



PREFACE

The world places great value on objects that are rare. One who owned the only remaining original painting by a famous painter would be considered wealthy.

However, Christians often seem unaware that they are part of a uniquely rare masterpiece put together by the greatest Master of all time, the Lord Jesus Christ. They belong to the *one and only* body in Christ, an organism created by the Spirit of God and made up of all true believers in Christ.

*So we, who are many, are **one** body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:5)*

That believers generally do not grasp the great value there is in this one body can be seen by the many efforts to establish some particular denomination as the only doctrinally correct church. Christians often exhibit greater concern in pointing out differences between their group and other denominations than

they do in emphasizing the communion (or life-union) with Christ that is common among them. For this reason, the uniqueness that the Lord intends in life, structure, service and vision for His body becomes blurred with human programs and methodologies. The body of Christ has become a denominated array of human institutions which mask the organism of divine life that makes the body of Christ unique. The Lord states that we are one body in Him and that we are members of one another. It is these *two* aspects of life-union that mark the body of Christ.

It is difficult to grasp the significance of the word “one” in the following scripture when a believer’s life in Christ is limited to traditional institutional Christianity.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5)

The lack of unity between churches today contradicts the truth of this verse. However, we are living in a time of church renewal and restoration. The Lord is preparing His people for a time of deep darkness that is coming upon the earth. In the days ahead, His glory will rest upon the church in a final great demonstration of His love and grace for lost men and women (Isaiah 60:1-5). Who can possibly measure the value of this coming fullness of His glorious presence in the church? It is beyond our comprehension, yet this is where our hope and vision is to be. The only true church is the one body in Christ, and when the church has come to maturity it will show forth *the* fullness of her Lord!

And He (God) put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

ONE NEW MAN

Each believer enters the kingdom of God bearing unique characteristics of their particular race and culture. Everyone is

received by the Lord without partiality and with equal worth, regardless of any physical distinction. In order for the body of Christ to function as the Lord intends, it is necessary for each member to accept these differences and see others as He sees them.

Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; . . . therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

The body of Christ reflects the “culture” of our Lord. It is not black or white, Jewish or Gentile; it is a new, spiritual man in Christ!

*He Himself is our peace, who made both groups (Jew and Gentile) into one, . . . that in Himself He might make the two into **one new man**, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in **one body** to God through the cross (Ephesians 2:14-16)*

*There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave or free man, there is neither male or female; for you are all **one** in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)*

Since physical distinctions will remain with us until Jesus returns and when believers receive bodies like His glorious body, how are such differences to be handled by a church so that the word of God concerning the body of Christ is not compromised? The following four guidelines are helpful:

- The gospel must be kept transparent to race or culture. Therefore, the church within a culture should be built and led by believers from that culture.
- There should never be a presentation of culture as a part of the gospel. They must be kept separate. The gospel alone is to be proclaimed!
- The headships expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:3 must not be violated. They help to preserve the centrality of Jesus.
- The hearts and minds of believers must be kept free from any partiality or degrees of worth concerning other members of the body of Christ. The goal is to build the body of

Christ, not a Christian institution. No leader, minister or body of believers should be honored to the extent that the centrality of Christ is weakened. He must *always* have *first* place in everything! Sectarianism must be avoided.

For when one says, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? — I planted, Apollo's watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:4, 6, 7)

Christianity has its center in the Lord Himself, and in our fellowship with Him; it is not centered in theology or in the charisma of leaders.

BECOMING PART OF THE BODY

Many who attend church consider the membership received when they first joined a church as that act by which they became part of the Lord's body. However, no one can join the body of Christ; one must be born into it, a supernatural act that *only* the Spirit of God can perform.

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. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

How does this spiritual birth take place? When one hears the gospel and believes it to be true, namely, that they are sinners and as such are subject to the wrath of God; that Christ died in their place on the cross paying the penalty for all of their sins and now offers them forgiveness and eternal life. If they believe in their heart that these things are true and confess their faith, repenting of their sins and receive Christ as their Savior and Lord, they then pass from death into life and are saved from the wrath of God. They are spiritually born into the family of God and the Holy Spirit places, or baptizes, them into the body of Christ. They now have a live-union with Christ through His Spirit. This communion, or fellowship in the Spirit, is what constitutes the church. They need not have the same under-

standing of scripture as do other believers; they need only possess the same divine life. Apart from faith, repentance and confession, a believer can contribute nothing to the miracle of regeneration. Even faith is only possible through the grace of God. No wonder salvation is a gift!

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)

It is wonderful to become part of the body of Christ. However, the practical significance of this can only be found by committing one's self to being rooted in a specific assembly, which is a local expression of the body of Christ.

