

Christ – Clearly Manifested by His Body

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by Philip W. Shields

Abstract: this sermon's main point is how Jesus cannot be clearly seen (manifested) unless the parts of His Body (the members of His church) come together, work harmoniously and each one does his or her God-given role. We also peek in to early New Testament church services. Also: signs we know God; why God formed His church.

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Warm hellos to everyone again. This is your brother Philip continuing the theme of “Know Christ – by Knowing His Body” – but today we’ll emphasize what I’ve put into the title: “Christ is Manifested by and through His Body”. This continues deeper from where two previous sermons leave off. I recommend you hear those first: “....That I May Know Him” and “Know Christ – By Knowing His Body”.

“Knowing Christ” is a life-long quest, since His riches are “unsearchable” – Ephesians 3:8. We can’t know God by just trying to figure it out (1 Cor. 1:21). Paul calls it his highest quest in Philippians 3.

Knowing God is what God Himself says pleases Him most. In Jeremiah 9:23-24, God tells us that being wise, strong or rich is not what impresses Him. But here’s what delights our Father: “let him who glories, glory in this – that *he understands and knows Me* [and My traits- which God lists]...for in these I delight’, says the LORD.”

Are we delighting God, are we indulging Him in this, by knowing Him more today than yesterday? Pentecost is coming up soon and what a great topic to be reviewing in our lives as we come to this great Feast.

Yes, I know God at some level. I trust you do too. I’ve covered before how God is the one who starts the process and leads us to Christ, and we’re given a *heart* to know Him (see *Jeremiah 24:7*). Jesus then reveals our Father, Whom *we can’t know Father without Jesus*. **Matthew 11:27** says “no one knows the Father except the Son and to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”. It is through Jesus that the light of the glory of God is revealed (**2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 John 5:20**).

But I confess I have a long way to go before I can say confidently I know God anywhere near as deeply as I could, with His help and grace. If you think you know God deeply and profoundly, God bless you that you’ll even go deeper. But I caution you: he or she who thinks you stand, take heed lest you fall.

Just as one can know *about* God, but not really know God, in the same way – though God obviously knows who we are, **if we don’t have a relationship with Him, He may not acknowledge that He knows US either**. Sure, Jesus knows everyone, but in the way the Bible means “to know”, He says to the 5 foolish virgins, “I never knew you” (*Matt. 25:11-12*). One of the worst things we could ever hear from Jesus is: “I never knew you”. Jesus also says, however, that He knows His sheep (you and me?) – and they know Him! (**John 10:14**). In fact, **He knows each of His sheep by name** and they follow Him, recognizing His voice (**verses 3-4**). So **someone who knows Jesus hears Him, follows Him, and trusts Him**.

EVIDENCE THAT WE KNOW GOD

* **Those who know God well are those who know *and love people* - their brothers and sisters in Christ, future brothers and sister, and even their enemies.** We cannot say we know God unless we love our brothers and sisters. **“He who does not love, does not know God” (1 John 4:8).** Last time I covered how many would say they love Christ, love their brethren in Christ – but leave out a part of the body of Christ languishing out there by themselves. That doesn’t work as I clearly showed in the previous sermon: remember the example of loving all of someone, but then rejecting his shins and kicking him hard there? That person would not feel loved at all, even if the *only* part of his body you were abusing were just one shin. (You really need to hear the previous sermon first)

* If we really knew God, we would be **far more obedient to Him**, for those who say they know Him, but don’t keep His commandments, are liars and the truth is not in them. (1 John 2:3-6; Jer. 9:3)

* If you and I more perfectly knew Jesus, we would more deeply experience the meaning of what Paul says: also **knowing “the power of His resurrection”** - - which goes hand in hand with coming to know Him.

* **If you and I perfectly knew God, we would never worry.** We’d be like Jesus sound asleep in the stern of a boat during a raging storm. He knew He was *the* Son of God. Do we know we are a child of God? Jesus realized Father knew about the storm. Do we realize Father knows about the storms *we get ourselves into*?

* **Someone who really knows God is *thrilled* by this relationship – and seeks ways to help others come to know the true God. *We cannot know God and remain a closet disciple.*** Peter and the rest of the disciples, while they were still unconverted, abandoned their Lord and Peter even denied knowing Him. But after conversion, Peter was a changed man and wanted *everyone* to know it was by the name of Jesus, that all the wonders were being done (Acts 3-4). I *do not believe anyone can really know God and remain a closet disciple.*

Knowing God, knowing Jesus, becomes your whole life – and even more so, the more you know Him.

