

The Body of Christ Becoming a Disciple Session 5

Warm-up Question: What has been your most memorable experience of working with a team of people for a common cause or job? What made it a memorable experience?

One does not get far in learning to be a disciple without relating to others in the church. We are all at different levels in our faith. Some are young in the Lord and need to be fed the milk of the Word of God (Hebrews 5:12-13), while others need solid food (Hebrews 5:14) so that they can grow to the point that they can feed others. The church must help believers to become mature, for only adult sheep can reproduce. It is a law of reproduction that one can only reproduce when you have reached a stage of maturity in order to care for the one that is born. Even Jesus took three years of training His disciples before He left them to carry on His work. Every church needs mature Christians to care for those that are young.

Often a great deal of mercy and patience is needed by those who are mature when those that are new to the faith are still acting out of relational or emotional hurts and needs. It is important not to allow the enemy to come between those who are mature and those who are still young in the faith and need the milk of the Word to grow. Satan would love to create division in the Body of Christ and in so doing, destroy the testimony of the church. Wherever God is at work, there is likely to also be a fair amount of “mess.” Where there is new life, there is also mess. This should not surprise us.

In the early days of the Jesus movement in the sixties and early seventies, many longhaired hippies came into churches after being drawn by the Spirit of God in a time of revival, but many refused to sit on the pews. They wanted to sit on the floor and listen and worship. This irritated some of the older elders and deacons in many churches to the point where they wanted these young newcomers thrown out of the churches for not behaving ‘properly.’ What is more important? Clean empty church buildings or those that are full of passionate, hungry, open hearted, young Christians? Some of those young people, viewed as unkempt and non-conformists by the older generation of their day, have now become strong church leaders today. To be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be pliable to the Spirit and accommodate others in the Body of Christ.

What is the Body of Christ?

¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form **one body**, so it is with Christ. For **we were all** baptized by one Spirit so as to form **one body**—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and **we were all** given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

I have been living in the United States now since the year 2000 (I am originally from England). Since that time I have noticed a tendency among Americans to live in a somewhat isolated and self-reliant way. Perhaps it has just been my experience as an

Englishman, growing up in my faith in the House Church Movement in the late 70's and 80's. It has been my experience that English Christians do seem to link arms more easily with others due to the lifestyle they are used to. Europeans seem to be more community oriented for the most part, and this may be out of need. Americans are used to a more independent way of life and this also affects church community life. In my early years as a young Christian in England I regularly experienced help in my daily life from my brothers and sisters in Christ. I had help in fixing my car, people shared their gardening tools, we loaned eggs or flour from our next-door neighbors to make pancakes for breakfast, etc. Of course, it can also make a difference whether you live in a rural area or in a city, but generally speaking, most American Christians would not think of asking their neighbors for help, unless in a time of crisis. I suspect that my experience has been partly influenced by the fact that most of my time in America has been spent in a large church of over 6000 believers. Even in smaller churches that I have served by preaching and teaching, however, I have noticed a similar mindset.

The New Testament holds up a different set of values to us as believers, it says that as believers we are family—the family of God, **“Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor”** (1 Peter 2:17). This love that Peter mentions is not to be in word only, but in deed. Love is not a noun; it is an action word, a verb. Peter is not seeking to drum up emotions in those he is writing to, he is instructing them to work out among themselves the reality that they are a family of believers in relationship together because of what Christ has done. The reality of the finished work of Christ on the cross is that something very wonderful has happened at the core of our lives. Christ has come in and taken up residence in the temple of our hearts and the Spirit has baptized us into the spiritual body of Christ.

What does it mean to be baptized into the Body of Christ? The Greek word *baptizō* means to dip, dye, immerse, plunge or submerge. “The word *baptized* “carries the double connotation of ‘being initiated into’ and being ‘overwhelmed by.’ For example, contemporary secular Greek sources spoke of a submerged ship being ‘baptized’. That ship was not merely ‘initiated into’ water; it was thoroughly ‘overwhelmed by’ water. Indeed, we can go on to say that it was ‘made to drink of’ the water, i.e. the water was inside the ship as well as the ship being underneath the water. Paul seems, then, to be saying both that Christians are in the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is in Christians, parallel to our being in Christ and Christ being in us.”¹

⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:4-5).

