

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (16)

July 27, 2008.

The Functioning Of The Body Of Christ. (continued).

Please turn to *Rom.12:3-8*. (read). This morning I want to tie up some loose ends in the study of our functioning as members in the body of Christ. We “are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” (*1Cor.12:27*). God has composed the body and determined how every member must function in the body. (*1Cor.12:11, 24*). Paul made it clear that all the members do not have the same function. (*Rom.12:4*). In *vs.6* he added, “we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.”

Every member has been given a gift(s) by the Holy Spirit for the common good of Christ’s body, the church. *Eph.4:7* says, “but to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” *1Cor.12:7* says, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” The emphasis in Paul’s sentence is on “**each one**”. In other words, just as every organ in the body has its peculiar function or functions and it is equipped to carry out that function or functions, the same is true in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit has placed you into the body of Christ, determined your role(s) or function(s) in the body of Christ and equipped you to carry out your role(s) or function(s).

I want to remind you again that your role and function in the body of Christ is for the common good of the church. This common good is described in *Eph.4:12-13* as “the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Note the key words : **unity; knowledge; mature; fullness**. Why is this important? It is important because we face grave spiritual and moral dangers in our world.

In *vs.14* Paul said when we achieve what he described in *vs.12-13*, the result is that “we are no longer children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” (*vs.14*). Spiritual maturity is set in contrast with spiritual immaturity. Those who are spiritual children are spiritually immature. Spiritual children are marked by spiritual ignorance and instability.

Peter O’Brien described the spiritually immature as “*unstable, lacking in direction, vacillating, and open to manipulation.*” In our text Paul pictures the spiritually immature as small rudderless boats that are driven and tossed by the waves and winds. The waves and the winds represent false teachings. The spiritually immature have no settled convictions and are unable to properly evaluate false teachings. The result is that they fall as easy prey to every new theological fad. When a Christian comes and asks what I think about this or that false teacher and / or their doctrines, it immediately tells me that I may be dealing with a level of spiritual immaturity that lacks the necessary discernment and ability to properly evaluate the false teacher and / or his teachings.

Note Paul’s other descriptions in *vs.14*. “Trickery” describes playing with loaded dice. “Craftiness” intensifies the meaning of “**trickery**” and describes one who is ready to do anything, whatever it takes, to achieve his wicked goals. In *2Cor.11:3* Paul used this same Greek word, translated “**craftiness**”, to describe the serpent that deceived Eve. The goal of evil men who use trickery and craftiness is “deceitful scheming”. “**Deceitful scheming**” is “*the well-thought-out, methodical art of leading others astray.*” So often I hear people describe false teachers and deceivers as people who do not know better. If you do so, this is where you are wrong.

In *Eph.6:11* Paul used the expression, “the schemes of the devil” to describe what the devil is doing. “**Schemes**” is the same Greek word translated “**deceitful scheming**”. The devil uses well-thought-out methods to attack and mislead all Christians and especially the immature who are not grounded in the word of God. The servants of Satan in this world follow Satan’s methods of craftiness and deceitful scheming to lead

you astray both spiritually and morally. And more than often, if you are not well grounded in God's word and in your fellowship with God, you will be no match for the servants of Satan.

Now you may not think too highly of yourself or your gift(s) or your role in the body of Christ and the contributions you can make for the common good of the body of Christ. If you have this mindset, you need to get rid of it. Paul said in *1Cor.12:21*, "the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'." The body of Christ needs you and the gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given to you. *Eph.4:12-14* makes it clear that the stakes are high. We need your effectual functioning in the body because the positive goal is maturity in Christ. The down-side is immaturity and all the negative things that come with such immaturity.

In *Eph.4:16* Paul said "the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body." Note that : Paul did not say that the proper working of the important parts cause the growth of the body. Paul did not say the proper working of those with the more excellent gifts cause the growth of the body. Paul said "the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body." No part or organ of the body is excluded. In other words : we need you! The church, the body of Christ, needs you!

The whole body is to be active in the promoting of its own building up and growth in the quality of its life. When every member in the body of Christ is functioning as it should the body is healthy and experiences growth. It experiences spiritual growth, that is, growth in the knowledge of God's word, growth in the grace of Christ, and growth in holiness. It experiences numerical growth through evangelism. It experiences financial growth through faithful and generous giving. It experiences growth by expanding its involvement in other ministries.