When the Samaritan woman realized who Jesus was, she forgot her water bucket and ran into the city telling everyone about the Messiah, for example. The whole book of Acts is largely about this very point.

How are we doing so far?

* If you and I really knew God, we would be solely and perfectly and always seeking **HIS will** in our lives, as Jesus did, knowing *this* Father really does know best. Always. Perfectly.

* If you and I really knew God, we would all be living in **more perfect harmony** with the other children of God and we would even love and bless our enemies, showing we are God’s children.

Though I'd like to say I'm giving this 2 or 3 part sermon because I want to share with you how I've come to know Master -- that's not it. I'm still very much in the quest to know Him. *This is a sharing of my own quest to more deeply find Him.* I've started. You have, too. But trust me when I say we haven't even scratched the surface. So I hope I have your prayerful attention.

* Someone who knows Christ as the HEAD of His church, does not brag about *men*, about preachers, about leaders – and those *preachers* would not want you bragging on them either if they knew Christ. No, we praise *God* and we brag on *Jesus* – not men. We brag on Christ. We covered that in some detail last time in the section on “I am of Paul, I am of Peter.”

What are the Reasons for Having the Church, the Body of Christ?

If you and I have God's Spirit and are being led by God's spirit, what's our purpose? **Pentecost** was the birthday of both the Old Testament Israel and of the New Covenant Israel of God, the church. It was the day the church started officially. *So why does God have a church? During these 50 days of counting of the omer after the Day of the Wavesheaf first fruits, it's a very appropriate question.*

The Bible reveals many wonderful and awesome purposes of the church but I want to focus on one that may not be hi-lited very often. But first – a quick review into some general reasons why there is a church. If you're in a group, it may be interesting, when I tell you so – to turn the tape off and try to take 2-3 minutes on your own to jot down what the purpose of the church is. See how many points you come up with. I want to focus on one point – but I'll list a few also first. I think by doing this, it makes you think and you'll get more out of the sermon if you're part of it, rather than just hearing it. If you wish, you may turn off the tape now for 2-3 minutes:

Here are a few of the many reasons why God has formed His church, or assembly of believers:

- *Why a church? To preach the true gospel to all nations as a witness (Matt. 24:14)* before the return of Christ. I recommend you hear my sermon about the true and complete gospel, the very first sermon I put on the web. Is it a gospel that is about God's kingdom but says nothing about Christ – or is it a gospel about the life and person of Christ but says precious little about God and His Kingdom? My sermon will intrigue you. By working together, we can accomplish more than if we kept just to ourselves.
- We are in training to be servant leaders, kings with Christ, priests under Christ our High Priest, Teachers of the Way – and the church gives us a way to start learning now to work together and receive the training we need. (1 Pet. 2:9 – royal priesthood).
- The church is the means by which we are taught and trained into the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16) so we also can be effective in ministry. For most, it is the most efficient means of learning God's word, God's way, the Scriptures – from the ministry and from each other.
- The church is also God's **avenue to make more disciples**, teaching them to observe all things Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:18-20), as brethren preach the gospel everywhere they go (Acts 8:4).

- ***to be firstfruits with Christ*** of all whom God will save (**James 1:18**) over time. I will cover this, and much more, in detail soon on sermons about the Feast of Sabbaths, or Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost or the Feast of Firstfruits.
- Those being called now are being called to be **part of “a better resurrection”** (**Heb. 11:35**), the first resurrection, to immortal spirit life (**1 Cor. 15:52-54**) Those who are first are being called to be leaders in the kingdom of God, ***co-heirs of all things with Christ*** (**Rom. 8:17**), if we overcome through Christ
- We’re being prepared ***to be the Bride of Christ*** (**2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7-9**). Hear my series on the Mystery of Christ and the Church, as well as an upcoming one on the meaning of Ruth in relation to Pentecost.
- Here and now we’re also called **to proclaim the praises of God**. We cannot be closet disciples.
1 Peter 2:9-10 “ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”
- We are the **Temple of God’s spirit**. (**1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16**).
- We are called to be **lights to a dark world**, showing God’s way of life (though we often fail miserably, we repent and get back into the fight). (**Matt. 5:14** and many others)
- We are **the new Israel of God** (**Gal. 6:16**), a new *spiritual* nation made up of those called from all nations. The Jews were not used to having Gentiles be part of the promises to Israel – and only when converted Jews could see it was now a *new* nation, composed of all peoples who had God’s spirit, that they understood God now has an Israel of GOD.