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS

There is only one true center of emphasis in the body of Christ; that is Christ Himself! It is not dogma, creeds, doctrine, ministry, church government, the gospel, the church, the Bible, the sacraments or anything else. Only if this emphasis of Christ is restored to the center of Christian faith can the present divisions in the body of Christ be removed and the full witness of Christ in the church be seen.

*That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that also they may be in Us; **that the world may believe** that Thou didst send Me—I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, **that the world may know** that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (John 17:21, 23)*

The church, which is His body, is the vehicle that the Lord has chosen to express Himself through. Thus, all that is done or spoken should always point people to the Lord Jesus Christ. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. For this reason, all deeds and proclamations in the church are to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

The body of Christ is not made up of all denominations; it is a spiritual organism made up of all believers. The way to

achieve unity is not ecumenicism or agreement in doctrine, it is solely based on fellowship with Him, a living union with the Head.

*. . . the one who joins himself to the Lord is **one** spirit with Him. (1 Corinthians 6:17)*

The common koinonia that each believer has through the Spirit of Christ unites them together in one body. Our communion with Him is the heart of relationship with God and fellowship with one another. We cannot create such unity by human effort but we can surely destroy it. We are responsible to recognize that we are one body and to practice unity in our personal and church life. Above all, we must abide in Him. The key is our personal daily experience of the life of Christ, not just doctrines that define life.

FINDING OUR PLACE IN THE BODY

We don't decide where we fit in the body of Christ or what our ministry gifts are. These have been determined for us by the Lord long before we were saved. Our responsibility is to seek Him and to discover His call on our life (2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:10).

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1 Corinthians 12:18)

But one and the same Spirit works all these things (i.e. spiritual gifts), distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Each believer has been prepared in his mother's womb for a unique place of service. Knowing their weaknesses and failures, both past and future, the Lord provides sufficient grace to each child of God to fulfill the call on his life. The question is not how visible and grand, or how apparently insignificant one's call might be. The important issue is our commitment to what God has called us to be and to do. We are not to measure ourselves or our success in ministry by comparison with other believers; each of us stands or falls in the

eyes of our Lord. It is vital to recognize the fact that the Lord sees *each* member of His body as equal both in worth and as recipients of His love. The grace we receive will be different, for this relates to our specific call in Christ. We have all been normalized at the cross of Christ; there all men are made equal!

Once one fully recognizes the role and dimension that God's grace played in his own personal life it becomes easier to accept other members of the body of Christ. There is a greater appreciation of our need for them, and in particular, for the grace resting upon them. There are no "lone rangers" in the body of Christ!

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Romans 12:7)

The reality grows that we are indeed members of one another and that, together, we form the living whole body of Christ.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (1 Corinthians 12:14-17, 21)

PREPARED FOR SERVICE IN THE BODY

A new believer's first responsibility is *not* ministry. It is to recognize Who is now in charge of his new life and to discern and obey His will. The first issue to be faced is how to separate himself from continuing in the sinful deeds and habit patterns of his old life. This involves an immediate step of faith: to be immersed in the waters of baptism. Here the Spirit of God will supernaturally circumcise his heart, allowing the new nature within him to arise free from dominance of the old, corrupt car-

nal nature. He should then be baptized in the Holy Spirit for power (Acts 1:8).

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a (spiritual) circumcision (performed by) Christ by stripping off the body of the flesh (the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts.) (Thus you were circumcised when) you were buried with Him in your baptism (Colossians 2:11-12; Amplified Bible)

The body of Christ becomes an expression of the Head as each believer lays down his own personal desires to do the will of God. The process by which such maturity comes to pass in individual lives is through the training and discipline of the Lord. However, to a very great extent, one's progress depends upon taking these first two steps of baptism where the human heart is circumcised and fullness of the Holy Spirit is received.

The "inner man" of every believer is nourished by the word of God. It is vital to cultivate a hunger for prayer and study of scripture in order to better know Him and His ways (1 Peter 2:2; Colossians 1:2-3). This does not imply a dry, intellectual gathering of information for, when anointed, the word of God is spirit and life (1 John 2:27). Sound teaching on foundations of the Christian faith is essential to equip believers for service.

One cannot serve apart from a relationship with other members in the body of Christ. We have fellowship with one another, with the Father and with His Son, through our response to the gospel. However, this fellowship can be hindered by human traits of selfishness, sin, pride, etc. Thus, we must walk in the light of God's word in order to have a fellowship that will build godly relationship.

