us in cutting through the morass of media and information that can blind us or desensitize us to the Truth. For a true Christian it is an essential skill that comes with repentance and studying the Word of God. Hebrews 5:14 captures this point perfectly: "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

We pray, we repent, and we seek the ways that we can draw closer to God the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. In John 18:36, we join the story as Jesus was being questioned by Pontius Pilate. Pilate was asking about Jesus being referred to as the King of the Jews. Jesus answered in this way: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." And so too, our membership is of a larger scale, being part of the Body of Christ.

We do not seek to join the world's political parties, clubs, and secret societies. Instead, we recognize the joyful privilege of God's call of redemption and His invitation to join Him and His Son in the Work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and supporting the brethren. This is our work in the *Church of the Eternal God*.

We are called as individuals as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Speaking to His prophet, Jeremiah, we see how God communicated His calling to this young man in Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah was called to become a born-again member of the Kingdom and Family of God, very much as we are, but he had

a specific task ahead of him. We are members of Christ's Body as we read in Ephesians 5:30: "For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones." Yet we are each called for unique reasons and we have a specific work to do.

We see this clearly in Ephesians 4:11-16: "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

Different assignments for the members, but a commonality of purpose. This is reinforced for us in Romans 12:5: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

Membership in the Body of Christ—His Church—does indeed offer privileges and hard work. We don't make application to join His Church, but if we are called by God, we have an Advocate in Jesus Christ who will guide us along on our membership in the Body. Being a member of the *Church of the Eternal God* and its international affiliates offers a daily opportunity to roll up one's sleeves and do the Work that God calls us to do. There is nothing in our human existence that can measure up to this.

In Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Bruno', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Frank Bruno