Pretty exciting, huh? And yet so many of God’s people are sound asleep and don’t even know their purpose! Or seldom think about it.

There are many more reasons for why God has a church – but *I want to now focus on one purpose for the church that I have heard precious little about:* **As the church comes together, it is to MANIFEST JESUS, the HEAD of the church** – as we work together and use the gifts God has given us.

What do I mean by that? Be turning to Ephesians 4.

THE BODY OF CHRIST MANIFESTS JESUS

The reason I spent so much time last time talking about the BODY of Christ: we are each like a body part. It’s easy for one part to judge and be critical of another body part. The mouth might think the liver is a little odd, because it seems to have to analyze and evaluate every little thing that comes into the body. It analyzes, filters, examines, purifies everything that comes in. the mouth could think the liver is hyper-critical.

The *liver* on the other hand could say, “that *mouth* – it lets *anything* in here”. But if the mouth didn’t feed the body, it would starve. Other parts may criticize the tear ducts for being emotional. But without tears, we couldn’t see properly. And as emotion wells up in a person and the eyes begin to tear up, the Adam’s apple gulps and helps establish more equilibrium. When an outside danger comes into the body, many systems work together to protect the body. If a part is cut, and blood is flowing out, other body parts send anti-coagulants and disinfectants and so forth.

Are WE like that, as a church, as the body of Christ? Do *we* look out for one another like that? Or is the prophecy that in the end time the “love of many will wax cold” already happening?

Now, as the body does its part, or parts, the whole body – the *person* – can continue to function. But *each* part has a very important function. It’s no less the case in the body of Christ. YOU are a body part of Christ. You are very special and much needed to the smooth operating of the body, whether others feel so or not.

Please turn to *Ephesians 4:11-16*. **I warn you, the rest of this sermon could challenge some of you and your traditional thinking.** Let’s start with just reading scriptures on this topic:

Ephesians 4:11-16 “And *He Himself gave some to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,** 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is *the head -- Christ --* **16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**”

Did you catch that? JESUS causes the growth – but:

v.12 – *ALL the saints are to be equipped for the work of ministry* and to be built up; its not just ordained ministers who have a ministry.** The KJV has a bad translation of this verse.

v.16 – speaks of “what *every* joint – or part – supplies to the body. See also **Col. 2:19**.

Does the group you attend with *let every member* who wants to, have a function, a part to play during church services, have input into decisions and direction of the church?

You are a part of the body of Christ. Maybe you and I are not even a complete part – but a cell in an organ, and perhaps many of us make up the hand, or the liver, or the pancreas, or the colon, for example. *You have a role and a function that must be allowed to function*, or the body will not be complete. Don’t think you can just come to a group and just be a silent observer and not get involved.

We can not come to deeply know Christ while refusing to do what the Bible says about the parts of His body: to let those body parts do their function! Or – speaking of ourselves – if we refuse to function at all, we’re hurting the body too. Body parts have to work together, in harmony, in unity,

under the coordination and ultimate guidance from the Head (which includes the Brain), which is Christ.

*What I'm saying is **that you by yourself cannot cause Christ to be fully seen or manifested.** I by myself cannot. But when all the parts of the body come together, finally, and work together, and let each one participate, the body is healthy and strong.*

*Let me change analogies for a second: I have a couple very nice **Turkish carpets**. It was amazing watching young teenage girls making the threaded knots as quickly as you can imagine – and assembling a work of art from just a small photograph or drawing they were working from. One could be wondering what the finished tapestry is going to look like, if all we can see are individual threads. It's only when the individual threads are placed together and tied together – the red ones with the blue ones, with the white ones according to how the artist had placed them – that the picture – the *finished* tapestry becomes evident. Then Christ is glorified, He is better seen and understood – and people end up growing and worshipping God!*

Almost all the analogies in the Bible are like that: The Temple of God. We are individual stones in that temple. Only when we come together, can we see a real temple.

SPEAKING IN CHURCH SERVICES: just for one or two?

How about speaking in Church services? Is that for only a select 1-2 in the group – the ordained ministers or the assigned “sermonette men” and assigned song leaders?

- If you study the passages carefully that describe the early church services, you'll see – especially in **1 Cor. 11, 12 and 14** that each was *expected* to have something to contribute and to say. Please be turning to 1 Corinthians 12.