If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

When problems arise, or when one is confronted in his personal life, the temptation is to leave and find a “better” church. However this is not the way to maturity. It is important to stay where the Lord has placed us so that He can equip and build us into His body as He pleases. We need to embrace the cross of His discipline for our life. This is how we grow in Him (Hebrews 12:5-11). It is a great weakness in the body of Christ when members can leave one assembly and go to another, being received with no questions asked.

As believers grow in Christ they will more and more keep His commandments, not because of directive constraints placed upon them by the Lord, but because, as they know Him better, they come to love Him more. This is the key to abiding in Christ.

BODY MINISTRY

To live, a physical body requires more than all the various organs performing their specific functions in an independent manner. The body lives because the organs work together in harmony. For example, our lungs cannot bring oxygen into the blood stream apart from the muscles associated with breathing; our blood cannot carry pure oxygen throughout the body apart from the heart and kidneys; and most important of all, there must be directive intelligence from the brain for all organs to function together.

In the body of Christ it is no different. Each member has a specific and unique task to do. In addition, there must also be a proper relationship between all members so that they work together in harmony. Just as tendons, joints and sinews are necessary for toes, fingers, arms and legs to function, so also there must be godly relationship in the Spirit for the members to be jointly effective in ministry.

. . . holding fast to the head (Christ) from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grow with a growth that is from God. (Colossians 2:19)

Body relationship requires humility, submission, love and commitment between members. This is *not* something one learns by simply being taught how to perform, for it is as much related to what we are in Christ as to what we *do* for Him. Our hearts have to be expanded by forgiveness and understanding.

An assembly grows spiritually only to the extent that individual members grow in character and interpersonal relationships and in faith to serve. All three are necessary.

. . . 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 that which 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. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

We all need the ministry of others; we require their input into our lives to encourage, exhort, edify, admonish and adjust us. We will not make it alone. Body ministry is more than an interpersonal transfer of information; it is an impartation of life.

A great strength in body ministry lies in the diversity with which the Lord has equipped His people. Unfortunately, a common fault for many of us is to copy or seek to be like someone else, perhaps one who has a more visible or exciting place of ministry. However, such misguided ambition only weakens the body. It is vital to exercise faith and walk only in that to which we have been called in Christ. This call for humility and sound judgment.

For through the grace given to me, I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all

the members do not have the same function, . . . since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly . . . (Romans 12:3, 4, 6)

In the body of Christ, there are no clergy or laity classes; there are no performers and spectators. Each member has a role to play according to the grace resting upon him. This may not be a public ministry of the word or a place in leadership , but it is necessary for proper functioning of the body. The most important ministry in a local body is often one that is not highly visible. I suspect that in the final reckoning, prayer and intercession will be seen as the greatest spheres of service. The key word is diversity!

*. . . there are **varieties** of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are **varieties** of ministries and the same Lord. (1 Corinthians 12:4-5)*

It takes the integrated total of all giftings to fully express what the Lord has prepared to edify and equip His people in a local body.

. . . to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Therefore, the starting point in body ministry is for each member to be wholly committed to serve others with the grace he has been given in Christ.

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)

The verbs found in the following verses of scripture paint a clear picture of the multifaceted dynamics of the life-flow in body ministry.

*And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing** with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you,*

so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,** to which indeed you were called in one body; and **be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell** within you, with all wisdom **teaching** and **admonishing** one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs **singing with thankfulness** in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:12-16)

GOVERNMENT IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

In the body of Christ there are those who have been given grace to go before the flock, leading them in the way of the Lord. Institutions choose leaders, often on an impersonal basis, by selecting those who can command others and get things done. However, the Lord chooses bondservants from among the flock, men who will lay down their lives to do the will of the Lord (Matthew 20:25-28; 2 Timothy 2:24). In this way they set examples for other believers to follow (1 Peter 5:3; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; Hebrews 13:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Human authority or institutional decrees can *never* be a substitute for the Spirit's authority in a church.

Government in a local church is not like the hierarchical chain of command that marks the authority of an institution. It has been designed by the Lord to preserve His centrality. First of all, the most important and highest level of government that exists is the Lordship of Christ over each believer. Jesus is the Shepherd of each sheep. Second, in a collective sense, the Lord governs each established local church through a collegial eldership. The word "collegial" means that the authority for oversight is vested equally between elders, while great diversity can exist between them in ministry, functions, visibility, etc. Plurality helps to guard against one man becoming too preeminent in the eyes of the people. Elders must be experienced men possessing one of the five ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11.

