

DISCERNING THE BODY AND HONORING EACH OTHER



Discerning and honoring the holy in each other holds us together and allows us to joyfully experience the presence of God in our midst. The following is an illustration of the beauty of this when found in marriages but it also applies to any relationship.

For a marriage to become what it was meant to be by God, a foretaste of heaven. There is an ingredient that's necessary that is many, many times overlooked. It's necessary if this marriage is going to really work, really thrive, for the man and the woman to treat each other with honor.

Even when they're angry with each other, even when they violently disagree they refuse to ever belittle or ever degrade their partner. Under all circumstances the man treats his wife with high honor. And in every situation the woman treats her husband with high honor.

Now, where you have such a marriage, you will always also eventually have love. And you will always have faithfulness. Children who grow up in such a home even though there may be financial pressures, even though there may be many other problems are growing up in an atmosphere of royalty that will bless them all their lives.

Now this honor, which the man gives to his wife and the woman gives to her husband is not a little act they put on in front of other people or even in front of each other. It's not a role that they play.

It's something which they discern.

They look at each other and they see something holy.

Now the man may look at his wife and he may see weaknesses in her. But beyond those weaknesses he sees deep within her, a flame of glory burning there, which he recognizes as a sign of the presence of God. And he gives thanks to God for that.

The woman looks at her husband and she sees weaknesses in him. But she looks beyond those weaknesses and she sees burning deep within his heart a flame of glory which is for her is a sign of the presence of God and she gives thanks for that.

Every so often you run across a couple, a man and woman who both lived as they were growing up as children in absolutely devastating family situations. Now they come together and get married and all the experts shake their heads, "*That's never going to work, their homes were so screwed up, they're never going to make it.*"



But somewhere this man and this woman have learned to treat each other with honor.

You walk into that house and it's like walking into a royal palace. It's like walking into a place of royalty because this man and woman have had their eyes opened to discern why God made them male and female.

They are able to discern the holy in one another. And they're going to be held together in bonds of peace, divine peace, as long as they both live.

Now this discernment which enables a husband and wife to discern something inside the other that makes it possible for them to really honor each other has another counterpart.

There is a discernment even more wonderful which enables the believer, the follower of Jesus to recognize the presence and the holiness of God in the other members of the Body of Christ. A discernment which enables us to recognize the Body of Christ in each other. Now where that discernment is active, where people are recognizing the Body of Christ in each other there you will always have life in that body.

Where on the other hand, you have believers gathering together who never really give that kind of honor to each other, never discern the presence and holiness of God in each other, who never see, nor recognize the Body of Christ in the gathering or in individual believers... in those assemblies the power of the Holy Spirit is severely limited.



But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and so humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

The thing Paul is getting out in this passage in this meal that these Corinthians are having together, presumably in the name of the Lord, presumably in communion with him, is that these people are degrading something which is holy.

First of all, they're dishonoring one another by not recognizing the Body of Christ in one another. More than that, they are dishonoring the Lord himself by not discerning his presence....

Not discerning his presence in the food they're eating.

Not discerning his presence in the assembly.

Now, if these people aren't discerning the presence of the Lord in these two most precious manifestations of Christ on Earth; the bread and wine, the gathered assembly.

How in the world are they going to see Jesus, to know Jesus, to love Jesus or serve him anywhere else?

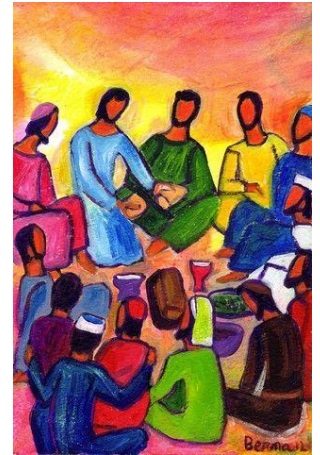
Paul goes on.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned.



1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Now central to this passage of course, is anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself. There will never be any danger of our eating and drinking without discerning the Body if we first learn to discern the presence of the Lord in each other. The two are connected.

There's no way you're going to recognize the bread and wine as a means by which the Lord comes to you, if you don't recognize brothers and sisters as the Body and the means by which the Lord comes to you as well.

For instance, when I have the eyes to see this brother or this sister walking down the road, in the market, at the park, or in the church building ... as a member of the Body... when I see, appreciate, acknowledge, and rejoice in these people, "*this is the Body of Christ, they are the precious Body of Christ*" then I myself draw close to the very heart of Christ. Maybe I'm mad at this one, or I don't understand that one, and this and that...But now I begin to change my attitude, I recognize that "*this is the Body of Christ, they are wonderful*". Even in the case of some brothers and sisters that seem like they are struggling with sin, or spiritually on the wrong foot, or maybe this one is doing something which I think is foolish, or making claims which seem to me to be ridiculous, if I regard them with high honor, despite my feelings.... then I bring light to the Body.

If, on the other hand, this person who's doing these dumb things from my point of view, if I dishonor this person in my mind, or if I go even a step farther and begin to belittle them with my funny little jokes, that are not jokes when they're belittling the person, then I'm bringing death to the Body.

When we recognize the Body of Christ in the assembly and in the members of the Body and constantly rejoice in them and give thanks for that... what happens is that the Spirit of the Lord is released in a way he can only be released when we discern the Body in that way.

Believers who come together and so discern the Body always experience the presence of God in their midst. And when those people go forth the gates of death always yield before them.