Now let's read what we're told actually happened in the early church's sabbath services:

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that you *were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols*, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that **no one speaking by the Spirit** of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

What's he saying? He's saying the churches you used to attend had gods that were mute, were dumb. They couldn't talk. But – get this – *you*, as *a living part* of the body of our GOD, as part of the body of Christ – you are alive and Christ is in you. Christ is not mute. Christ is not dumb. Christ is in all the parts of His body. As you'll soon clearly see as we continue in 1 Corinthians, many of the brethren participated in the speaking at church services. In fact, they are *expected* to contribute.

The Master lives in each of us by His Spirit. And He speaks from inside each of us. He reveals Himself through each and all the members of His body. We will never see or hear God fully unless we're part of a group that lets each of the members be free to function, to speak, to express Christ in them – within the parameters the Bible teaches of harmony, order and truth. We have to also discern, whether or not it IS the Spirit of God that is speaking, when one is speaking.

If only one or two speak each week, then only the amount that person sees of Christ will ever be shared. That's why all of us after a while enjoy hearing a different speaker after a while. We want new insights, new topics, and a different angle. But when many participate, then we're learning and hearing from what God is showing to the many, and not just to the one or two. If you don't see it or agree with me yet on this, let's keep reading:

Let's continue in **1 Cor. 12:4-11**

4 "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 *There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.* 6 *And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.* 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: **8 for to one is given the word of wisdom** through the Spirit, **to another the word of knowledge** through the same Spirit, 9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another gifts of **healings** by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of **miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discerning** of spirits, to another different kinds of **tongues**, to another the **interpretation** of tongues. 11 **But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.**"

You know what? I rarely have heard it said of regular *unordained* brethren that he or she has a gift of healing, or of prophecy, or wisdom. But I have heard it – from the clergy – that this minister or that *minister* has the gift of healing or whatever.

But that's not what it says, does it?

Paul isn't saying all this about the gifts of the Spirit in context of just the ordained clergy - - but in context of the average Joe and Jane! I mean you and me and the person next to you, in other words. You are *supposed* to have something to contribute. You are *expected* to have something to contribute. You are expected to be active in the church *service itself* – not just before and afterwards, setting up chairs and taking them down again afterwards. That's important too, and we must be servants, but you and I are expected to have something to contribute, and we are expected to be active during *the church service* itself.

Elders and pastors: The Bible is clear that Paul appointed elders in every city (*Acts 14:23*). It is clear there is definite important role for pastors (*1 Tim. 5:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:1-4, etc.*). Yes they are overseers (*Heb. 13:7, 17*). Yes, they are shepherds (that's what "pastor" refers to). Yes, they have some authority. I'm just saying that from what I can read, the modern concept of the pastor doing all the *speaking* is not Biblical. There's a book a friend sent to me called, "*Pagan Christianity*", by Frank Viola that explains the historical development of the professional seminarian/pastor, the modern liturgy, the modern church service seen in most non-Catholic meetings today. You'd find it interesting, though I cannot say I agree with *all* of the book's contents – I don't. But he does have some interesting points, especially about the modern church service.

In your church, would a regular lay member be allowed to have Bible studies and discussions in his home? Or would that be discouraged? I love how it describes the early brethren: the persecution scatters them all over the Roman Empire, and it says the apostles stay in Jerusalem. So what do we read?

Acts 8:4 – 'therefore those who were scattered [the regular brethren] went everywhere *preaching the word.*'

In case you're wondering, the word for "preaching" used here is the same Greek word used for "evangelizing" – declaring the good news. It's the same word translated "preach" in 55 other places. The same word where Jesus preached, Paul preached, Peter preached – and here in Acts 8:4, the scattered *brethren* are preaching too.

And yet there are those who feel the brethren are supposed to keep their mouths shut and leave the preaching to the preachers. I've even heard of a faithful *unordained* servant of God who was having Bible studies with a dozen or so brethren, and the *ordained* ministers made him stop having their in-home Bible studies because no ordained man was present in the studies. Incredible!

I would think we should be encouraging the brothers and sisters to get together more often, to discuss God's word *more* often.

Get it now: you and I are also called to preach the word! Acts 8:4 makes that clear. Either that, or cut it out of your Bible. Of course the most effective way is to preach the word by our new lives in Christ evidenced in love for all people – or else we'll just be clanging cymbals (*1 Cor. 13:1-2*).

These are regular unordained members preaching. Everywhere they go. And the apostles and pastors aren't stopping them. They couldn't be stopped if you tried, is my guess. They were so full of zeal for talking about the truth they'd learned, for revealing the Messiah Jesus, and wanted everyone to know about the Spirit and the Kingdom of God – you couldn't stop them.

But today, there would be organizations, there would be ministers, who would try to stop them – because "they're not ordained". Poppycock!