Those who are part of institutional Christianity will say that an eldership will not work. They believe there ought to be

one man in charge, one who is responsible for final decisions. However, this is precisely the role that Jesus reserves for Himself. It is apparent that a group of men have a mutual check and balance in making sure they hear the voice of God. In addition, because of their diverse giftings, they are jointly more capable of equipping the saints for service than any one leader could be. A godly eldership characterizes the body of Christ since it is a group of diverse men with different ministry graces, standing together in service as *one* man.

An eldership will only work if the men have been called and anointed by God to be elders, and additionally, if they have committed and prepared themselves over time for this service (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Even so, there are still factors that can surface because of sin in the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9).

Personal pride, selfish ambition and competitiveness are examples. Such things must be faced and dealt with immediately when they become apparent. Other less obvious factors, that can be just as damaging, are impatience, intimidation, carelessness, poor communication and actions that are based on wrong premises. How quickly such things are recognized and put away is a measure of quality in an eldership. Furthermore, these should be observed and dealt with before the people see them. This will require a depth in relationship and trust between the men, and this, in turn, requires that they spend much time together, time that is not dominated by church problems. There must be opportunity to speak into one another's lives.

At all times, the eldership must be wholly committed to standing as one man with mutual accountability before the Lord and in the eyes of the sheep.

The following tendencies, which reflect human nature, should be watched for in shared leaderships:

1. *An elder who vigorously campaigns for his personal idea so that although unintentionally, he initiates a spirit of control over others.*

2. *And elder with a strong personality who uses his personal interface with others to force decisions that may not be the burden of the Lord.*

3. *An elder with a passive personality who often finds it easier to let others make decisions.* Godly confrontation may then be neglected that would lead to clarity in issues. The important thing is always to hear God.

4. *An elder's unwillingness to open his life to his peers for adjustments of what he might see to be minor shortcomings.* This can arise from a lack of trust, fear of rejection or even pride. However, becoming vulnerable is essential if the eldership is to survive, for "small faults" can grow into large ones.

5. *Placing too great an emphasis on one's personal ministry when making decisions related to oversight.* Elders must learn to listen and be willing to defer to the anointing of their peers. Some issues are clearly more pertinent to the grace of a specific ministry. For example: counseling and pastors, outreach and evangelists, translocal issues and apostles, etc. It must be clear that, while government is shared equally in a collegial eldership, that does not mean there is equality in gifting, visibility, stature, experience or grace. An eldership is strong because of its diversity, not because the men are clones.

6. *Suspicion of another elder's motive based on a previous fault in performance.* Learning from past mistakes is how one grows in Christ. Yesterday's imperfections can be a sign of tomorrow's strength. The issue is not what happened yesterday, but what is God saying today.

In these and similar shortcomings, the Lord will work redemptively, strengthening the eldership providing the men remain humble, teachable and willing to be adjusted. At all times, they must be aware that the enemy, "the accuser of the brethren," is seeking to divide, discredit or destroy the leadership.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls

when there is not another to lift him up. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10, 12)

CONCLUSION

It is very easy to view the current growth in evangelism, along with the increasing evidence of spiritual gifts, and to believe all is well with the church. However, we need to have our spiritual eyes opened to see the sin of division, as God sees it, that exists today in Christendom. Division in the body of Christ is a grievous sin and we need to repent of it!

The key for success in the great end-time harvest will require great unity between all laborers. The task is so enormous that the whole body of Christ must work in unison under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The essential purpose of the gospel is to save and establish men and women in one body with one faith as a unique expression of God in the earth (Ephesians 4:1-6). To participate in this task, we are called to walk in all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to other Christians in love, being diligent to reserve unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It is imperative that we reach out in love to all who belong to Jesus. There is no place for an elitist spirit in the body of Christ. True love will tolerate differences and respect the gifts and graces of others. It will not exhibit a spirit of intolerance, and neither will it use doctrine to divide the body of Christ. Doctrine is not the basis of fellowship. Should a group possess a truth that others do not, they are to reach out in love as bond-servants and share it. Should their words not be received, fellowship is not to be broken; rather, they are to walk in the light of that particular truth so that they demonstrate the life and reality of it. In this way, those who are hungry, whose hearts are open, will be encouraged to also receive it.

Disunity has arisen over the years in the body of Christ over inflexible doctrinal positions and the institutionalism of churches. This has quenched the testimony of the one body of

Christ. The answer is not better or bigger organizations, and neither is it ecumenicism! What has been organizational for centuries, in structure and function, must become organic with the life flow of God's Spirit. True unity can only come from the Lord Himself. He must touch hearts, especially of leaders, to see the great need that exists for repentance and humility. This is a work that He is beginning to do. The anointing of the Lord comes upon His body when there is unity between the members (Psalm 133). What is needed is true unity centered in Christ Himself. He must come to have first place in everything, beginning with our hearts.

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