I want to return now to my two closing points in the last sermon. *Firstly*, you do not need to know what your gift(s) is to serve the Lord in His church. You can begin with

the commands He gave to us. I listed for you a sampling of the commands you ought to be obeying. They have to do with the Great Commission, worship, hospitality and the ministry of encouragement. We saw that the Bible speaks a lot about this ministry of encouragement. The ministry of encouragement is not necessarily simplistic as it may sound. The ministry of encouragement is an important part of the ministry of counseling. It may require more than saying an encouraging word to a person. It may require you spending time with the one who needs encouragement.

There is also a great need for members to devote themselves to the ministry of intercessory prayer on behalf of this church the Lord has raised up. This kind of intercessory praying or warfare praying is a very important aspect of the church's ministry. It is a mistake to exclude **“all prayer”** from the armor of God we must use in our warfare against the schemes of the devil. **O'Brien** wrote, *“Prayer is given greater prominence within the context of the battle with the powers of darkness than any of the weapons listed in vv.14-17.”* Please turn to **Eph.6:18**. Paul wrote, “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

Note the important four-fold repetition of the word **“all”**. In prayer you must be continually alert. The verb Paul used means *“to be watchful; to be vigilant; to stay awake; to pass a sleepless night.”* Is there a hint here that warfare praying may take you through the night as Jesus prayed all night? I think the hint is strong because **“be on the alert”** is combined with **“all perseverance”**. In other words, sometimes warfare praying may require that you persevere all through the night. **Lk.6:12** says Jesus **“went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.”**

Why the need for such vigilance in prayer? Peter said, **“be on the alert.** Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (**1Pet.5:8**). That **“someone”** may be you, someone close to you, some member of the church or some servant of God who is at the forefront of the battle. **“Be on the alert”** is a synonym of the verb Paul used. Peter's verb has a sharp ring to it and

he is saying that your confidence in God must not lead to slackness because the spiritual warfare you are waging demands vigilance.

Paul said to the Ephesian Christians that they must engage in warfare praying for all the saints. In the context this refers specifically to all the members of the church in Ephesus. But the primary specific application must not exclude the broader general application of praying for Christians in other places. The body of Christ cannot pray for you with warfare praying unless they know your burdens. This calls for building relationships, transparency and trust. It is for this reason also that we have been devising programs for you to meet for fellowship and give you avenues to build relationships of transparency and trust.

Gal.6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” The verse attacks the heresy of individualism and the myth and self-sufficiency. It commands us to a life of mutuality. The law of Christ is clearly stated in **Jn.13:34-35**. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The practice of this quality of love can have an important evangelistic impact. **Jas.5:16** commands us to pray for one another. We cannot bear one another’s burdens and pray for one another unless we have knowledge of the burden you are carrying and unless we know what are the goals you are seeking to achieve.

Brethren, we have various volunteer committees in this church for a variety of ministries and activities. We need to form a committee who will be committed to warfare praying and who will seek to involve others in warfare praying. I shall be speaking more about this in due course.

Secondly, I asked the question : Aren’t you glad that the Lord Jesus got involved? Aren’t you glad that the Lord Jesus did not choose to sit idly by as a spectator? When Jesus got involved, it cost Him a great deal. The final cost for Him was His death on the

cross, becoming sin for us and paying the divine penalty for our sins. We are commanded to follow in Christ's steps. (*1Pet.2:21*). He got involved and so must you. The failure to get involved in what the Lord Jesus is doing in building His church is a very serious matter.

I want to turn you now to *Matt.25:14-30*. The slave who received one talent failed to get involved. But I want you to note whom he blamed for his failure. Note *vss.24-25*. (**read**). Do these two verses remind you of another person? They ought to remind you of Adam. Firstly, Adam said to God, "I was afraid". (*Gen.3:10*). The one-talent slave said to his master, "I was afraid." Culpable failure made both of them afraid.

Secondly, the slave blamed his master for his failure. "Master, I knew you to be a hard man." You are the reason why I chose not to invest this talent you gave to me. Adam blamed God for his disobedience. He said in *Gen.3:12*, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." You are to blame because You gave me this woman.

What is of interest here is that Adam acknowledged God's sovereign action in giving him a wife. But his reasoning is that God's sovereignty makes God responsible for what happened. In his answer Adam shifted the focus from the command God gave to him and his responsibility to obey God's command to God's sovereignty. And by blaming God for his sin he also dispensed with the doctrine of human responsibility.

Rom.12:3; Eph.4:7, 11; 1Pet.4:10; 1Cor.12:7, 11, 18 emphasize God's sovereignty in giving to you a gift or gifts for the common good of His church. You didn't ask for the gift or gifts He gave to you. But one of these days you will be called upon to give to God an accounting for your use or non-use of those gifts in His church. What will you say to God on that great accounting day? Will you blame God for your failure to use those gifts in His church?

Blaming his master did not excuse the slave's failure, help him escape judgment, or relieve him of the severity of the punishment the master would impose on him. The master described him as wicked, lazy and worthless. We can safely add here that he was also selfish. He was caught up in himself, in his negative views about his master and in what he felt must be done in this situation. He was not concerned about his master's will for him. He was not concerned about what his master wanted him to do.

He began his answer with the word "Master" or "**Lord**". But the word had no meaning for him and thus it did not impact his conduct. In *Lk.6:46* Jesus asked the people, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I say?" Calling Jesus "**Lord**" must impact your conduct. In *Matt.7:21-23* Jesus made it plain that it is not those who say "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who do or obey the Father's will. The one-talent slave was cast "into the outer darkness; in that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (*vs.30*). There is only one place that is described in the Bible as "the outer darkness". That place is the place of eternal punishment and torment.

Brethren, as we bring this section of our study to a close, I want to emphasize that in serving the church through the exercise of your gift(s) you are not serving man. You are serving the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. The members of Christ's body will benefit from your service. But the One to whom you will have to give an account is the Lord Jesus and the One who will reward you or judge you is the Lord Jesus.

My primary motivation for serving you is the Lord Jesus Christ. I know already from personal experience that to choose not to serve, regardless of the reason, is to put myself in the place of judgment. I am utterly grateful to the Lord that His judgments are being meted out to me in this life and that they are not being held in reserve for that great accounting day. I know that the Lord has been using His judgments to keep me in line. I live my life knowing that I am locked into serving Christ's church.

I live my life knowing that I must not even try to cross the boundaries the Lord has put around me. Like Paul, I live under divine compulsion. I live knowing that I am entrusted with a holy stewardship. And by the Lord's grace given to me, I have come to joyfully embrace all that the Lord has made me and love what the Lord has called me to do. And I know also that I have nothing to boast about. I am what I am by the grace of God. My ongoing prayer is that His grace toward me would not prove to be vain. (*1Cor.15:10*). My ongoing prayer is that "after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified", that I myself will not be **adokimos**, disqualified, rejected and cast out. (*1Cor.9:27*).

I want to say to you that in your service to Christ do not keep your eyes on the members of His church. If you do, you will stumble. Keep your eyes on Christ. Do not ask what are the others doing? Keep your eyes on Christ's commands and your responsibilities to Christ in obeying His commands. *Rom.14:12* says, "each one of us will give an account of himself to God." *2Cor.5:10* says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Note the emphasis on "**each one**" in both verses. You will stand alone on that great accounting day. You will have to give account for what you have done. Blame-shifting will be of no help on that day. Being a Christian is not simply about you going to heaven. If that is your understanding and goal, you will be in for a shocking surprise on that final day. May the Holy Spirit help you to understand this and order your life accordingly to the glory of our great God and King.

The Fact Of Church Membership.

In the time that remains I want to begin to deal with the fact of church membership. The final topic I hope to deal with why we must love the church. Does the Bible teach us a

doctrine of church membership? Do we have a Biblical basis for requiring that those who claim to be saved become members of the church?