I love the fact that Stephen and Philip and others are ordained as deacons and before you know it, they're into full fledged preaching and baptizing and are full of the spirit. Several are mentioned in Acts as prophets – including 4 daughters of Philip. But today we claim we have no prophets. Why is that? Maybe we truly are non-prophet organizations! But has that function truly become extinct!?

Regarding women's role in the church, I recommend you hear my 4 part series on women, especially part 4. It will once again challenge a few opinions, I'm sure. Though I do not personally feel women are to be church pastors and ordained elders, I feel – based on my reading of scripture – that perhaps some churches are not letting women do as much as God would have them do. Go back and hear Part 4 of the Women series.

Jesus appeared first to a woman (Mary Magdalene) at the empty tomb. Women were not considered reliable witnesses, but Jesus had a penchant for going against the norm. Add the fact that Mary Magdalene had previously been demon possessed and you see what an honor Jesus is giving her. Jesus also first revealed Himself to the Samaritans through another "fallen" woman. In Philippi, the host of the house church there was apparently Lydia. Philip, the evangelist, had 4 daughters who were prophetesses. Are we ready for female prophetesses? I don't care how you interpret "prophetess" (whether preaching or inspired speaking or foretelling) – would your group welcome female prophets?

Having said all that, I recommend you review Part 4 of the Women series.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Let's read another passage before we put it all together. *Please turn to 1 Corinthians 14*, the one passage in all the New Testament which describes actual church services.

The context of this chapter was the matter of speaking in other languages or tongues, and some had this gift. Paul instructs them to rein that in unless there was an interpreter or it would seem like so much babble. However, Paul does not forbid speaking in tongues (*1 Cor. 14:39*) and claims to speak in tongues more than them all (v. 18). He encourages them to seek to speak in the normal language – that all may be edified.

Now please read these passages for what they say:

1 Corinthians 14:1-4

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 *But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.* 4 *He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.*”

Church services seemed to be open to the public. Notice verses 22-25

1 Corinthians 14:22-25 “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and *there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers*, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if ***all*** prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

Paul then goes on to teach that though the Spirit may move each one, there needs to still be order in the church – **verse 40** – “Let all things be done decently and in order.” It's not supposed to be, or look, confusing and chaotic! Let's continue in verse 26:

26 “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, *each of you* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 ***Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.*** [discuss. There is give and take going on. Now notice the next verse!]

30 ***But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.*** [discuss. Wow. Imagine that in your church service today. Someone saying he has something to add – and the current speaker is to stop speaking. **THIS WAS OPEN FORUM.** Open discussion.]

31 For **you can ALL** prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

Are you hearing what Paul is describing as the early church service format? ***Everyone is involved and active, and participating*** – but not in a chaotic or disorderly manner. It was very orderly, in fact.

If you can't agree with that, why not just cut those verses out of your Bible? Or better yet, realize that the way most modern church services are run, is not at all the pattern shown in the Bible.

This is saying that our church services should be with *each and all parts* of the body supplying what the Body requires for it to be edified, to grow and to become one – and to manifest what Jesus is like. *Our meetings are sharing with others, the parts of Christ in us that we have come to see, that we have. And it's receiving from others what they see and have in their lives that they can show us.* It's not just one minister sharing his one vision of God and Christ – but everyone is.

What I'm saying is that you by yourself cannot cause Christ to be fully seen. I by myself cannot. But when ALL the parts of the body come together, finally, and work together, and we let each one participate, like individual threads coming together, the picture – the finished tapestry becomes evident, CHRIST is glorified, JESUS CHRIST is better seen and understood – and people end up growing and worshiping God.

There is a role and place for a church pastor. But God never intended there to be but one voice – other than Christ's – in a congregation. Christ is not mute, and Christ is in all the parts of the body. This is not the way I've always seen it, but I believe God is finally getting this point through to me.

When one cell thinks it's better than the rest, or more important than the rest, and wishes it could clone itself – in a physical body that is called CANCER. It starts to take over the other cells, parts and organs of the body – and eventually hurts and kills that body.

God is telling us through Paul that we're all supposed to be supplying something to the body. Let's pick it up again, this time in 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 “For as **the body is one** and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Now how does one become a member of the body of Christ? Of course we have to be called, and then repent, and become baptized – not just in water – but by the Spirit of God.

