

## **Energized or Mechanized?**

***“ . . . In order that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing majesty of His power in us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strength, with which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead . . . and gave Him as a head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of the one who fulfills all things in all”*** (Ephesians 1:18-23) (Author’s Translation).

The plain teaching of Scripture is that all believers are energized by the Holy Spirit. If one does not have the Holy Spirit, one is not a member of the body of Christ (Romans 8:9). And it is that energy of the Holy Spirit that unites the believers together in one body of which Christ is the head. A distinction must be made here between the “body of believers” and the “Body of Christ.” The body of believers has to do with the members of the family as a group. The body of Christ would be the living organism, which is analogous to the human body. This distinction is vital to understand, but not commonly recognized. When Paul speaks of the gifts to the Corinthians, he is using this analogy. Using such an analogy, it must be understood that all the members of the body can only function as the head directs. By the same token, no member is independently usable without the rest of the body. Thus, the brain gives the signals to the vast network of nerves that control all the functions of the body. No member of the body can function without signals from the brain. Each separate nerve has its own function as directed by the brain, from the physical functions of the limbs and extremities, to the thought processes controlled by the tiny neurons within the brain itself.

Paul makes it abundantly clear in a number of passages that the relationship of the believer to Christ is of this nature. All members of the body are integrally connected with the head and with one another. To the Corinthians (Ch. 12) he illustrated this principle using several members of the body as examples. He was not, of course, attempting an exhaustive list. In the human body, there are literally millions of functions that go completely unobserved and unobservable except, in some cases, by a microscope. These ought also to be in the list, were Paul attempting to do so. Every one of these functions is vital to the soundness of the body. For example, there are twelve reticular nerves that control eye movement. Should any one of these twelve malfunction, vision could be seriously affected. One of the marvels of the human brain is that it is able to keep these myriads of minute impulses sorted out and unconfused. Without the brain none of the members could function. On the other hand, without the other members, no single member has any significance. This whole concept of the head and its body is given to us as the prime example of the way in which the members of the family of Christ are integrated together with Him and with one another. Given this analogy, we are at liberty to define our relationship to Christ in terms of a vital, living organism, rather than in terms of an organization or a religious order. Often when people speak of the body of Christ, they think only in terms of the body of believers, which is quite another thing. When the Church is regarded as such a body—a religious group—it is tempting to see it as a mechanized organization rather than an energized organism. Herein lies much of the mischief that keeps believers constantly dissatisfied with themselves and with one another and even with the Lord, Himself. The

common query—"What are you doing for Christ?"—puts the emphasis on human rationale and motivation. It is as though the individual member—the arm, for example—can function independently of the head. One might better ask—"What is Christ doing with you?" Although even that question is inappropriate, inasmuch as it presumes that we always know what Christ is doing with us.

When the body of Christ is viewed only as the body of believers—a religious group—the members are usually evaluated in terms of their functions or services rendered to the objectives of the group, and not as having an individual worth apart from these services. Such services are usually classified and rated in terms of the value to the welfare and promotion of the group. Thus, for example, one with a public gift, as for example, some kind of vocal ministry, would be valued far more highly than one whose gift might involve the unobserved practice of intercession, or the quiet contribution of the "widow's mite." By the same token, one who would succeed in bringing to Christ some celebrity, would be given far more "press" than one who might succeed in bringing to Christ a teenager. Similarly, there is much attention given to the recruiting of "public gifts," and much leverage exerted upon the body in general to seek to exercise such a gift. If one is not doing something of public notice, it is assumed that one is not properly fulfilling one's purpose.

It is further assumed that everyone ought to know precisely what one's gift is. As easily could one know the function of every member of one's own body, including its myriad of nerve cells, which do their function in total obscurity. We could judge the function of the more obvious parts of the body, but the body is so infinitely greater than the external functions. And of course, many of the functions overlap and many parts have a variety of functions. Who can sort it out? There have been a great many cases in the author's own ministry where one contact, made by a normally unobtrusive believer, has resulted in a series of very successful ministries resulting in a number of conversions. If the particular one in question did nothing else in one's lifetime than make that contact, that would have been a gift of great value. Of course, Jesus Himself gives us the clue in His statement concerning the "cup of cold water," given in His name.

