

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 the Holy Spirit energizes all believers. 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 between the "body of believers" and the "Body of Christ." The body of believers is about the family members 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. This analogy is used when Paul speaks of the gifts to the Corinthians. It must be understood that all 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 nerve has its 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.

Paul makes it abundantly clear in several passages that the believer's relationship to Christ is of this nature. All members of the body are integrally connected with the head and 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, millions of functions go completely unobserved and unobservable except, in some cases, by a microscope. Every one of these functions is vital to the soundness of the body. For example, multiple reticular nerves control eye movement. Should any one of these nerves malfunction, vision could be seriously affected. One of the marvels of the human brain is that it can 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 how the members of the family of Christ are integrated with Him and 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 about 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, one another, and even with the Lord. The common query, "What are you doing for Christ?" emphasizes 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, i.e., a religious group, the members are usually evaluated in terms of their functions or services rendered to the group's objectives, 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, a public gift, like a 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." As well, 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, much attention is given to recruiting "*public gifts*," and much leverage is exerted upon the body 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 should know what one's gift is. It is like saying everyone should understand the function of every member of one's body, including the myriad of nerve cells that function in total obscurity. We could judge the function of the prominent parts of the body, but the body is infinitely greater than those 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 many cases in this author's ministry where one contact, made by an unobtrusive believer, resulted in a series of successful ministries, resulting in many 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, classify, and motivate the believers in terms of the gifts evolves into 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 the leadership the task of directing the function of the members. Many leaders seem to see their role as "physical therapists" manipulating the limbs of a paralytic. The proper task of the leadership is to guide the gifts, not manipulate them. It is to observe and nurture that Christ is working within the individual, not to presume what Christ **ought** to be doing with that individual. This task, of course, requires 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 is just as 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 a question of what the hand is doing for the head but what the head is doing **through** the hand. There are 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 in dealing with the disease. The entire race of humankind 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 shepherd's task 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. The result is a body functioning in response to the head and fulfilling His earthly purposes. *"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 He will identify what that gift is and how it contributes to the functioning of the body. Our human minds cannot discern all the implications and intricacies of God's usage of the myriad of members in His body. We must trust Christ Himself to make His body a dynamic functioning force in this world. His Spirit inspires, instructs, and empowers us to accomplish His will. If it depends on human resources and responses, the classification and pursuit of gifts to control the body, and to motivate our action, then the world's plight 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 despite our human inadequacy. Not only is it not necessary, but entirely counterproductive for the Church to "mechanize" the body of Christ and thus interfere with its energizing by the Holy Spirit.

The main thing, then, is that one receives the Holy Spirit into one's spirit, thus restoring the connection with the head and becoming subject to His directions to guide us through this life. We may not always understand what He is doing with us, what His plans are for us, or even what our particular gift might be, but we can trust Him to fulfill His purpose in us. *"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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