

The Organization of Christ Or the Body of Christ; Which Are You Building?

– Charles Simpson –

Seven principles for the development of body life

For years I believed that the unity of the church is supposed to be primarily mystical. I thought that the church was going to be united only in heaven. But I have come to see that the Lord wants the unity to be visible. He wants the church to be united on earth as well as in heaven. Jesus said, pray this way: "Thy will be DONE ON *earth*." He told the disciples, "Whatever you bind and loose on *earth* will be bound and loosed in heaven." The Lord wants the church to be united on earth so that it can carry on his ministry on earth.

The kind of unity that the church must have to carry out its mission is the unity of a body. The goal of the church is not merely to get Christians to heaven; it is to be the light of the world. The responsibility of the church is not to get out of the world, but to disciple the nations. The relationships that ought be in the church are not relationships of merely mystical unity, but visible harmonious relationships. Only when the church functions as a body will it be able to achieve that goal, fulfill that responsibility, and demonstrate those relationships.

When Christians talk of the unity of the church we are often thinking of the unity of all Christians. We assume that we already have unity in the local church. But what *kind of* unity do we have in the local Christian churches and groups which we are leading? If it is not the kind of unity that a body has, then we're not going to be able to be on earth what the Lord wants us to be.

ACTIVITIES OR RELATIONSHIPS

The Bible tells us that Christ is THE HEAD OF his body, the church, and we are its members. But reading something in the Bible does not mean "having" it. For the most part, churches today do not function as bodies in which all the members are connected to the head and to one another. I'm glad my own body is not in the shape many churches are in. My mouth might start talking against my ears. My feet might stop listening to my head.

In many ways, what we have in the church is meetings and activities. But a meeting is not a body. My body does not get together once a week; the parts of my body are

in a relationship all the time. For the church, being a body does not mean being together all the time. But it does mean being properly related to one another.

If the members of the church are not in a relationship with one another, meetings and activities won't make them a body. Even activities like praising God and preaching the gospel won't make the church a body. There is a difference between a rock pile and a building. Without committed relationships, the church is just a collection of arms and legs, hands and feet. It is the connections with the head and the other members that make the parts a body. There has to be a head; there have to be joints.

SOURCES OF UNITY

To function as a body the church must be held together by relationships. But churches today are often held together by everything except relationships. Some are held together by buildings. For example I might ask someone, "What church do you belong to?" "It's that building over there," he might answer. Now, it is good to have a nice building to meet in, but the building is never the church. God's people are the church.

Some Christians think that they have unity because they have the same ideas about church organization or liturgy, or because they agree on doctrinal details, such as the precise form for baptism. But if points of doctrine are all that unite us, we cannot be united with Christians who believe anything different from us. And our unity is destroyed if one of us changes his mind about something. Any time we change our beliefs a little, we have to get a new set of friends.

The only true and enduring basis of unity is our recognizing the will of the head that we be joined together.

HEADSHIP

Certain principles come into play when we begin relating as members of a body. I want to present seven of them. These are laws, of a sort. They are not the kind of laws that you have to obey. They are laws like the law of gravity: they work whether you understand them or not. But understanding them can be very helpful.

The first one is the law of government. I would state it this way: Entrance into *fellowship necessitates coming under headship*. A person cannot be part of the church until he confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus says, "You cannot come into my body unless you acknowledge the head of the body, because I won't have subversion in my body."

This is what I call the "door principle." Jesus said, "I am the door." His is the door into the church. If you are going to go into any domain, you go in through the one that is responsible.

This is true in the family. If I am going to have fellowship with a family, I need to acknowledge the husband and father of the family. If I have fellowship with a man's wife and I do not acknowledge his headship, my fellowship is going to cause trouble. If I develop a relationship with the children and I do not acknowledge that the parents have responsibility for them, my relationship with the children is going to make them worse, not better children, because it will be at odds with their parents' training them.

Not only is it important that all be related properly to the one head, Christ, but it is essential that the members of the body be properly related to the delegated human leadership. In 1 Corinthians Paul writes: "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatas, Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition."

If I had gone into the church at Corinth and refused to recognize Stephanas because I said that "I recognize God not any man," I would have been out of order. "Submit to men like this," Paul says, "and recognize them."

