

The Body Of Christ
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Last week we had a church meeting that had to do with a couple different things. The first part of the meeting had to do with our identity and function as the body of Christ. And then the last part of the meeting had to do with some possible structural changes to our gathering that might help us better function as the Lord's body. You all obviously know all of that. I'm just saying it for the recording.

When it comes to meetings like this, I think we have a tendency to become more interested in the practical things that effect our daily natural lives, than we do the much bigger reality of what we actually are as the Lord's body. I was a bit concerned that all of the talk and sharing opinions about potential structural changes might have distracted us from the real heart of what I believe God wants us to think about. There is no structural change that a person can make to the body of Christ, its meetings, arrangement, ministries, or roles, that can do anything to truly altar the measure of Christ that is working in us. I think the church is often confused on this issue.

What I mean is that it seems like many in the body of Christ are trying to discover the correct model for church, or the most functional model for meetings, or the way to "do church" that will allow the glory of God to come, or the way to return to how the Apostles did church. There have been several movements in recent years, and I suppose throughout the past 2000 years, that have tried to recapture something of Christ by changing the structure of meetings and ministry.

"If we just had church organized in smaller house groups. If we only removed the one pastor model, and switched it to a team of governing elders. If we only removed all spiritual authority and met together without any leadership. If we only spent the first full hour in singing praises, then the Spirit would feel invited to come. If we only taught sound biblical doctrine then the Lord would honor us with His presence. If we only remembered to reach out to the poor, than God would bring revival to this city." If you've been in the church for any length of time, you've probably heard some, if not all, of these ideas.

In other words, we often naturally assume that by changing the wineskin, the wine is bound to follow suit. But, what I'm trying to say is that the opposite is actually the case. Our problem is not the model or structure of our meetings. Our problem is that we do not know Christ. Our problem is not that we forget a missing ingredient. Our problem is that we have never known what it meant for Christ to define His own body when the Spirit reveals Him as the life of that body.

And I say all of that just to assure you that whatever we may or may not change practically/structurally speaking...it is only in an attempt to better align with what God has already changed in the wine. In other words, if we change and alter our

structure (which we have done very little of over the years)...it is because the Lord has brought us to a greater view of his body that begins to demand that change.

I'm not interested in change for the sake of change. Some people like change. Some people fear change. Both of those are natural preferences. **The Lord only changes outward things by transforming and increasing inward LIFE.** And so I just wanted to say that.

But getting back to where I wanted to head this morning...last week I said a few things about leaving behind an old model of church that exists in our hearts. The main point wasn't to talk about leaving behind an old model of church that exists in our day planner...but rather the understanding of church that exists in our hearts. We have all inherited an understanding of church, and our relationship to it, that is very much like any other natural association or fellowship or commitment. And if I were to summarize the natural man's philosophy for commitment the body of Christ it would be in this sentence – **"I will come when I can, to get what I can"**.

Now listen...if your attendance is pretty poor, I'm not trying to convict you or condemn you. I'm not really even talking about attendance. I'm talking about realizing what we are actually a part of. I'm talking about thinking in a new way about what we are, and what it is that we have been joined to...**and making decisions that are constrained by the Truth.** NOT making decisions that are constrained by guilt and manipulation or obligation.

We generally commit ourselves to a local body because we find there something that both works with our schedule (most of the time) and because we find ourselves a place where we think we can take something away for ourselves each week. A nugget of wisdom. And explanation of a tricky verse. A sense of fulfilling our spiritual obligation to God. A lesson in morality that we can live by and teach to our children. Whatever it is. It's something that makes the trip worthwhile on a Sunday morning. I mean, if I'm gonna bundle up four kids, and pile them in a car on a cold winter morning, I better be expecting to get something out of this that is worth the effort.

The reasons we usually commit to church are different for different people. As I just said...for some its this and for others its that. But when all the religious smoke clears, there is generally the underlying motivation that we "come when we can in order to get what we can."

