

## **What does it mean to be the body of Christ in the World?**

The Body of Christ is the visible reminder to the world that God exists and is very much in the business of reconciling everything to him. One way in which the Body serves as a reminder to the world is by demonstrating the type of life humanity was created to live; instead of living in brokenness (emotional, spiritual, mental, physical), living in the process of healing and reconciliation (social, individual and with God). As members of the Body work, live, relax and worship God with each other they make progress in healing from living in a broken world. This healing process is completely beyond our comprehension but we can look forward to it and work towards it. A main characteristic of this healing/reconciling process is simply the fact that each member of the body is working together for the sake of each other instead of personal interest. That is to say that Christians older in their faith strive to work with those younger in faith so the younger can benefit from the experience, insight and wisdom of the older. While this may seem completely simple the process is anything but simple because in some mysterious way, the process is horizontal instead of vertical in the nature of the relationship. This is a formative process of mutual sharing rather than a form of downward sharing and instruction. Iron sharpens iron regardless of the age and experience of the two pieces of iron. For example the younger believer may be blessed with the spiritual gift of encouragement while the more mature Christian is blessed with the gifts of discernment, prayer and humility. Isn't it possible that they would sharpen and strengthen each other regardless of how recent the younger became a Christian? This might seem unusual because, like so many other parts of the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ has a way of turning our thinking and paradigms upside down and inside out. Should this be a surprise to anyone who has sat down and read the scriptures? Probably not since this is one of the dominant traits of God's methodology (i.e. using the child Samuel to point out that Eli was unable to hear God).

What would it look like to move this idea from merely being a discussion into the realm of daily living? I suspect that it would be similar to a dynamic partnership where the younger in faith serves as a conduit of God's desire to remind the more mature Christian that He loves creative expressions of mercy. Maybe the mature Christian had forgotten that there are many expressions and forms of mercy. This reminder could take

place over coffee as they share what God has been teaching them. It is probable that the younger Christian may unknowingly serve the older in this capacity. Society tells us that more often it is the younger/less experienced individual who learns from the more mature and experienced people in their lives. Is this social perception with its emphasis on downward instruction wrong? There are various accounts of Paul providing instruction to Timothy (i.e. 2 Timothy 2:1-3) as a means of helping Timothy grow both as a Christian and a church leader. However, it is easy to overlook the fact that Paul was strengthened and encouraged by Timothy being present at Ephesus. The encouragement and assurance weren't solely rooted in the knowledge of what Timothy had been taught; it was also rooted in knowing that Timothy (younger in faith) was driven by a sincere faith and served as a reminder of God's delight in Paul's faithfulness (2 Timothy 1:1-6).

Another practical expression of the Body of Christ is for individual parts of it (members, congregations, study groups, etc...) to seek guidance from God concerning where to start the reconciliation process in their lives and community. Is there a specific step that needs to be taken such as fasting and prayer before starting the process of reconciliation? If not, then consult with some fellow Christians concerning how to go about the process (i.e. praying for soften hearts, writing down every offense committed against an individual, confessing it before God, setting up a time to meet with the person wronged and praying). After the preparation process is completed, then meet. This is a sample for beginning reconciliation which becomes life-long and if implemented into daily living will help to set Christians apart from the world.

The Body of Christ is also an instrument of reconciliation in the world. This reconciliation has many expressions and descriptions. Each description of reconciliation is customized to bring about healing. When considering reconciliation, it is tempting to believe and even practice the notion of one tool does it all. Unfortunately, the church has not resisted this temptation and although they haven't entirely embraced this notion they have settled for a watered down unbiblical expression of reconciliation- initial reconciliation between God and sinner without changes in daily living. The body of Christ must demonstrate that being reconciled to God is not the final step for the Christian rather it is a means of being strengthened to reconcile with others, to help them reconcile with God and to remind us that we are to confess our sins (not once or twice but

continually). As a mature Christian I admit that I struggle with and sometimes fail in the practice of confession in my daily life. If we as Christians aren't demonstrating the serious nature of confessing our sins against God and others than why should we expect there to be a change in the church's relevance in community. Without acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the need to make it right there is no way in which reconciliation within mankind and with God can happen. Without reconciliation the body of Christ is not faithfully living out the teachings and commands of God. The reason why we should be concerned with healing our relationships is that Jesus called us to be imitators of him and to carry on the ministry begun during his time with us. Regardless of our view on freewill or predestination, there are two reasons we (the Body of Christ) must become more serious about imitating Jesus; out of love for God and because it is a command (not optional).

### **What does it mean to be the body of Christ for the world?**

A key part of being the Body of Christ as depicted by Scripture and church tradition is that its presence in the world isn't enough, just as Immanuel's presence in Galilee and Judea wasn't enough to fulfill prophecy. The Body of Christ must be in the world for the world or it is disobeying foundational teachings of Jesus (the great commission and the great commandment). God doesn't give us a choice as to which teachings to orient our lives by (the great commission or great commandment) rather it is expected that we strive to live in accordance with both as lenses that help us to fully imitate Jesus.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me." These are words that should describe the Body of Christ existing for the world. This quote is not from Scripture but from the pedestal upon which the Statue of Liberty stands. Yet they describe the very thing the global body of Christ needs to carry out - accepting people from all stations of life, ethnic backgrounds and age. By accepting them, the body of Christ carries on the work Jesus began - changing lives through transformation of their status as lost and sinful sheep in His hand to children of the Most High God. We have always been children of God but we haven't

always known our identity is rooted in this status; instead, the notion that our identity is rooted in this broken world is what we have been told since birth (Psalm 51). Through the working of the body of Christ each of us regardless of earthly status can come to know our real identity as children of the living God (Romans 9:2-14).