HONESTY AND RECONCILIATION

The second principle is this: *Staying in fellowship requires walking in the light. Walking in the light means walking in the truth with each other, living honestly.*

John says, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." That means that if we walk in the truth and in openness with each other we become cleansed. Fellowship cleanses.

If I understand that passage right, it even says that the blood flows in fellowship. If I block off a member of my body, if I tie a tourniquet around my arm, it will die. Why? Because the blood has stopped. Impurities are clogged up. No new life is coming in.

The same happens in the body Christ. Watch a Christian that is beginning to backslide. One of the things that you will notice is that he will begin to drift out of honest fellowship. The brother won't show up at meetings. When you talk to him he does not really communicate with you. Poison is setting in.

Staying in fellowship requires walking openly and honestly with one another. That is why there is so much said in scripture about confessing our faults one to another. James 5 talks about healing: "Confess your faults to one another. Pray for one another." We cannot really know how to pray for each other if we do not confess our faults to one another. It needs to be done in the church. Frankly, it would do many of us a lot of good to confess our sins to somebody. If we get them in the light then God can deal with them.

Now I was born and raised a Southern Baptist. Most Baptists and other Protestants I know have so reacted to the Catholics' confessing to the priest that we do not confess to anybody, not even to God. We say, "Forgive us our sins." But that is not a confession; that's a generalization. "Forgive me for that lie I told about So-and-so" - that's a confession. Then if we go and confess it to So-and-so, God knows that we are sincere.

Matthew 18 is very explicit: "If your brother has transgressed, go to your brother privately first. If that won't work, take somebody. If that doesn't work, bring it to the whole church." How much trouble would we be spared if Christians observed Matthew 18? I dare say that most division in Christianity has occurred because Matthew 18 has not been practiced.

As long as we are divided, we will not see God's grace working perfectly among us. If we believe that God means what he says, we should practice Matthew 5:23: "When you bring your gift to the altar, if you remember somebody has something against you, first go be reconciled to your brother.

I have tried to make it a practice that when I hear that anyone has said anything against me, I try to call them on the phone or write them a letter and make it right, if I can. That has kept me pretty busy; and it does not always work. But I am not free before God until I try.

The scripture says, "If you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven."

We need to take that seriously. If we go on being religious without observing that, we are deceiving ourselves. Especially as leaders we must practice reconciliation as best we can.

HUMILITY

The third law of fellowship is the law of humility. The law of humility *is; humility of heart is required for harmony and success.*

Romans 12:10: "In honor prefer one another." That is a difficult scripture. How many of us get more excited when our brother or sister gets honored than when we do?

Too often we are likely to think, "Well, if they knew him like I know him, they wouldn't have paid him such a compliment."

1 Peter 5: 5,6: "You younger men, be subject to your elders. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time." Humble yourself, and he will exalt you. Exalt yourself, and he will humble you. You do your job, he will do his. You do his job, he will do yours.

Strife is directly traceable to pride. A working body is one where each member serves the body and not merely itself. Serving other members is direct evidence of humility.

FAITHFULNESS

The fourth law is the law of faithfulness. I would state it this way: *Increase in responsibility in the body requires faithfulness to responsibility.* What that means is this: In a body, if a person is going to be promoted, his promotion must be born out of faithfulness to what he has been asked to do. If it is not, the body will stop working.

Luke 16:10-12: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" We can see three parts to the law of faithfulness - faithful over a little, faithful over money, faithful in that which is another's.

When we see people in the body who have jobs in which they are not functioning properly, we will see that these laws were broken. As a pastor I learned this. We would give responsibility to a lot of people who had not proven themselves. We paid the price for it.

- in little things

The scripture says, "Do not lay hands suddenly on anybody - on a novice - lest he be lifted up with pride and fall into the snare of the enemy." A person should start by serving. Every new Christian ought to be given a *few* things to do, and little things.

For example a person comes to me who has just met the Lord, and I say, "Wonderful, you've met Jesus. You're on fire for the Lord. You've experienced the Spirit. That's good. That's wonderful. Now, would you straighten up the chairs for next Sunday morning?"

"Chairs?" he says. "I feel the call of God. I'm ready to be an apostle."

"Would you fix up the chairs?"

"The world is lost and dying. I want to go somewhere and preach Glory to God!"