Just as a body has many parts, many members, so we that belong to Christ are part of this spiritual body of Christ. It is an organic unit. No matter how different we are, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, we have all been given the same spirit to drink. Paul the apostle says that all those who belong to Christ, have been baptized by the Spirit into *the* spiritual Body of Christ when we believed (1 Corinthians 12:13). We can't see

¹ The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church (Downers Grove, Ill. Intervarsity Press, 1965), p.211.

this invisible body, but there is an organic unity that we each have with other believers in Christ. He is the Vine, and we are the branches (John 15). We have been made one by the Spirit of God, many churches all united together into one spiritual organism; the Body of Christ composed of all believers worldwide. There won't be a distinction among believers at the rapture of the church; we will all go to be united with Him together, at the same time when Christ comes for His church.

Although we are all different, we are one body. There are churches that emphasize different doctrines just as there are many facets of a diamond, but there is only one Body of Christ. You and I are spiritually connected in some mysterious way if you are a believer. With that union there is often an awareness of other people's needs that are known only through the Spirit. Some would call it an inner consciousness. Others would say that it is a spiritual gift—perhaps a word or message of knowledge that the Spirit gives (1 Corinthians 12:8). The more a person acts upon those inner revelatory pictures that the Spirit gives, the clearer the pictures, dreams and visions become.

Have you ever had the experience of knowing something about another person that you weren't told about in a normal way? It could be a close relationship, a friend or even a stranger. Did you act on that knowledge or impulse?

Many Parts But One Body

¹⁴Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12:14-25).

How big was the Corinthian church when Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians? We have no way of knowing, but however the size, they were still able to build close relationships and even eat a meal together as part of their corporate meeting (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). The apostle Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians, has a picture in his mind that he describes. He sees them as a corporate body of Christ, representing the Lord Jesus to their city. He describes each of them as needing one another. There is no one that

is more valuable than another. When he is thinking about them, in his mind's eye, he recalls certain ones who are weaker, but then he thinks that they too are absolutely necessary and required (indispensable). He doesn't name names but he thinks of certain individuals as parts of the body that shouldn't be given up front visibility in relating to the people outside of the church. He calls them, "parts that are unrepresentable," saying that they should be treated with special modesty. His concern seems to be focused on making sure that each person is valued, especially those who have come to the church from a difficult background and have been beaten down and lacking self-esteem. We should give greater honor and respect to those individuals and build them up in love, by each person taking care of one another. Paul is very careful in saying that if we belong to Christ, we all have a part in the work of the church in caring for one another and building one another up—this is not the work of a paid specialist—this is the work of the church, to care and shepherd one another.

[What do you think is behind Paul's thought when he says that God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be? \(verse 18-19\).](#)

Paul is writing from the city of Ephesus, situated in the South West corner of what is now the country of Turkey. Corinth was a highly populated port city not far from Athens, Greece. His concern for them was that Satan should not have opportunity to cause division among them, he says, "**so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other**" (1 Corinthians 12:25). He knows that one of the strategies of Satan is to cause division among a body of believers and separate the corporate expression of the life of Jesus in their midst. He already knows of instances where there is a breakdown of their unity in the faith. In the previous chapter (11) he reprimands them for what was going on during the meal that they ate together as part of their meeting. This wasn't just a piece of bread dipped into a glass of grape juice; this was a proper meal that believers shared together as part of their meeting. It was called the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20, and in Jude 1:12 it was called the "love feast." In America we would call it a potluck dinner. Communion was part of this meal where they would break bread together and celebrate and remember all that the Lord has done for us. The apostle tells them off because some who had more money were eating all the good food and even getting drunk before the poorer ones even got there (1 Corinthians 11:21). The real need for them was to understand that the corporate expression of the life of Christ within their body was being damaged by their lack of care and concern for their brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord was judging this attitude among them—yet they were not realizing it. Paul was very clear:

²⁷So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

²⁸Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹For those who eat and drink **without discerning the body of Christ** eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

³²Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being

disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. ³³**So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.** ³⁴**Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment** (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

This is important for us to see that we have not been saved to be on our own. The spirit of this world is seeking to keep us alone and separate from the Body of Christ. There is no power when there is division among us. We must be careful when we talk about others in the Body of Christ. If they are believers in Christ, then we are one with them and they with us. There is a worldwide corporate body of believers and there is the local expression of the Body of Christ that is working together to reveal the Lord Jesus to our cities and towns.