And its in response to that mindset that we all have become familiar with, that I said what I said last week. I want to repeat some of that and continue along those lines today. I want to continue to talk about the reality of the body of Christ. NOT because I can change anything by talking about it. I cannot cause the Lord's body to function any differently simply by talking about what we truly are. But I hope to present before your hearts something of a contrast. An enormous contrast, in fact. A contrast that is black and white, life and death, Adam and Christ. Because the church, for starters, isn't even something you join. It is something you are born into when you are baptized in Christ. And just that fact alone should soundly slap us across the face and get our attention.

What is the church? The church is the living, organic, body of the resurrected Son of God. It is not the place where people meet to talk about the Son of God. It is not really even the people that come together to share time and place in the earth in

order to believe in and pray to the Son of God. The church is actually the life of Christ in those people, functioning according to the mind of the Son of God. The church is Christ functioning according to His life, nature, and mind, in a corporate people. And you become a part of the church not when you commit to a local fellowship, not when you attend, not when you commit to a group of people, or a pastor, or a vision. You become a part of that church when you are crucified with Christ, and raised out from death to become one Spirit with Him.

The church is one Spirit. The church is one body. The church is one mind, one faith. The church has been baptized into one death. I'm not saying this myself. I'm quoting Paul from Ephesians chapter 4. We've spent some time on these verses in recent months.

And what we ARE, must begin to dictate what we do. What we already are, when it is seen and known and realized, must revolutionize every single concept and idea about what the church is, how it functions, how it relates, how we function together as the actual body of Christ.

I asked you last week why you are here. Why are you here? I don't know how many of you thought about that this past week. I hope many of you did. There are a lot of reasons that people go to church on Sunday mornings, or throughout the week. I would guess that most of them are personal reasons, individual reasons. But I hope that that is ceasing to be the case with us.

Last week I gave you a few reasons why I hope that you are here. Let me repeat some of those for you to consider. I hope you are here because Christ is your life, and because His body is the primary place and way that you experience and grow in that life. I hope you have seen that, and seen that there is nothing else in natural life that offers you an experience of what the cross has made you to be.

I hope you are here because the cross is the lens through which you have come to see all things. There is a division, a judgment, between the living and the dead. And that division is the cross that calls one man dead, one creation put away, one covenant obsolete...and the same cross shows One Man to be alive, and a new creation to be in Him. I'm sure that reality may slide in and out of focus for you, but I hope that it is nevertheless the dominating reality and motivation for all things in natural life. I hope it is the underlining foundation upon which all other things must be understood. Because, whether or not it is for us, it is precisely how God sees all things.

I hope you're here because, in the light of that cross, you have seen that the earth is a passing world of shadows at best, and because there is nothing in it that you can have. There is nothing in the natural realm that your soul can possess. Everything of this realm is passing you by just as fast as you can notice it. And I hope you come to the Lord's body because His body is the only thing that you can experience in your body that is not like that. The body of Christ is the only eternal thing that touches this world. And what you gain of Christ in that body you will never lose. And what you experience of Christ in His body you will always have.

I realize that experiencing the Lord's body in this way is not very common. Maybe some of you are listening to this and thinking that you have never known the body of Christ in this way. Or at least not to any great extent. Perhaps you're thinking that you have never experienced a great deal of the life of Christ in fellowship with His

body. I want to suggest to you what you probably already know and assume. The problem with us in this is always a matter of blindness. If we do not experience the life of God in His body, it is not because God is somewhere else. It is because those who meet together as His body can see very little of what is there. I want you to think about that.

Christ is in you when you are born again. All that He is, is in you when you are born of His Spirit. We know that. And we hopefully understand that all that Christ is in us is, experientially speaking, dormant while we remain ignorant of and blind to His life. Nothing that Christ is can be accessed apart from faith – which is the mind of the Lord. So, though He be in us, we remain contrary to Him in all ways to whatever measure that we are not walking in His light, seeing as He sees, knowing as we are known.

And therefore all things of spiritual growth begin to happen in us only to measure that we begin to become conscious of His indwelling life. I mean, every Christian will tell you that Christ is in them. And many, I would bet, will insist that they are conscious of His presence. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about becoming aware that He's there. I'm talking about the consciousness that He has, the awareness that Christ possesses, becoming the reality that we see and know, and the source and motivation of all that we comprehend and do.

In simple words: it is one thing to be born of His life. But growth begins when you begin to become conscious of that Life through a work of the Spirit of Truth. You begin to awaken to His reality. You begin to awaken to what He sees, how He knows, what He's done. And the reality of it becomes the reality that you know and abide in. The fact that it is real and finished and true has its necessary effect on your heart with the coming of light.

Most of you know this and have begun this journey. But the reason that I'm mentioning it this morning is because one of the things that you eventually start to become conscious of is the reality of the Lord's body. Sooner or later, waking up to the Truth will mean a deep and permanent dealing with your soul along the lines of just what the body of Christ is, how it functions, how it grows and feeds and lives and relates. In my experience this is nowhere near the first thing that a soul begins to comprehend in the Light. But it is nonetheless a reality...and the Light will eventually expose it, show it to be real, and conform you to it.

The reality of the Lord's body has only recently started to enter a little bit into my field of vision. I have seen bits and pieces...little tastes in the last few years. But it wasn't really until I was in Costa Rica in October that the Lord really began to awaken my heart to the centrality and enormity of the body of Christ. And I had no ability at the time to communicate what I was seeing – either in English or Spanish. But the view was life-altering. I told that story last week.

So, I am just a beginner in this too. Like you, I am like a baby that is growing up into the knowledge of a world that existed long before I was born. I'm discovering it as Light shows me what is real. But I'm beginning to realize that this thing called the body of Christ is literally and exactly THAT. It is THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. And that may not strike you with any force right now because the words are so familiar to us. But I guarantee that a little light on the subject will get your attention. A little light will show you that in God's view, the body of Christ is the only relevant thing in the entire natural creation.

We are the body of Christ. And in every way that your natural body functions as a living, united, organism...so too is the body of Christ. The natural body is a mere shadow of the Lord's body. The body that we have is a dim picture of the body that we are...though I realize that the former still seems far more real to us.

God has always seen those in covenant with Him as a corporate body of His Son. Way back in Exodus 4:22 – "Israel is My Son, even My Firstborn". It has always been God's view. But it is very rarely ours.

And one of the things that I'm trying to do this morning is just advertise that reality to you. I'm trying to just present these things before you heart for your consideration and in the hopes that you will bring these things before the Lord for a greater measure of Light. That is one of my goals. And truly, nothing can genuinely change among us until that Light shows us these things.

But I'd also like to take the little that I've seen and attempt to explain a few things about the function of the Lord's body. I'd like to just make a few observations that have to do with how we function as His body. Here's what I want to say. **The body is where the life is. And the life is experienced and shared and served only through the knowledge of the Head.** Let me break that down into two distinct pieces.

First of all: the body is where the life is. You see, I say that because we don't actually believe it. We actually think that the life is somewhere else. We think its off in heaven somewhere...as though heaven is somewhere distant from your soul. We think that Christ comes and visits us. He pops in at a meeting from time to time. We shows up sometimes when we're reading the Bible. No. The body is where the life is. A seed went into the ground in one form, and it was raised up in another. 1 Corinthians 15 talks about this. The life of God in the body of Nazarene was sewn into the ground. But something far greater came forth. A harvest of that seed, if you will. And now the life of God dwells in a different body. It's not the Nazarene off on a cloud. It's Christ living and dwelling and glorifying His Father in the body that we are.

But second of all: the life is experienced and shared and served only as we grow up together into the knowledge of the Head. There are so many things that could be said about this. But for now let me just point out a few things. When it comes to your natural body, there is obviously nothing that you can do for yourself that doesn't have you as its source. I mean, this is so obvious that its actually hard for us to understand. Let me try to put it another way. Your hand is only serving your body because of its acquaintance with your head. If your head was not moving and motivating and defining all things to your hand, the hand would be completely incapable of serving your body. Can you see what I mean?

This is how it works in the body of Christ. When the body of Christ comes together, there is really only one relevant thing that must happen. It doesn't matter if I have some really neat ideas about what we should do. It doesn't matter that you have some neat things that you want to teach. You see, that's not going to help anybody because those things are not moved and motivated and defined by the head. What we all need to share and to feed on, to communicate and to see, to give and to receive, is whatever measure of the HEAD that is currently working in us by faith.

What I'm trying to say is that the body of Christ feeds on and grows with and serves only according to the mind of Christ that is operating in each part.

Whatever I do in this body, I must do according to the measure of faith that is operating in me. That is what you need. That is what I need. I need to know and see and grow up in whatever you have seen of the Head. Romans 12 talks about serving the Lord's body in proportion to the measure of faith that you walking in. Weather that is in teaching, serving, prophesying or whatever. It is all according to the measure of faith, because faith is the only thing that connects us with the Head. Faith is the only thing that accesses the Life of this body. When the body comes together, it comes together to share faith.

Paul says in Romans 1:12 that he longs to come again to the church in Rome so that they could be mutually edified and encouraged by the sharing of faith – both his with them and theirs with him.

The body of Christ is not something that you commit to as a spectator. That doesn't even make sense. The body of Christ is something that you have been born into, and something that begins to function in you as you connect with the Head through the revealing of Christ. **And every single thing that you see of that Head and know of that Head and every way that you have been moved by that Head and changed by that Head....every bit of that is relevant to the entire body.** I need to hear and see every bit of it. If it is from Him, then it is also for me. If it is a view of Him, then it is for the entire body. We need to realize that is how a body works.

If there is something of life working in the hand, then it is for the entire body. If there is something of life working in the eye, then it is for the entire body. There is nothing of life that is just for an individual member of the body. And there is nothing of life working in the members that is not also meant to benefit the entire body. Every bit of functional connection to the head that is working in each member (which is again called faith) is given by the head in order to benefit the entire body.

What I'm trying to say is that the measure of Christ that is being revealed in you is not for you alone. It is for His body. He doesn't see you as an independent Christian person. He sees you as an individual member of one body. And His movement in your soul through faith is according to the building up of His body.

Ministry in and to Christ's body comes out from our consciousness of His life. In other words, the Life that is in His body is accessed BY His body and shared with His body to the measure that you and I come together and feed on one another's faith. This isn't about coming when you can and getting what you can. This isn't about enjoying a person's teachings, and hoping next week is a good one. This is about speaking the truth to one another and growing up into Him who is the head in all things. This is about ministering to one another according to the measure of faith that is present in our view...and sharing with one another the reality of His life.

Now listen...I'm not talking about people coming together and sharing religious ideas. I'm not talking about trying to figure out tricky Bible verses or dialoguing with folks about theology. And if that's all that we know, then we don't yet have anything to share. And that's ok. Just be silent and wait for His appearing. We have nothing to say until He appears. But where He is appearing, where are connecting with His

life through His mind...that is where we contribute to His body. That is where we feed His sheep and tend His lambs. We don't feed them cheeseburgers. We feed them the bread of life, the blood of the covenant, the reality of eternal salvation that is experienced through the true knowledge of God. I'm talking about One, Son being seen in one Light, being shared with one body, who are one Spirit, growing up in all things into Him.

I want you realize that this is God's expectation for His body because we who have been joined to the Lord are one Spirit. I want the old ideas about church to fall away from our hearts because they were invented in the darkness. They were creations of our minds when we couldn't access the Life of the body by faith. I want us to begin to awaken to the consciousness of the Head, and therefore begin to do all things for the body out from the mind and motivation of the head. At the very least, I want us to realize that this is where we are heading. This is what we're aiming at.

Speaking the truth in love, we grow up in all things into the Head, which is Christ. This is why we gather together.