Now, how in the world did Paul get this vision of the Body that's so vivid, burns on almost every page of every letter? It began on the day of his conversion.



But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting;

Acts 9: 1-5

Now, really this is strange. How can Saul be persecuting Jesus? He can't even touch Jesus. Jesus is in the realm of the Spirit now. But he is touching Jesus, and he is persecuting Jesus, and he is afflicting Jesus by afflicting his Body.

And now his eyes are going to open, and he's going to begin to see that these people that he's been arresting and killing, or at least watching as they're being killed, are not what his natural eyes saw them to be. He sees that these people are the Body of Christ on earth... and that when he afflicts them, he's afflicting the Christ... and that when he draws near to them, he's drawing near to the Christ.

And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Acts 9: 5-9

Now there's somebody else in Damascus who also is having trouble discerning the Body. There's a man in Damascus who is part of the Body, yet he's having trouble seeing.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name."

Acts 9: 10-14

"I don't want to go. No, Lord, you must be making a mistake here".

Ananias knew that he was part of the Body and he knew that those brothers and sisters back there in Jerusalem were part of the Body. But he had a limited view of who could be received into the Body... a narrow idea of what the Lord had in mind for his Body.

"You're making a mistake. That guy doesn't belong to the Body. We don't want him in the Body. Keep him out of the Body. You made a mistake he's going to be a problem for us if he comes in.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened.

Acts 9: 15-19

The thing to notice is that Saul of Tarsus does not come into the Kingdom of God merely by having a vision. He isn't really in the Kingdom of God until somebody from the Body, some flesh and blood human being who is part of the Body of Christ, comes to him, lays hands on him, and speaks a word to him. He is received into the Kingdom as the Body reaches out and gathers him in.

Every redemptive event that takes place on this earth, every retentive act, every one is in some way connected with the Body of Christ, with these flesh and blood people for all their weaknesses....who love the Lord, are praying to him, trying to serve him, are pouring out their lives, shedding their blood, crashing the gates of death. It is through these people that redemptive things take place.

And the only ones who can so function as the Body are those who discern the Body.

The lone ranger disciple who goes far charging around on his own trying to do great things for God, but it has no vision of the Body, no discernment of the Body, always ends up hindering the purposes of God.

Also, the supermarket Christian who comes to church with a shopping list. *This is the stuff I want to get today. I'm going to be disappointed if I don't get it* and then grab what's there and goes on their way without discerning the Body. These also are a hindrance to the purpose of God.

Only those who discern the Body, see the Body of Christ in these people, and rejoice in what they see, and draw near to it, and identify with it, and commit themselves to it, and are part of it and function in harmony with these other people....Only through these does good news go out to the poor, deliverance come to the captives, and sight to the blind.

The meal in which we eat the bread and drink the wine is sacred in most assemblies. We call it communion. Now it's communion with Jesus only when we discern the Body in this meal, only when we see his presence.

And we need to discern the Body of Christ as we eat this meal in two ways.

First, we have to discern his presence in the food.

Take and eat. This is my body. Which was given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

And as he did this, he took a single loaf, broke it and passed it around. Then he took the cup, take and drink this is the blood of the new covenant, shed for your sins. Do this for the remembrance of me.



Then he took one Cup and passed it around. And today, in our churches, we have our little glasses and we have our little pieces of bread. We're not drinking from a single loaf or a single cup, actually physically. But what we are doing is *joining* ourselves to him and we are *receiving* him in this food.

Secondly, we need to discern the presence of the Body of Christ in the food.

We need to discern the Body in each other.

God help us to see this is not a spiritual cafeteria. Everybody loads up their tray, gets up quickly and goes on their way. That's not what this is.

This is the Body of Christ gathered at the table, becoming one, acting as one, joining our hearts, and wills together as one.... around Jesus. We don't have anything else in common but that really.

May the Father open our eyes, that we might discern the Body when we gather together. And by having our eyes open, begin to discern the body sufficiently so that we begin to give each other honor as we gather together and may we continue to give each other honor as we go into the world.

The work that remains to be done out there is not going to be done by lone rangers or by any of us as an individual. It's going to be done by the Body, it's going to be done by those who have eyes to discern the Body and hearts that fit into it.... as the Body of Christ does its work, fulfills the purpose of God in their city, and across the earth.

Prayer- Lord God, we ask that today, you would help us to see things that we often miss. We always look for the grandiose in the big and stumble over the little. How often in our relationships of all kinds, It's those little things that mess it up. Things that look so little to us but are so important to you.

We pray, Lord today, that you'd help us to learn and to practice continuously this matter of giving honor to our brothers and sisters, even when they're wrong, even when they're dead wrong. Not to condone anything evil, but never to dishonor each other in our thoughts, or our actions, or our words. Help us Lord in this matter and help us today to repent of the way we do it. Help all of us, help us all to repent of this.



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Prayer- Yes Lord help us to see each other with your eyes, to honor our brothers and sisters the way you call us to. Oh Lord keep us from hindering your purpose, from being deceived into divisiveness. Lord help us to see that when we belittle and dishonor each other, we are belittling and dishonoring you. We are degrading the holy. Forgive us. Heal us. Help us to see the Holy in each other, beloved members of your precious Body. Help us to see that they are the means by which you come to us. Help us to rejoice in them, go forward with them, live in harmony with them and take this same love, this same power that allows us to live in such a way... out to deliver this world and offer something the world cannot give them. Amen.

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