13 For **by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body** -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and **have all been made to drink into one Spirit**. [the Rock was Christ; the water that came out of that Rock pictured the Holy Spirit.] 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now **God has set the members, each one of them, in the body** just as He pleased. [but I ask: are they being allowed to use their talents and gifts, or not?] 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 *And 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 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that ***the members should have the same care for one another.*** 26 ***And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*** 27 ***Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."***

Please turn now to Romans 12:4-8. Paul – in Ephesians, Corinthians, Romans – all over, Paul emphasizes he wants us all doing our part in the church service.

Romans 12:4-8 (from New Living Translation for clarity):

*"Just as our bodies have many parts and **each part has a special function,** 5 so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, **and each of us has different work to do.** And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.*

6 God has given **each of us the ability to do certain things well.** So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. 7 If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. 8 If your gift is to encourage others, do it. If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly."

The gifts of God's Spirit were not given for individual glory or credit – but to the glory of God. The gifts were not for individual expression, but to express within our Lord's body alongside all the others, working harmoniously with all the others expressing and using their gifts as well, so the full mind of Christ could be manifested.

And Paul adds, if there's no love in the mix, we're nothing but clanging cymbals (**1 Cor. 13:1-2**). If we're keeping repentant and true members out of the body for whatever political or personality reasons – where's God's love being expressed, especially if someone has repented of any alleged past sins?

Now I'll say it again: it's only when everyone is allowed to work *together* and use his/her special contribution to the Body of Christ even during church services, that Christ is more fully seen in His glory, all His beauty, all His depth, all His wisdom, all His love.

This concept is a bit scary to established organizations because someone other than the pastor may be speaking or edifying the group at any given time. They fear losing control.

This will probably not be accepted in regular established churches, but it's what the Bible says, nonetheless. That's why we must not be loners. I preach to myself too. We learn more about Christ as we learn more about His body, the members. We also need peers who can keep us balanced.

LESSONS FROM THE CHURCHES OF REVELATION 2-3

We also must quit thinking that we know by outward appearances who are the body of Christ and who aren't. ***Be turning to Revelation 1. Those who have God's spirit are His people. Plain and simple.***

Many of you 7th Day Sabbath keepers feel only your type of believers can be in Christ's body. Many of you Sunday keepers feel surely those legalistic 7th day sabbath keepers can't be part of His body.

I am a 7th day sabbath keeper, though not a 7th Day Adventist, and feel that when that truth is revealed, we will keep it if we are part of the body of Christ. Yes, I believe obeying the 4th commandment is incredibly important. I see no evidence it was discarded in the New Testament, but rather I see Paul teaching even Gentiles on the 7th Day sabbath.

Having said that, there is so much more to knowing God than *just* keeping the right sabbath day. Paul says the greatest of all was to love one another (**1 Cor. 13:13**). JESUS says it is by LOVE that is so clearly evident for one another that all people will be able to recognize who His true followers are. He didn't say they'd recognize us because we call ourselves "the church of God" or something similar. John was inspired to say that we cannot claim to know God and hate our brother (1 John 4:8). So how about it?

I know sabbath keepers who rest on the 7th day who have almost no love for people different than themselves. I know people who claim to know God who refuse to fellowship with known "sinners". They should read Luke 15 all over again. Known sinners were attracted to Jesus for some reason. Hmm.

1 John 4:7 "Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**"

Love is defined many ways, for example: keeping the commandments (1 John 5:3). That's not the ONLY definition though. *Love is also defined by various kinds of behavior in 1 Cor. 13.* Love does no harm and fulfills the law (Rom. 13:10). We can't claim to love God and act in ways which show we hate our brother (1 John 4:20). Love is proven by actions of solving needs for people – not just praying for them (1 John 3:17-18; James 2:14-16).

So those who know God, know love. **If someone has no love, he or she cannot, and does not, know God yet** (1 John 4:7). Also, if someone won't forgive and accept back a repentant sinner, they cannot be forgiven either, and they probably do not really know God either.

Now, let's look at the churches of Revelation 2-3. Would we even *recognize* them as "the church of God" today if we could suddenly be transported into their services via a time machine? They had enormous problems, and frankly, they would say that about us today as well.

Revelation 1:12-13 "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and **in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man**, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band."

Revelation 1:20 “The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, *and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.*”

Do you see where I’m going with this? The body of Christ is depicted as the 7 golden lampstands (not candlesticks), representing the 7 church congregations that make up that one body. It is not my point today to explain the 7 churches. All I want you to notice at this point is that Jesus is seen standing and walking in their midst. He sees these seven congregations as His church. They have problems, but they are still the “church of God”.

