

REVIEW |

In Lesson 2, we learned that

The so-called spiritual gifts should not be viewed as special abilities to do ministry; rather, they should be viewed as the ministries themselves. Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church.

Today, we want to think of about our spiritually empowered services, ministries and activities in the context of being united to one another as the body of Christ.

HOOK | The True Nature of the Body of Christ Explored: “The larger world of the small”

Read and Discuss:

It is not fashionable to say much nowadays of the advantages of the small community. We are told that we must go in for large empires and large ideas. There is one advantage, however, in the small state, the city or village, which only the willfully blind could overlook. The man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world... The reason is obvious. In a large community we choose our companions. In a small community our companions are chosen for us... That is why the old religions and the old scriptural language showed so sharp a wisdom when they spoke not of one's duty towards humanity, but one's duty towards one's neighbor. The duty towards humanity may often take the form of some choice which is personal or even pleasurable. That duty may be a hobby; it may even be dissipation... But we have to love our neighbor because he is there--a much more alarming reason for a much more serious operation. He is the sample of humanity which is actually given us. Precisely because he may be anybody he is everybody. He is a symbol because he is an accident.

G.K. Chesterton, Heretics, 1905

Questions for Consideration:

- What is implied about the nature of “the body of Christ” by the larger community conception of the “global or Universal” church? Especially when described as the “invisible” church? (ideal/spiritual?)
- What by contrast is implied about the nature of “the body of Christ” by the conception of a “local” or small particular church? (Material?)
- Why does Chesterton describe the “local” small community church as representing life in a “larger world” than in the bigger more “global” church?
 - E.g. How does this change the way we think about our union with Christ? Is it an ideal/conceptual union (based only on a set of beliefs) or is it a material/visceral union

consisting of flesh on flesh interactions relative to a a specific community comprised of individual members that are known and who know me?

- How does it altar the meaning of our “duty to one another?” (note for instance the currant trend in social justice, however noble the ambition)
- How does it altar the way we make choices about who we service and even hang out with?

BOOK | The Body of Christ: Metaphor or Reality?

- 1) Note how in 1 Cor 12 on “spiritual gifts (aka “services” c.f. Lesson 2), Paul's development of the body of Christ theology constitutes sixteen verses out of the thirty-one total verses in 1 Corinthians 12-more than half.
- 2) According to the following passages, how exactly is Christ presented as “present” in the midst of us on earth as Christ has ascended into heaven?

1 Cor 10: 15 I speak as to sensible (sensory) people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (participation from Grk “koinonia”)

Eph 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all... Eph 2:19 you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him \you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Accordingly, is the nature of Christ’s presence

- *Ideal?* As a metaphor only of a general idea—the “body of Christ” is metaphor for an ideal concept – “we love humanity”
- *Spiritual?* As a sign only of a spiritual reality-- the “body of Christ “ is a real power but only spiritually vs. in any real, material sense wherein it directs us to a more inward spiritual reality.
- *Material?* As a sacramental seal—the local church becomes the mediated body of Christ, distinct from Christ but not efficaciously separate from Christ, such as to actually become, *mediatedly*, Christ in the midst of us. It is a real means of grace wherein grace is ordinarily conferred (albeit not necessarily but predicated upon God’s sovereign decree). by means of our “sacramental union” with Christ’s body in heaven.

- E.g. Body of Christ” is a real and even bodily presence albeit mediated by the Holy Spirit in/with/through the local membership of a particular church in union with Christ and One Another

Notice how the following two citations of our WCF explain the “sacramental union” of the members together of a local church (“body of Christ on Earth) to the eternal person of Christ (body of Christ in Heaven)?

WCF Chapter 27

2. There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

WCF Chapter 20

1. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

Accordingly, what is the relation of the local, flesh on flesh, body of Christ to the fullness of Christ’s presence on earth and subsequently the gospel itself in the world?

WCF 20.2. The visible church.. consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

- 3) Per 1 Cor 12:15ff, how is every individual Christian related to the corporate Body of Christ?

1 Cor 12: 15 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body... 21 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.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,

(Each and Every Christian is An Essential Element of the Body of Christ)

- 4) What is the focus of the spiritual services/ministries/workings of members in/with/for the body of Christ? What does that mean about how we discern what our ministry/service/activity should be? Does everyone have a ministry(ies)?

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (relative to the body of Christ). 1Cor 12: 7

- 5) What is the purpose of members spiritual services/ministries/workings in/with/for the body of Christ?

Phil. 1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,

with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

LOOK | Discuss the following citations from Richard Hayes. What, by way of implications, do you discern regarding our individual responsibility to the body of Christ?

The conception of salvation as an individual matter between man and God is utterly foreign to Paul's preaching. To be in Christ, in the Lord, in the Spirit means to be in the community of Christ, the Lord, and the Spirit.

The communal context of the believer's life is of the greatest importance for Paul's understanding of how the Christian is able to know what he ought to and ought not to do. The believer's life and action are always in, with, and for "the brethren" in Christ. For him, moral action is never a matter of an isolated actor choosing from among a variety of abstract ideas on the basis of how inherently "good" or "evil" each may be. Instead it is always a matter of choosing and doing what is good for the brother and what will upbuild the whole community of brethren.

Richard Hayes, *Ecclesiology and Ethics in 1 Corinthians*,

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it... We can meet others only through the mediation of Christ: before I could begin to act, Christ acted decisively for my brother; I must meet him only as the person that he already is in Christ's eyes.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

TOOK | So What?

- 1) How does the idea of our spiritual identity and purpose being tied to the body of Christ change the way we make decisions?
- 2) How does the idea that EVERYONE is essential in his/her service/ministry/work within a local body of Christ re-imagine the variety of ways we can participate in the body of Christ in service to the gospel of Jesus Christ? What confidence does it bring that “I” matter when “I” becomes “we?”
- 3) How does the sacramental union of Christ's body in heaven with Christ's mediated body on earth impact the way we will experience intimacy with Christ?
- 4) How does this study re-shape our understanding of a “health” church? What, in sacramental/spiritual terms is the “bigger” church? (Flesh this out- pun notwithstanding 😊)

Further Discussion