"Brother, let's do the chairs and straighten up the hymnals," I ask.

"Praise God, if we had faith, we wouldn't need hymnals!" he replies.

Well, I come to church Sunday and the chairs are not arranged and the hymnals are all messed up. I say, "Brother, what happened to the chairs?"

"Well, I didn't feel led to do it. I was praying and fasting and seeking the Lord. Glory to God."

Now what if later I have a meeting with the elders and somebody says, "We need somebody to do this big job. What about him?"

"Well, he didn't do the chairs," I reply.

"Well, maybe he wasn't challenged by that. Let's give him a bigger job. Maybe he'll do that."

Will he? No. Faithful over a few things, faithful over many. Unfaithful over a few things, unfaithful over many. Who said that? Jesus did.

When Jesus chose his disciples he started them out at the bottom not at the top. He sent Peter to get the tax money from the fish. He told the disciples to fetch the donkey and get the room ready for the meal.

They served.

GRACIOUSNESS

Fifth law - the law of liberality. It is: *Increase in the grace of God requires graciousness. If I want more grace, I must be gracious.*

When Mary broke her alabaster box at Jesus' feet, Jesus rebuked her critics. In the Lord's eyes, her lavish love deserved to be remembered wherever the gospel would be preached.

Proverbs 11:25 says, "The generous man will prosper." Liberality is part of the Christian way of life, in which we ought to train the people we are caring for. Paul

sent Titus to the Corinthians "to finish this grace" in them, to work graciousness in them (2 Cor. 8:6).

When there is meagerness, miserliness, meanness in the church the wheel turns, but there's friction. Grace is the oil that makes things go smoothly.

I minister to all kinds of Christian groups and I find that the generous groups, those who share and are gracious, are those that have the greatest revelation of Jesus Christ. They are not always the most "religious." Some real "religious" groups are so tight they squeak, but they do not have much revelation of Jesus. As a pastor what I want to see happen in a group of people is for there to be an attitude of graciousness in all the relationships.

FRUITFULNESS

Sixth, the law of fruitfulness: *What one receives he is required to transmit.* "Unto whom much is given, much shall be required." In John 15 Jesus says, "Herein is the Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Fruitfulness is reproductivity.

"Every branch," Jesus says, "will bear fruit or it will be cut off." Every branch is to bear fruit. A person might not bear fruit the first year or the second year or the third, but sooner or later he has got to reproduce. He ought to be able to say, "Lord, here's what you gave me, and here's what I did with it."

Pastors should expect people to be fruitful. Being fruitful is not a position in the church. Being fruitful is bearing people into the kingdom of God.

RESPONSIBILITY

The seventh principle: the law of administration. I would state it this way: *What one produces he must accept responsibility for or provide oversight for.*

Several years ago our church started growing. The old church mentality was that the pastor is like "the old mother who lived in a shoe, she had so many children she didn't know what to do." I was preaching, and we had an altar 75 feet wide, and every Sunday people were being born again and filled with the Spirit - and they were being left there. It was like children being abandoned on the orphanage doorstep. I and three or four others did all the mothering and daddying.

I prayed, "Lord, send a great revival. But if you do, I'm going to die."

The Lord showed me that others in the church needed to be brought into caring for the new members. I wasn't supposed to be raising one generation after another of spiritual children who never grew up and never learned to take on some responsibility themselves. I saw that everyone in the church should learn to take at least some degree of spiritual responsibility for new members, especially for those they brought themselves. I wasn't supposed to be raising my spiritual grandchildren.

What would happen to young parents if their own parents raised all their children for them? In an emergency that might work; but it isn't the norm. The whole idea is for parents to raise children so that they will be mature at a certain age and can go and raise children themselves.

I think the church has raised a lot of dependents. Some Christians are 40 years old but have never been able to take some responsibility for helping men and women grow to maturity as Christians. They have watched while others have done it all. One of the important priorities for pastors who are building up a Christian body is to train the members of the body to take on this responsibility.

A successful body is no accident. It is the result of carefully observing God's instruction. The above are some of the principles that must be observed, according to scripture. As we observe the will of the head, members will properly relate and edify the body. The body will be visibly unified. A functioning mature body can then give itself to doing his will on earth, as it is done in heaven.

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