

FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST



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In order to experience the life of God consistently so that we can function in this world as sons and daughters of heaven, there are three points of contact we need to maintain continuously.

First, we have to be in living touch with Jesus.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

The basic need of our life is communion with Jesus, because we draw our life from him. He has joined us to himself by an act of fathomless love, and now it's up to us to abide in him ... to keep that union clear, to keep his word living in us, by hearing and doing it.

Second, we have to be in living touch with each other as fellow members in the Body of Christ.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Matthew 28:16-20

Hence, Jesus' command;

- that we are to love one another even as he has loved us,
- that we are to wash one another's feet,
- that we are to serve one another.

The greatest among us is greatest, not by virtue of authority or power or gifts. The greatest among us is the most consistent servant, the most effective and perhaps the least noticed, washer of feet.

Without genuine unity with brothers and sisters in the Body we cannot live. Our union with the Vine will wither and die if we drift away from unity with brothers and sisters.

Third, we have to be in living touch with the needy, wounded, dying world.



Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Go make disciples of all nations.

As the Father has sent me, so send I you.

Without this going forth with a living word and heavenly grace for the world, we will soon become ingrown and sick and we will die.

For 2000 years this truth has been borne out again and again. Believers who fail to touch the needy world in some way soon lose touch with Jesus and with each other ... if they survive at all they survive as cults, or religious snob clubs, but not as the Body of Christ.

First, we have to be in touch with Jesus ... living daily, continuous union with Jesus.

Second, we have to be in touch with each other ... living continuous union with the Body.

Third, we have to be in touch with the needy world ...life-giving, hope-giving, healing, saving touch with that world, manifesting the love of Jesus.

And of course, it is these three vital points of contact which are the continuous target of Satanic attack.

Satan's primary target is to somehow **destroy our union with Jesus**, the Vine, by luring us away from a prayer life or tempting us to compromise his commands.

Satan's second target is to **divide us** from each other.

His third objective is to **isolate us** from the world and its needs.

But here's the problem:

In many of our fellowships the stress has been on points one and three. We see the importance of staying in union with Jesus (number one) and of keeping in touch with the needy world (number three). But on point number two, the importance of staying in touch with each other, the stress has often been weak. In fact, you could say we've stressed points one and three, and let number two take care of itself.

Hence our conception of church has come to mean, "The door is open ... come on in and find a seat..."

.... leaving people pretty much on their own, to figure out how they are to fit in with the rest of the Body.

The result is that our working concept of the church is a kind of **Spiritual Supermarket**. We come and get what we want and go on our way *without tasting the kind of fellowship with each other we all really need*.

And so, the Spirit has been saying,

- "If your union with Jesus is ever to be what it was meant to be,
- If your effectiveness in the world is ever to have the impact it should have,

- you need to do some basic work on your unity with each other."



There are two places where the Spirit will help us practice the unity of the Spirit with each other –if we cooperate.

- First, in the gathered assembly, as we come together to worship the Father and commune with the Son in the breaking of bread.

- Second, in smaller groups of believers into which the Spirit may be drawing us for nurture ... a house meeting, a family group, or a small group that gathers on the lunch hour where we work.

But whether it's the smaller group or the larger assembly, the same principles apply.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Ephesians 4:1-6

What a difference it makes when we see our coming together as a manifestation of ...

the one Body,
and the one Spirit,
and the one hope,
and the one Lord ---

--- knowing that each individual member either contributes to that unity or tears it down.

But grace was given to each of us, according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.".... And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

Ephesians 4:7-12

Every disciple has some measure of Christ's gift ... some gift of the Spirit

.... that will help equip all the other saints for the work of ministry and will help build up the Body of Christ.

We often tend to think of "coming to church" as something we do for ourselves.

"I come because I need it," we say.

And sometimes we walk away from the assembly disappointed or even angry.

"I didn't get anything out of it today."

And it's true, we *should* be getting something out of it.

We should be quickened and strengthened *by coming to-gether* to praise God, feed on the word and partake of the blessed meal.

But what we aren't seeing so clearly is that it's even more important that our presence in the gathered assembly

.... is for others

... not just for ourselves, for others!

Our attitude, our spirit, and what we do, should, in a mystery, enable others to "get something out of it!"

In the assembly where the Lord has placed me, the health of the entire Body is affected by me—

---my presence, my faithfulness, my intercessions, my care and love for them.



The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

I Corinthians 12:21-26

I haven't been put in the Body just to get something out of it. I have been put in the Body because the Spirit has ordained that I have a function to fulfill.

For the Body to fulfill its purpose I, as a member of the Body, need to be present and functioning.

For instance, most of us don't give much thought to our teeth. We just keep on chewing and talking and taking our teeth for granted. Then one day an abscess develops at the root of one of our molars. Suddenly we forget all about our hands and feet and ears and elbows. All we're aware of is this aching tooth!

... if one member suffers, all suffer together.



Then we get the molar repaired. What a relief!

... if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

In exactly the same way the health of the Body is affected by each one of us.

- If I come into the assembly with an attitude, it's the beginning of a toothache for the whole body.
- If I'm undisciplined or careless in such a simple matter as gathering with the saints, it's like the Body has a loose tooth.

It's hard to eat with a loose tooth!

-If I come together with the other saints, but my heart is ill prepared, it's as if the Body is forced to try to walk with a foot that's gone to sleep.

It's hard to walk with a numb foot!

On the other hand,

- if I come to the gathered assembly with a heart that's committed to serving the Body, then my presence is used by God to build up the Body,
- if I faithfully pray for other members of the Body,
- if I honor them in my conversation,
- if I accept them, love them, go out of my way to serve them,

--- the whole Body is built up and strengthened.

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

And we bring this gift of grace to the Body,

- to help equip others for their ministry,
- to build them up,
- to maintain unity.

This gift from the Lord is not only something that we do or speak (though it is that) ...

.... but it's first and fore-most....

An attitude of our heart....

A desire to serve others....

A spirit of mercy and kindness toward them.

Am I coming to the Body with a spirit of patience, forbearance, forgiveness?

Am I drawing near to my brothers and sisters with a genuine willingness to commit myself to them?

Have I come to help, to serve, to lay aside my garment of pride and wash feet?

Am I dependable, or am I a loose tooth, a numb foot?

The message of the Spirit to our churches is,

- not only do we need to abide in Jesus daily, hourly,
- not only do we need to touch this troubled world in Jesus' name,-

--- we also need to maintain holy, godly, blessed unity with each other.



But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are using that grace for the equipping of the saints, for their work of service, for building up the Body.

And if we see the need for change in our attitudes, our habits, our approach to one another, the time to begin that change is now.

- The same Lord who calls us to come to him and abide in him,
- The same Lord who sends us forth into the world to preach his gospel....

Also commands us...

- to love one another
- to be faithful to one another in ways that we have yet to learn....



and the time to begin is now.

Prayer: Yes, Lord help us to begin now to love one another, to be truly faithful to one another...to build up your Body the way you call us to. Give us the frame of mind and the attitude that we gather not so much for ourselves but for others... to touch their hearts, to offer the friendship, the listening ears, the tender care, the prayers, the gentle guidance they so desperately long for... and honestly what we ourselves long for. Help us to contribute to the unity that others seek. Help us to see and use the gifts you have given us for this holy task. May we find our function so we can build up your Body, so we can come together in one body, one spirit, one hope serving you together, living for you together the way our heart of hearts desires. Amen. Maranatha Mirror

Message: Richard Bieber 1982

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