Were these churches perfect? Did they even have perfect doctrine? NOT AT ALL. Read about them in **Rev 2 and 3**. Frankly most of them sound like they’re a mess! A couple of these churches have the false doctrines of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and allow the teachings of Jezebel. Thyatira is immoral. Laodemia is lukewarm, Sardis is dying. Ephesus has lost its first love. And granted: most of them were commanded to repent, or lose their reward. They’re all commanded to overcome if they expect to be rewarded. They’re all commanded to hear what is said to all seven churches.

If you and I were to walk into some of those churches, we’d probably conclude they could not be God’s people.

But get this: THEY ARE ALL GOD’S CHURCH! Jesus walks in their midst, after all!

We are baptized into Christ’s Body by His spirit. All of us have a lot of growing to do, especially at the time we first receive the spirit – and then for the rest of our lives. Based on what I said about Rev.1, 2 and 3, I’m *much* more careful today about deciding for God who His people are. I advise you to use the same caution.

Of course to each of those 7 churches, Christ said to hear what was said to all seven churches. He ends each discourse with a warning to “have an ear to hear” what He says and to repent – and to overcome, if they wish to sit with Him on His throne, or to “eat of the hidden manna”, or to be given rulership over nations. For example: **Rev. 2:7, 11, 17-18, 24-29**, etc. It seems that there were those assembling in the church groups who were more zealous and righteous and careful than others. They’re all God’s church – but those who are rewarded the most in the end are those who respond. Those who do not overcome? I wouldn’t bet a wooden nickel on them. However, God is gracious.

Read Rev. 2-3 carefully, slowly, and you’ll see both sides of this: they’re God’s churches, and yet they’re also being corrected and warned. Perhaps in the end, only those who do hear will be the ones who end up as the Bride of Christ or who walk with Him in white. (Rev. 3:4-6, 11-13, 19-22). I would not want to be among those who remain with their state of losing first love, of not opening the door on which Jesus knocks, or not overcoming. Read it for yourself.

But my point is: you and I must respond. You and I must repent. You and I must overcome. You and I must listen and hear our Lord. Let’s leave the judging of who is “in” and who isn’t – up to Him. It’s hard not to wonder, but we must resist that temptation.

In any case, we're told to honor *all* men, to pray for *all* people, to love everyone – even our enemies. Not just those who assemble with us. We're told to root out any feelings of superiority, exclusivism, or inferiority. We are ONE, together. We are OF one – the body of Christ.

My message today is really simple: ***It takes the whole body coming together, working together, accepting one another, knowing one another, honoring one another, letting one another use his/he God-given gifts, before we'll see Christ, or HEAR Christ, completely.*** It takes all of us doing our part, and harmoniously serving God and one another, to manifest Christ.

I don't believe we've been doing that for the most part. I also believe we will change. I believe we *can* come together as God's people and work together, and accept one another. Parts are parts. The eye might think the liver looks kinda weird. The liver might think the mouth is far too easy about what it allows into the body – so God has some people who are like the liver: they filter everything else first for the body. Others think that's kinda annoying – but it keeps the body alive. Some of us are reckless and do things that hurt the body. Other loving body parts come around and stop the blood flow, or fight the infection. But all the body parts love the other parts and *accept* them, idiosyncrasies and all.

Get the point? WE GOTTA COME TOGETHER, FOLKS, and let GOD do the things only GOD *should* do! Too many people are trying to act like GOD, making decisions for Him.

THE “HOUSE CHURCH”

You may find your best bet to meet with a smaller fellowship, frankly. Did you realize the early church – those Paul often established – ***met in brethren's homes***? Some of you listening to this don't like meeting in just a house. You want a big fancy church *building* with stained glass windows, a huge pipe organ, a pricey auditorium, or at least a “proper” church building. Some of you don't feel you've been “to church” unless there are at least 100 or 200 or more people there.

You *are* the church; it's not a matter of “going to church”. Where two or three are assembled in Christ's name, He is there (Matt. 18:20). We don't need to have 500 people to make it “a church”.

When a work wants to feel established, they usually decide to build a church building. Please read the list of verses I'm going to give you showing that congregation after congregation in the early New Testament met in people's ***homes***. They couldn't have been that big of a church, and certainly there was no stained glass and pipe organs and gold leaf on the ceilings! So re-think your insistence that you have to attend with a large established church. That's fine if God's word is preached there and Jesus is magnified there and brethren are served there – but don't despise the small home assemblies either.