As the Body of Christ, we should seek out the poor, broken and outcast with the intent of embracing them. What is meant by embracing them? Embracing these individuals starts with treating them as human beings who have the same value before the Almighty God as we do. By treating them as humans, whether that is asking them their names or enjoying time to get to know them, several amazing things can happen at the same time: restoration of self worth, participation in a group that is loving and potential opportunities for discipleship are revealed to the local body of Christ. When the local body of Christ reaches out to all members of society with the desire to do more than fill the pews it begins to demonstrate the desire to change society both local and distant (state, national and global). This desire could be expressed by participating in lives through loving them and instructing them in ways to imitate Jesus it fulfills the teachings and commands God passed on through Jesus, the apostles, church fathers and preserved by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

What does the world gain from the Body of Christ treating people as valuable? God's active presence in the world provides a means of understanding humanity's options including the option to move away from the daily grind of accepting brokenness reinforced by paradigms of indifference. When the local body of Christ intentionally acts with the goal of showing reconciliation and transformation of individuals, families, local and global communities, society is forced to accept the validity of living for something other than the American dream, self-preservation or communal well being. This type of societal response will meet resistance, be scoffed at and be judged by some as abnormal or wrong. But these expressions of desiring to keep the status quo are okay. They are okay because not everyone gets the importance of changing paradigms. This is either because they refuse to change or they need time to let the idea sink into their thought life. Both

refusing to change mindsets and needing reflection were present when Jesus was preaching, healing and performing miracles and they will continue to be represented by parts of society until the Second Coming.

### **What does it mean to be the body of Christ for the glory of God?**

In order for the body of Christ to glorify God, it needs to take a good hard look at how Jesus – the head of the body – glorified God during his earthly ministry. In short, Jesus did the will of the Father; he did not stray or deviate from the will of the Father. It might seem easy for Jesus to know and do the will of the Father. After all they are in communion with each other. Although that is true, it is not an excuse for why the body of Christ doesn't do more of the Father's will. Jesus demonstrates time and again that part of being in communion with God is intentionally seeking God all the time not just when we are starting something new. Jesus went away from the crowds and spent time with the Father. True, there is no record of what happened or how long these conversations went, but there is proof that it happened enough to assume it was daily in occurrence. What does this have to with glorifying God? I dare say it has to do with everything. If we as individuals and local parts of the body of Christ don't spend time with God and learning his will then how we are supposed to fulfill his will and thus bring glory to God in the highest.

The body of Christ has designated leaders with specific responsibilities yet they are not the part of the Body that needs to glorify God through doing his will. It is the complete Body of Christ that must strive and yearn to glorify the Almighty. Otherwise the body is not in harmony and sharpening each other but broken and in need of repair. We, the Body of Christ, can't rely on our own strength and wisdom to glorify God because we will fail and be increasingly susceptible to the sin of pride. The paragraphs which follow will provide two examples of instances when self-dependence instead of dependence on God by an individual affected a community and did not bring glory to God

The first example is Saul's disobedience to kill everyone and destroy everything belonging to the Amalekites. Saul believed he was doing the right thing by sparing the choicest livestock for the purpose of a burnt offering to God yet this

was not what God had commanded. The consequence of this disobedience is God's rejection of Saul as king over Israel. Saul's sin wasn't thinking of what was needed for a burnt offering to God it was choosing what seemed right over doing what had been clearly expressed as the right thing. Even though Saul admitted to his sin after being chastised by God for his disobedience God wasn't glorified (1 Samuel 15).

The second example is the apostle Peter. Right after Jesus predicted his death to his disciples Peter took a step away from glorifying God. Without thinking it through, Peter replied that Jesus must never die at the hands of scribes, elders and chief priests. Without missing a beat Jesus rebuked Peter by using the same name for Peter as the name of the devil - "Satan". The rebuke came because Peter did not set his mind on the interest (will) of God but on man (Matthew 17: 21-23). Unlike Saul, Peter was later reinstated as a servant of God (John 21:15-19). Peter had a lot to learn but demonstrated a willingness to yearn for a life according to the will of God. Once Peter accepted that he did not on his own know the will of God he was transformed and bringing glory to God.

The Body of Christ in its entirety is responsible for glorifying God. These two examples demonstrate what can happen when a leader within God's followers disobeys him. In the example of Saul, his people suffered for his foolishness in the form of civil strife every time Saul pursued David. The decisions of leaders can benefit or bring consequences to followers of God. Each congregation, neighborhood movement, small group and mission society is responsible for how well they strive after glorifying God. One community called to task by God for not obeying divine teachings was the early church at Pergamum. They were told that they aren't doing everything they could to glorify God (i.e. banish false teachers, embrace moral living). The church at Pergamum is told to repent or Jesus himself will war against them (Revelation 2:12-17).

How does a community of believers bring glory to God? They commit to faithfully striving to do his will as it is revealed to them. If they are unsure of what specifically they are called to do in their part of the world then they should pray for guidance instead of starting something up for the sake of doing something visible. After all, the only way to know the will of God is to ask - guessing gets you nowhere

(i.e. King Saul's first disobedience). Although God has blessed us with individual gifts, they are meant to be shared and when they are shared their ability to please God is magnified. God calls us individually and corporately to imitate him at all times (not just when we feel like it). There are only two types of communities – those that are earnestly seeking God's will (i.e. the early church per Acts 2, Reformers) and those that do not run hard after God's will (i.e. Rome, stagnant congregations). History is filled with accounts of both types of communities. The following line from the Lord's Prayer sums it up: "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven".