

(One Body in Christ) 1. One Body - the Basis of Fellowship

by Zac Poonen

The Church's ability to fulfill her God-ordained function as the light of the world and individual believers' ability to become ministers of life to others depend on true Christian fellowship among believers.

Topics: "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Fellowship"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical importance of fellowship among believers, arguing that despite being born again, many Christians still struggle with interpersonal conflicts that tarnish the witness of the Church. He highlights that true love for God is evidenced by love for fellow believers, as outlined in 1 John, and that broken fellowship deprives individuals of experiencing Christ's love and fullness. Poonen illustrates that the Church, as the Body of Christ, must function in unity and love to fulfill its divine purpose, warning that disunity hinders Christ's work on earth. He calls for believers to seek spiritual vision to recognize their role within the Body and to live out their calling in humility and love.

Transcript

Despite man's advancement in many areas, human relationships continue to present problems all over the world. Business concerns and agencies spend huge sums employing personnel to promote harmony among workers.

Well, one might think it is understandable that self-centred, unconverted people find it difficult to get along with each other, but surely when people are born-again and have become new creatures in Christ, such problems can never arise. For, after all, when God is the centre of one's life and service, what possible room can there be for the petty problems that besiege others?

Yet, sadly, no proof is needed of the fact that Christians fight and quarrel with each other, all over the world. Many are not even on speaking terms with some of their fellow-Christians; some cannot even stand the sight of certain other Christians. The Name of God continues to be disgraced in the world by the behaviour of professing believers.

Jesus said that the world would identify His disciples by their intense love for one another. This was - generally speaking - literally fulfilled in the first two centuries of the Christian era. The world looked at the Christians with amazement then, and exclaimed, "Behold how these Christians love one another!" Today

the story is different and the world often says, "Behold how these Christians hate one another!"

Relationships are indeed most important. Gifts, talents, methods, techniques, programmes and finances are all secondary to people and to inter-personal relationships. The Church can fulfil her God-ordained function as the light of the world only when there is true Christian fellowship among her members. Likewise, an individual believer can become a minister of life to others only when he himself has learned to live according to the law of love with his fellow-Christians.

Two-Dimensional Fellowship

The Bible plainly and repeatedly teaches that no Christian can have fellowship with God without fellowshiping with other believers. You cannot walk with God if you do not walk in love with your fellow-believer.

The Cross on which Jesus died had two planks - a vertical one and a horizontal one: Jesus came to bring peace not only between man and God (vertically) but also between man and man (horizontally). The vertical and the horizontal relationships go hand in hand. You cannot have the former if you ignore the latter.

John, the Apostle of Love, has some very strong words to say on this matter. One of the evidences, he says, of genuine conversion is that a man begins to love his fellow-Christians. If a man does not have this love, it is a sure indication that his conversion is spurious and that he is heading for eternal death (1 John 3:14). Doctrinal correctness was not the only test that the apostles applied to ascertain where a man stood in relation to God.

Later on in the same letter, John says that if a man claims that he loves God while hating his brother, he is a liar. Mark that! The proper name for such a man is not "believer", but rather, "liar"! And John's logic is irresistible. He says a brother is visible whereas God is invisible. If you cannot love the visible, it is impossible to love the invisible (1 John 4:20).

Now compare this with the experience of most "believers." Love for God is usually assessed in terms of busy activity in Christian work or in terms of rapturous feelings of delight experienced in the presence of God. These can be most deceptive. I have come across believers who are out of fellowship with other Christians who testify nevertheless to "wonderful times of prayer" and to "amazing results in service."

How could they possibly be walking with God when they have not even made an effort to settle matters with other members of God's family against whom they have a grudge? Surely Satan has blinded their minds to the truth of Scripture!

The Price of Broken Fellowship

Often we do not realise what we deprive ourselves of, when fellowship is broken with other believers. The Bible tells us that we can discover the breadth, length, depth and height of Christ's love and be filled with all the fullness of God only along "with all the saints" (Ephesians 3:17-19). It is only as we know the reality of fellowship with the believers God places us with, that we shall be able to enter into an experiential understanding of the love of Christ and of the fullness of God.

The one who cuts himself off from any fellow-Christian thereby deprives himself of the experience of Christ's love and grace which could have been his through that person. When we fail to live by the law of

love, we rob ourselves of some of Christ's riches and some of God's fullness.

The Body of Christ

Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians is centred around the great truth of believers being one Body in Christ. Christ is the Head of the Church, and the Church is His Body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Each believer is a member of this Body.

This is not merely a fact to be acknowledged intellectually but one that should have many repercussions on our daily life on earth.

The first half of the letter to the Ephesians deals with the doctrine of the Body of Christ. The second half of the letter deals with the practical outworking of this truth. And this is how the second half begins:

Thereforewalk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace(for we are all parts of) one body" (Ephesians 4:1-4).

In other words, once a person has understood and "seen" this truth of the Church being the Body of Christ, he should long to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, unity and peace with his fellow-believers. When a Christian does not walk like that, it indicates that he hasn't seen the Body of Christ.

Such a person needs to go back to the first three chapters of Ephesians and say, "Lord, I'm blind to something here. Please teach me. Please open my eyes." For the truth of "the Body" is not one that we can grasp merely with our intellects. As Paul says, the eyes of our heart need to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, if we are to know (Ephesians 1:18, 22, 23).

To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, "You are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). True, the Christians in Corinth in the first century were only a small part of the worldwide, past, present and future group of believers that constitute the Body of Christ; but they were nevertheless to be a local expression of that Body in Corinth. This is the calling of every group of believers in every age and in every place. It is God's intention that every Christian fellowship, whether it be a church, organization or body of workers, be a visible expression to the world of the Body of Christ.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, He came in an earthly body. God showed Himself to man through that physical body of Christ. Without a physical body, Christ could not have accomplished what He did, and the world would not have known what God was like. A physical body was essential.

Now, consider what limitation there would have been in Christ's ministry on earth, if His body had had paralysed or uncoordinated limbs. If, for example, His legs, arms or tongue had been paralysed, He could not have walked to the homes of sinners, put His arms around lepers or spoken the words of life. He could do all these and more - only because He had a strong, healthy body.

When Christ ascended to Heaven, God gave Him another Body on earth to carry on His work - a spiritual Body of believers redeemed by His blood out of every nation and tribe and language. This Body of believers, indwelt by the same Holy Spirit Who dwelt in Christ on earth, was to continue with the ministry which Christ, using His physical body, had begun. This is the calling of the Church.

Do you see why Christ is limited on earth now? His spiritual Body (the Church) has limbs and organs that are either paralysed through sin or uncoordinated through disunity.

Satan cannot attack the physical body of Christ today, but he can and does attack Christ's spiritual Body. Satan (unlike many believers) realizes that Christ's work on earth can be limited by non-functioning or non-cooperating members in the Church.

How desperately we need to pray for spiritual vision concerning the Body of Christ. It is indeed one of the greatest needs of the day. May God help us to see Christ as Head over His Body and each of us as members in it. Such a vision alone can make the Church triumphant.

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