I've been in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the Gothic architecture of Cathedrale Notre Dame de Paris with its many spires and grotesque gargoyles everywhere, and many other historic and large church buildings all over Greece, Czech republic, Italy, France -- all over. I've been in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. I don't read in my New Testament that the church in new covenant times is like that. The gold that was lavished in St. Peter's, the marble everywhere – the size of it – I think the Peter I know in the Bible would have been upset to have his name associated with all that.

Here are a few verses you can look up on your own some time about a few of the House Churches in Paul's day: Paul taught them publicly from house to house (*Acts 20:20*); Paul preached from a rented house in Rome (*Acts 28:30*); other examples -- **Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; The Philippian church was likely one that met in Lydia's house (Acts 16:14-15); Col 4:15; Philemon 2 – “and to the church in your house”.**

The home church can be a wonderful little group where people can know one another and where our Savior is glorified and where Father is worshiped. I would prefer this usually to the big mega-churches we see springing up today, where 10-20,000 or more are meeting in huge coliseums.

TEMPORARY ISOLATION IS NOT ALWAYS A BAD THING

I will add one more thing before concluding this sermon: some of you hearing this have been dropped by organized bodies. Maybe you're an individual, or a small group of believers of 5-7-10 or so of you. “They” don't want you among them perhaps because of what they've heard about you. It doesn't seem to matter that you've deeply repented. Some groups just don't want “your kind” there.

But don't hurt too long. God has not forsaken you and never will if you seek Him and repent of past sins. In fact, God may purposely have you or your group in relative seclusion for His purposes. He may be preparing you, or your little house group, for some very special purpose down the road. Let me give you some examples:

- **Paul** himself, whom we've been talking about: it was hard for the Jerusalem believers to accept him. After all, Paul single-handedly had just about decimated their numbers. So what did God do? Remember? God put Paul into isolation several times in his life. First of all, right after his calling, Paul was blinded for 3 days until Ananias in faith accepted his new brother and prays for him – scales fall off Paul's eyes – and he's healed. But he kept Paul in isolation for 3 days.

Then – for three years God took Paul to Arabia, out of circulation – probably to Mt. Sinai, which is correctly in Saudi Arabia, not the Sinai Peninsula. There, face to face, Jesus was back on earth personally teaching and equipping Paul for a huge ministry (*Galatians 1:17-18; 4:25*).

- **Moses** – after he murders an Egyptian has to be isolated for 40 years, watching sheep, the lowest of the low professions for a renown general of the mighty Egyptian army - before God reveals Himself and a special mission for this exiled felon! The wilderness was part of his training and preparation in brokenness and having to rely on God.
- **Elijah** – had to hide for most of the 3 year drought
- **John** the baptizer, son of a priest – out in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord.
- **Jesus** Himself – 40 days in the wilderness before He started His ministry
- **There are many others – Joseph, all those years in jail in Egypt, is another example.**
- **Certainly in a sense: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – were pulled out of big groups and set by themselves, living out of tents.**

But DON'T misunderstand me: *I do not believe God wants us to stay in isolation, once He reveals people and groups to us where we can contribute, and be accepted, and listen to sermons that square with the word of God..* HE may have a reason for time, to give us more time to pray, repent, reflect, study His word, a time of introspection – but in the end, the body parts need each other or the body is not going to function properly.

If this message has been helpful or thought provoking to you – pass the word to others.

We'll end with reminding ourselves: the way I treat you, and the way you treat me – is something Jesus takes and feels personally.

If you've ever wanted to see Christ, to meet Christ, to talk to Christ, to hear Christ – open your eyes. It may be easy to miss Christ. Remember, we're parts of His body.

Jesus may be that fat lady in the corner. He may be in the black man feeling isolated. Jesus may also be in a horrible repentant sinner whose sins everyone seems to know. Jesus may be in that young woman flirting with the young man over there. Perhaps He's in the old woman who is getting forgetful, or the old man who isn't. Look at the sister or brother next to you, and let me introduce you to Jesus Christ and another part of His body. We *are* having our one-on-ones with Christ and just don't always recognize it.

Now look beyond your congregation, beyond your denomination, cross those lines – and meet other parts of the body of Christ. *Get to know the rest of the body of Christ. Start working with them.* “All one body we”, is what we sing in “Onward Christian Soldiers”. Now let's practice it. Go love one another, cross church fellowship lines and meet your other brothers and sisters.

If this message has moved you to view your brothers and sisters differently, tell others about the message. It's a free and easy download off the website www.lightontherock.com

Pray for this website that God will grant us His grace, insight and His mercy. Til next time, this is Philip Shields, saying ‘good bye, dear brothers and sisters in Christ’ -- and I hope you see Jesus much more often and in more places than ever before.

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