The Ligaments of the Body

Every one of us has a part to play in building up our brothers and sisters in Christ, but what does Paul mean when he talks about supporting ligaments?

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, **joined** and held together by every **supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up** in love, as **each part does its work** (Ephesians 4:15-16).

How is the whole body joined and held together? How does it grow and build itself?

In the Book of Ephesians Paul again uses the analogy of the body. We will grow as disciples to maturity as we are connected to the Lord Jesus and allow His life to flow through the corporate Body of Christ. There are those in our midst that God uses to bring structure and connection with one another. He calls them ligaments (verse 16). What is a ligament? Ligaments connect bones to other bones to form a joint. There is no structure or connection to the body without ligaments. Paul is probably referring to those whom God gives responsibility and gifting as leaders:

¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²**to equip his people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until **we all reach unity** in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature**, attaining to the **whole measure** of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

God is involved, even today, in gifting and using certain individuals as servants to equip the body for its corporate task of ministry to the area where the local church is based. Often in today's church these individuals are expected to do the work of the ministry, but that is not what the Word of God says. They are equippers and trainers, yes, to do the ministry, but more than that, by their modeling behavior they train and equip others to be involved and give themselves in ministry, to those in the body to edify (build them up) them, but to also serve outside the church to their friends, relatives and

acquaintances.

In the analogy of a body, do you know what part you have been given? Do you think a person's role in the Body of Christ can change?

Rewards Shared Among the Body

It is my belief that when, as a local body, we get home to be with the Lord and celebrate with one another, that there will be corporate rewards that we will share in together.

⁴⁰“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴²And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward” (Matthew 10:40-42).

All those that enter into the corporate expression of the life of Christ that we are enjoying, and every fruitful work that happens because of this expression, do not think that only the front person shall enjoy the reward. Our Lord, when it comes time to reward His servants will reward us individually, but there will also be corporate rewards. The man that led Billy Graham to the Lord, don't you think he will enjoy some of the fruits of the labor that Billy exerted? He had a part in the winning of all those that Billy won to the Lord. Even if our part was as small as giving a drink of water to those who labor to win the lost, we enter into the fruits of their labor due to our part in being the Body of Christ with them. We might not be an eye or a hand—the seen parts of the Body, but each of us has our part to play in being the expression of the local Body of Christ, as we each do our part.

King David exhibited the heart of God and showed forth this principle of equal rewards after a terrible trial happened to him and the six hundred men that were with him. David and his men had returned to the village, Ziklag, where all their families were living safely in Philistine territory from King Saul, only to find that an Amalekite raiding party had attacked their town and kidnapped all their families, the animals and everything else that they had. David set off in hot pursuit of the raiding party, but because of the distance involved and the heavy weights that they were carrying with them, a third of the men grew too tired to carry on. Two hundred of the men stopped at a point on the way, the Besor Valley, and all their heavy gear was left with them while four hundred men carried on to attack the raiding party:

¹⁸David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives.

¹⁹Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. ²⁰He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, “This is David's plunder.” ²¹Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too

exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Valley. They came out to meet David and the men with him. As David and his men approached, he asked them how they were. ²²But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go." ²³David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us. ²⁴Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." ²⁵David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this (1 Samuel 30:18-25).

After returning to every man his family, David shared equally the plunder that was found in the Amalekite camp. It wasn't just those who were engaged in the battle that received a share of the spoils of war, it was also shared equally with those who stayed behind in support. This same principle will be done, I believe, by the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. All of what we do together as the local Body of Christ, each of us laboring together to do our part to reach out to those around us and draw them in, will share together in the harvest at the end of the age. ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope **of sharing in the harvest** (1 Corinthians 9:9-10).

What a glorious day that will be!

Prayer: Father, thank you for calling me to be a part of the family of God, the Body of Christ. Please equip me and train me to be all that I can be and to do my part to build up the Body. Amen!

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