When we speak of the church, what do we mean? The answer is two-fold. *Firstly*, there is the universal church. This is the body of Christ world-wide. It consists of all those who are truly saved. In *Acts 9:31*, after Saul was converted, we are told, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up.” The word “**church**” is singular and used to describe Christians who were found in three different regions. **David Williams** wrote, *“It should be noticed that the word “church” is in the singular, though the reference is to a number of Christian communities. There is but one “body” of Christ, no matter how distant or different the parts.”* **John Polhill** wrote, *“Luke’s use of the singular “church” could be taken in the “universal sense” as the whole body of Christians in all their local assemblies.”* **Simon Kistemaker** wrote, *“[Luke] uses the word “church” in the singular to indicate the unity of the body of Christ. Jewish Christians from the south (Judea) and the north (Galilee) lived in perfect harmony with Samaritan Christians.”*

But, *secondly*, the great emphasis in the Bible is on the local church. In *Acts 11* we are told that something good was happening in Antioch. Gentiles were getting saved. *Vs.22* tells us that this news about what was happening in Antioch “reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem” and they sent Barnabas to investigate. *Acts 13:1* says, “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there.” What we have at this point are two identifiable local churches, the church in Jerusalem and the church in Antioch.

In *Acts 13*, the church at Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. They visited several cities and established churches in them. In their return journey to Antioch, we are told that both men revisited these new churches. *Acts 14:23* says, “When they had appointed elders for them in every church....” “**For them in every church**” is for the members in every identifiable local church. Later on when Paul would write his epistles, he would write to the church in Rome, the church in

Corinth, the church in Galatia, the church in Ephesus, the church in Philippi, the church in Colossae, and the church in Thessalonica. All of these churches had established and identifiable memberships.

In *Acts 20:17* Paul “sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.” And in *vs.28* he called on the elders to guard the church over which God had placed them. These elders were peculiarly the elders of the church in Ephesus and their responsibility and oversight were limited to the church in Ephesus. In *Gal.1:2* Paul spoke about the churches of Galatia and in *vs.22* he spoke about the churches in Judea. In *1Thess.2:14* he spoke again about the churches in Judea. It is obvious that there were now several churches in these cities. Finally, we are told in *Rev.1:4* that John wrote to “the seven churches that are in Asia.”

In these various churches we find examples of people who are directly or indirectly identified as members. In *Rom.16:1* we are told that Phoebe was a member of the church in Cenchrea. Priscilla and Aquila has a church in their house. (*Rom.16:3-5*). The household of Chloe and Stephanas were members in the church at Corinth. (*1Cor.1:11, 16*). Epaphroditus was a member of the church in Philippi. (*Phil.2:25*). Epaphras and Archippus were members of the Colossian church. (*Col.4:12, 17*). These are but only a few of the examples in Scriptures of Christians who were identifiable members in various local churches.

Now Brethren, I want to make it clear that there is no command in the word of God that says, “**Thou shalt join a church.**” A lot of people who refuse to join a local church hide behind this absence of a command. But the reality is that they have no basis for their refusal. Let us consider the evidence drawn from the Biblical practice in God’s word.

Firstly, in *Acts 2* Peter preached his great Pentecost sermon. The result was a great working of God’s Spirit in converting sinners. *Vs.41* tells us, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added three

thousand souls.” The first question is : added to what? *Acts 1:15* tells us that there were about **120** brethren in what was later described as the church in Jerusalem. In other words, there was an identifiable membership of **120** brethren in the church at Jerusalem and these **3000** were added to that already existing membership.

The second question is : who added them? In the immediate context, they were added to the existing church by the apostles. But in the ultimate sense the Lord was adding them to the membership of the existing local church through conversion and baptism. In *Acts 2:47* we are told, “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” **John Stott** noted, “*True conversion always issues in church membership. It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts....*”

Secondly, the ideal church consists of an identifiable membership, pastors (elders, overseers), and deacons. In *Acts 14:23* the churches that were planted by Paul and Barnabas had no elders or pastors. So, Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in every church.” As a result each local church now had its own identifiable members and pastors. In *Phil.1:1* Paul addressed his epistle to “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” Here is a local church with its own identifiable members, pastors, and deacons.

In *Tit.1:5* we are told that Paul left Titus in Crete to appoint elders in every city. Since elders cannot exist in a vacuum, it means that there were already in every city churches with identifiable memberships. In *Acts 20:17 & 28* we are told that the Ephesian elders were responsible to give oversight and guard the members of the Ephesian church from false teachers. In *1Pet.5:3* Peter told the elders that they must not lord it over “those allotted to [their] charge”, that is, those specific believers in the Lord Jesus who were placed under their care.

