

Its Interaction

Rediscovering Church:

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

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I have been accorded the great honor of sharing very personal and sacred moments at the time of death. I have been welcomed to the deathbeds of precious souls and watched the families hold hands and offer expressions of love, comfort and honor. I remember holding hands and singing together with a family at the death of their loved one: “Praise God from whom all blessing flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” When you observe and experience scenes like that, you know that there is nothing like family. There is nothing like family when it’s full of honor and love. There is nothing like family when it is formed by faith in Jesus Christ. The interaction is healing. The interaction is life-giving. The interaction is life-building.

Contrast what I just described with an interaction that happened at a large office where the manager spotted a new employee. The manager asked, “What’s your name?” The new man replied, “John.” The manager scowled, “Look, I don’t know where you worked before; but around here, I don’t call anyone by their first name. That breeds familiarity which can lead to a breakdown in authority. I refer to all my employees by the last name only: Smith... Jones... Baker... That’s all! “And, I am to be referred to only as Mr. Robertson. Now that we got that straight, what is your last name?” The new man sighed, “Darling, my name is John Darling.” The boss responded, “Okay, John, the next thing I want to tell you is this...”

Perhaps, we don't suffer such formality in the church, but how far do we go beyond the superficiality of that office as we work together on a few tasks, like worship or service? The church that God designed and blesses is a lot more like those families I observed at the deathbed than a people focused on some common tasks. Listen to this description by the Apostle Paul:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4-5, NIV)

Take a moment and look at your body. Glance at your arms and legs. Pat your stomach. Ooh, mine's soft. You are not this body. It belongs to you, but it is not you. It is your host. You live in this body. Paul wrote that the Spirit of Jesus lives in us together in the same way as we live in our own body. Together we are the body of Christ. Assembled together we are the host for Jesus' Spirit. Have you thought about the implications? We will explore them in the next few minutes. However, if you doubt this truth, listen to Jesus himself:

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.
(Matthew 18:20, NIV)

I think we don't realize the impact of this statement. Other Bible passages and our own experience suggest that Jesus is with us individually. What's the big deal about Jesus being with us when two or three come together?

Have you ever staggered with dizziness or had trouble gaining your balance? Do you realize how many body parts are needed to walk successfully? I can't list them all; however, suppose your heart is pumping and your lungs are breathing and your endocrine glands are working and all your critical stats are normal, also assume that all your bones, cartilage, joints and muscles are healthy, you still rely on toes, heels, feet, eyes and the semicircular canals of the ear. Did you ever think you needed all of those parts to walk? If you remove one or two parts, you still may be able to walk; but it won't be easy, and your body may wear down quickly.

Now how many of us are staggering or stumbling in some areas of our life? We are either not walking or we are falling a lot over some relationships or issues or even health. How many of us pray about this and pray about that, but nothing happens or it seems to get even worse? Some folk conclude that God doesn't answer their prayers, or they think like Bette Midler sings, "God is watching us... from a distance." Some even cease to believe that God loves them or that he exists... at least with any power that makes a difference today. Some remember special moments when God came to them, but they cry out to him day after day getting no relief and becoming more discouraged. Some ask, "Has God abandoned us? Are we suffering some deserved judgment?"

However, if it takes more parts than I can list to walk physically, what might that say about what it takes to walk spiritually and victoriously? Paul wrote that we Christian believers are members of one another. That would suggest that to whatever degree you are isolated from other Christian believers, you experience a personal deficit of divine love and power that is meant to be there for you. Whatever area of your life is hidden or separated from the rest of the body of Christ is removed from the ministry and power of Jesus. It isn't that Jesus doesn't love you. It isn't that Jesus lacks power. It isn't that Jesus wants you to suffer. No, you have removed yourself or part of your life from his voice, his hands or other body parts that he uses to breathe life and health into your heart and circumstance.

The church Jesus formed is not like a big office where we focus on tasks (like worship, evangelism, study and service), but never focus on personal things. Just as a family is exactly about personal things, so is Christ's church. We are meant to be the family where your problems get addressed, not forgotten. We are meant to be the family where the stuff you don't like about yourself is known, and where people still love you and act as Jesus' agents of your healing.

However, there is more. It is not just that you are incomplete and limiting Jesus' work in your life when you isolate yourself, or part of your life, from your spiritual family. You also are a member the family depends on. Your decisions, both obedience and disobedience, and your experiences, both struggles and victories, affect the rest of the body. You are not an island. You are not merely an individual. You are part of a people, part of a family, part of Christ's body on this earth. Your decisions and experiences affect the rest. Listen to what Paul wrote:

God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:24-26, NIV)

Do you see what is happening? God has not divided us up into classes of Christians. There is not a professional class and a lay class. There is not a clergy class and a congregant class. God designed his body to have no division. He designed us to interact. I know as a leader of this congregation that my gifts bring you blessing and that my deficits and sins cause you to suffer. However, your screw-ups hurt us all too, but your gifts and victories bless us all. We are discouraged or encouraged by your experiences and perspectives. We are helped by your repentance, faith and gifts. We are hindered by your unbelief, pride, and absence. Is this really different from any other family?

Beware of the tempter. Satan is the accuser of humanity. He will tempt you with thoughts like this: "I'm too broken and unhealthy to bother you or be around you all. You'd be better off without me. I'll do you all a favor and leave." Excuse me, but isn't amputation an extreme act used only when death is immanent and certain. Moreover, does the part amputate itself or does the person, Jesus, first decide and then the whole body carry out the decision? Amputation or separation is not your decision if you belong to Jesus' body. The tempter may

also say, “If you stick around these people, you will get incurably sick or hurt. They are too unhealthy, too hypocritical, too sinful to stay around. I’m better off alone.” Isn’t that like the ear saying, “I don’t need those eyes because they don’t see distance? I don’t need those hands because they drop things? I don’t need those feet because they stumble?” If you need Jesus, you need what he does through his body.

Two sins cripple our interaction with one another. The first is pride. We often mistake pride for discretion. Discretion evaluates the health or appropriateness of an act. Discretion evaluates who you share things with. Jesus told his followers not to cast their pearls before swine or they might turn and trample them. They needed to be careful with their advice. Discretion is concerned about who you share with and issues of confidentiality. Discretion is also concerned about honoring people, including family members. While discretion cares about issues like confidentiality, honor and even the wisdom and gifts of those you share with, it seeks help. Pride doesn’t. Pride pretends, glosses over and covers up. Pride is secretive in order to save face. The second sin is unbelief. Unbelief dismisses or diminishes the love and power Jesus has to heal our lives and to also make differences in other lives through the gifts he bestows on us his family. We fail to use our gifts because of unbelief, and we fail to receive the ministry of Jesus through others because of unbelief.

When the Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians to eagerly desire the greater gifts, he was telling them to seek the fullness of Jesus in the body. Pray for and seek Christ’s great gifts to operate in both ministry to you and ministry through you. Are you hungry for the greater gifts? I am. Let’s eagerly desire them and seek them from Jesus. Remember. It takes only two or three assembled in Jesus’ name for him to powerfully make a difference through his gathered body. He’s there. He’s there to make a difference.