The effort to identify and classify and motivate the believers in terms of the gifts evolves a process of "mechanization." While it is acknowledged that Christ is the Head of the Church, He is seen more as a "headmaster" than a head. The common assumption is that while Christ is the acknowledged head, he has given to the leadership the task to direct the function of the members. Many leaders seem to see their role as "physical therapists" manipulating the limbs of a paralytic. The true task of the leadership is to guide the gifts—not manipulate them. It is to observe and nurture the work that Christ **is** doing within the individual and not to presume what Christ **ought** to be doing in that individual. This, of course, requires a total submissiveness to Christ, the Head, on the part of the "undershepherd," to control the eager desire to "get everyone going for God," as well as the fleshly ambition for expansion. It seems a general, if faulty, assumption that "bigger is better"; that service is quantitative and measurable by human standards. If one does not see the member in motion, one assumes nothing is happening. The sheep grazing in the pasture may be just as much alive as the ram "battering the bulwarks."

Seeing the Church as a living organism—the Body of Christ—the whole issue of

obligation takes on a different perspective. What is the obligation of the hand to the head? The very question itself is inappropriate. The hand can only move as the head gives it its impulses. It is not a matter of obligation, but of condition. The condition of the hand is that it is attached to nerves which receive their impulses from the brain. It is not then a question of what is the hand doing **for** the head, but what is the head doing **through** the hand. There are, of course, diseases that affect the nervous system and paralyze the hand, but the treatment for the problem does not consist in moving the hand mechanically, but dealing with the disease. The entire race of mankind became diseased through the effects of sin. The antidote is redemption in Christ Jesus. In a figure, we must be reconnected to the head. Once that connection is made, it is the head that directs the function of the members. The task of the shepherd is to nourish the members—not manipulate them.

All gifts are, in reality, impulses from the head to the members, through the connection restored by His Spirit, and as it pleases Him. The result is a body functioning in response to the head and in the fulfillment of His purposes on the earth. *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it had pleased Him”* (I Corinthians 12:18).

Not only is it up to the head to determine what each member shall do, but only He can ultimately identify what that gift is and how it contributes to the functioning of the body. Our human minds are not really capable of discerning all the implications and intricacies of God’s usage of the myriad of members in His body. We must trust Christ, Himself, to make of His own body a dynamic functioning force in this world. It is His Spirit that inspires and instructs and empowers us to accomplish His will. If it is all dependent on human resources and responses—the classification and pursuit of gifts—to control the body and motivate it to action, then the plight of the world is hopeless.

It was not Paul’s human reason that transformed him from a willful and zealous enemy of Jesus and persecutor of His followers, to an ardent and invincible force for proclaiming Him as a Messiah. If God can do that for Paul, charging headlong down the wrong road, can we not trust Him to bring each of us in conformity to His will? God has many ways of accomplishing this—all He needs is our desire to have Him do so. He has the power to energize us in spite of our own human inadequacy. Not only is it not necessary, but completely counterproductive for the Church to “mechanize” the body of Christ and thus interfere with the energizing of it by the Holy Spirit.

The main thing, then, is that one receive the Holy Spirit into one’s own spirit, thus restoring the connection with the Head and becoming subject to His impulses and directions as it pleases Him. We may not always understand what He is doing with us or what His plans are for us or even what our own particular gift might be, but we can trust Him to fulfill His purpose in us if we are willing to have Him do so. *“Now the God of peace . . . perfect you [mend, restore, equip] in every good thing to do His will, doing in you that which is pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever. Amen”* (Hebrews 13:21) (Author’s Translation).

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