Thirdly, please turn to *Heb.13:17*, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this

with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” The identifiable membership of this church is being addressed. In vs.7 they were told, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” This church had an identifiable group of former leaders. Quite likely they had died. But they were the men who spoke the word of God to them. They were the men who taught them the scriptures.

Now, in vs.13, they are being told, “obey your leaders”. “**Your leaders**” means the members of this church had a present identifiable leadership. They were commanded to obey their leaders. They were not being asked to obey Christian leaders in general. They were being asked to obey “**your leaders**”, that is, those men whom they identified as their own leaders.

Brethren, you are not specifically required to obey nor submit to everyone who calls himself a pastor, regardless of whether he is a true man of God and properly ordained as a pastor. You are required to obey and submit to your own pastors. When we invite a pastor to preach to you, we are saying to you that we approve of his preaching and you should give heed to his message. If any part of his message is questionable, your pastors will duly inform you. Giving heed to the preaching of a visiting pastor is not the same as obeying and submitting to him as your leader.

You are required to obey and submit to your pastors because “they keep watch over your souls”. Note the emphasis that points to identification : your leaders; your souls. The two verbs, “**obey and submit**”, point to the obligatory conduct of the membership towards their leaders. But both verbs have slightly different emphases. “**Obey**” points obedience rooted in persuasion derived from earned respect. “**Submit**” points obedience derived from one’s office and the inherent authority associated with that office. The verb conveys the idea of one’s readiness to comply. William Lane noted that the membership “*is summoned to respect the authority with which the leadership has been invested by God.*”

Your pastors “keep watch over your souls.” We met this verb “**keep watch**” in *Eph.6:18* where it was translated “be on the alert”. It means “**to be watchful; to be vigilant; to stay awake; to pass a sleepless night.**” Pastors are God’s appointed watchmen over your souls. The word “**soul**” is used for your entire human existence as a Christian. They must watch over your entire human existence as a Christian in the light of eternity. *Acts 20:28-29* says they must guard your souls from the savage wolves that will seek to destroy you. “**Savage wolves**” specifically describes false teachers but it also describes anyone who will seek to deceive you and lead you astray.

Pastors often have sleepless nights when members will not be persuaded that they are under attack by evil men or evil women. Those who are not persuaded do not obey. Like Paul we know what it is to spend years building integrity and trust and then to find that integrity and trust overturned in an instant by the “smooth and flattering speech” of the deceivers. (*Rom.16:18*). Sometimes members think we are over-reacting. Listen to Paul : “Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” (*2Cor.11:29*). We may translate this : “Who is caused to stumble (or, who is caused to fall into a set trap) and I am not set on fire?” You think we are over-reacting because you do not have the shepherd’s discerning eyes to see the dangers you are facing. I hate to say it but this is one of the reasons the Bible describes Christians as “**sheep**”.

When the Chief Shepherd and Guardian of your soul, the Lord Jesus Christ, (*1Pet.2:25; 5:5*), puts you under the watchful care of pastors, this means that these pastors will have to stand in the final judgment and give an account for your soul. The writer warns that your pastors must be able to do this with joy because it will be unprofitable for you if they give this account with grief. The word “**unprofitable**” is an understatement for expressing the serious danger you will be in if your pastors must give an account for you with grief or groaning in the final judgment. **William Lane** noted that we have here a sober reminder that your welfare as a Christian is tied to the quality of your response to the teaching and counsel of your pastors.

The point of application I want to make to you as I close is this : if you attend this church and you are not an identifiable member of this church, **Heb.13:17** does not apply to you in your dealings with the leaders in this church. In other words, since we are not your leaders or pastors, you are not required to obey us nor submit to us. But at the same time the pastors of this church have no direct responsibility for the spiritual and eternal welfare of your souls.

When you refuse to be a member of a Biblical church, that is, a church as defined and described in God's word, you are walking in sin. You are disobeying the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church. You are putting yourself in grave spiritual danger. And most importantly you are raising serious questions about the genuineness of your claim to be a Christian. I close with **Stott's** words, "*True conversion always issues in church membership.*" The person who is truly converted to Christ immediately desires baptism and church membership. This person immediately wants to become identified with the body of Christ.