

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 30, 2012

Why Do We Meet Together?

by Dan Trygg

"...the equipping of the saints [is] for the work of service, to 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. ...[out] from whom *the whole Body*, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of *each individual part*, causes the growth of *the Body* for the building up of itself in love" Eph. 4:12,13,16

"...[out] from whom *the entire Body*, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." Col. 2:19

When you read the letters of Paul, it is interesting to note that **the overwhelming majority of the practical teachings they contain are about relationships *within* the Body of Christ.** There is very little taught about "evangelizing your neighbor", yet within most modern churches *that* has become the primary thrust of most strategies for growth. The focus of most conservative Protestant groups has been the proclamation of the Good News. This sounds good and right on the surface, and it certainly is *part* of what a healthy church will do. Too often, however, our evangelistic efforts "put the cart before the horse". **We set ourselves up for failure with the unbelieving world because we "talk the talk" without really learning how to "walk the walk"** ...and we "turn people off" by what they perceive as hypocrisy. **What is our "corporate witness"? What do people really think of the church?** A recent study confirmed that **the church in America has *not* increased its share of the populace by even one percentage point in more than a decade.** **Why?** For all the church activities we do, all the promotional campaigns and marketing strategies we employ, **to the average unchurched observer, the Christianity we practice appears to offer very little of practical benefit.** The non-Christians see the church and Christianity as irrelevant, powerless, and often even *unattractive*. **We appear to them to possess nothing that they need. We appear to have nothing they want.** To them, Jesus and the church are *not* Good News. At best, we present something that is "ho-hum" and harmless. At the worst, we come off like legalistic snobs, judgmental, arrogant, and even dangerous.

Obviously, the impact of the Christianity *we* practice, and that lived out by the early church is vastly different. Why? **What makes *our* church experience so irrelevant and anemic, when compared with the first century church that was "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)?** Well, I think that it comes down to the fact that, for all our *talk* about spiritual growth and personal change, what we are actually *doing* to promote it is largely *ineffective*. **People aren't really growing and changing**, at least not in a positive way that stands out to non-believers. Another problem is that *we are aiming at the wrong stuff*. **Why should we meet together? What should we attempting to accomplish?** Paul clearly maintained that **the building up and maturation of every individual is the purpose of the corporate gathering.** Is that what *we* are aiming for? Is that where we invest *our* resources, time and energy? Or do we spend an inordinate amount on putting on a *big show that produces little* effective growth and change? **There are over 21 "one another" commands the NT says we are to do for each other.** Have you even *heard* of them? Where do we make room for them in the way we typically do church?

The gathering of believers in the NT was *not* primarily to put on a worship service. It was *not* just to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and utter praises to God. What would be *the point*? We can worship God at home in private. If we are in our own little private thought-bubble when we are gathered together, ...if there is no actual exchange of relevant, practical, understandable insight into *our own person* or *our own relationship* with God..., there is little to be gained by such a gathering that will be lasting, or that will truly equip us to become mature. **The goal of ministry is the maturation, equipping and active service of every member of the Body of Christ.** This is communicated both by direct statement and by practical words of instruction throughout the NT.

The NT is full of images that indicate we *are* in a growth process. *We begin as spiritual infants*, vulnerable, undiscerning, uncoordinated, undisciplined, and unaware of what our new life is all about. *The goal is maturity*, a condition where we have become strong, experienced, skilled, discerning, self-aware, wise, self-controlled, and productive. **Maturity means that we have developed a clear working-knowledge of our faith, an intimate relationship with God, and a moral character like Jesus' own** (Eph. 4:13), expressing righteousness, graciousness, and an incredible, sacrificial love like His love for us. Beyond these things, **each mature individual should understand how the Holy Spirit works in his or her life, and should be able to operate in the leadings and giftings of the Spirit's power together with others in the Body of Christ. Maturity also means *living skillfully* in the day-to-day areas of life**, e.g., personal finances, self-maintenance, family relations, education, etc. **If *this* is what we are trying to produce, it does not take much looking around to see that *most churches are failing miserably!***

Paul's teaching concerning the Body of Christ repeatedly contains images that describe the interrelatedness and interdependence of the parts to one another. He says things like, "...we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5,6), and, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body; so also is Christ. ...And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it". In Paul's mind, **this interrelatedness and interdependence of parts is a key component for both individual and corporate growth, and for effective ministry as well.** The word picture from the passages listed above, and the passages from Colossians and Ephesians at the top of this page, describe the gathering of parts together in tight assembly, joined together by life-giving bonds and ligaments. This is an incredible image to ponder. **Together the parts support and energize one another.** Each part functions according to its own unique design, yet, as a corporate entity, the function of the parts complements each other so that the entire Body benefits and grows. This is the ultimate description of an interactive, interdependent system.

Maturity cannot take place on a wide scale without the responsible interaction of everyone in the Body. To Paul, maturity was not just an individual, one-on-one proposition. He believed that growth was to be encouraged and developed by means of a Body-life, interactive dynamic. **The vision for growth that Paul possessed would not come through the efforts of any limited group of "superstar Christians". Rather, growth and maturity would take place as the parts of the Body interact according to their God-designed function.** *Growing the church is not the job of a pastor, or a board of leaders, or a planning committee, though any purposeful forethought and healthy leadership can have a positive impact on what happens. Too often, however, such plans do not take into account the Body-life dynamic. Leadership that does not seriously engage this fundamental principle is misguided.* At best, its efforts will only produce *partial* results. **Growing the church is the job of the church.** The Body causes the growth of the Body, as the various parts link together in supportive, healthy, life-sharing ways that value and affirm all the members, and allow them to function as God empowers them to function. **A healthy, interactive community will accept people where they are, but will continually be moving everyone to maturity.**

In practical terms, the writer to the Hebrews says, "See to it that *no one* comes short of the grace of God...", meaning that **we are all to take an active role in watching out and caring for one another** (Heb. 12:15). This idea had been expressed earlier in the book, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in *any one of you* an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage *one another* day after day, as long as it is still called, 'Today', lest *any one of you* be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:12,13; cf. 10:24,25). **Everyone is valuable.** *No one* should be lost, or allowed to drift away through *the neglect* of other believers. The NT admonishes *us* to *insist* that none should fail to meet their potential in Christ. **We are responsible before the Lord to do all that we can to stimulate, encourage, build up, fortify, and invest in our fellow brothers and sisters, so that they can become healthy, strong and able to take their place as ministering members of the Body of Christ.** Notice that this mandate is to *all* of us, not just to "leadership types". Unless we reach out to those whom God brings into our lives with truth, love, and encouragement, the effective nurturing of their maturity will not, *can not*, take place. The job is too big for the "leaders", or so-called "professionals", to do by themselves. **The maturity of every member can only begin to become a remote possibility if we will all pitch in and become "ministering members", or "practitioning parts", of the Body of Christ, according to the abilities, gifts, and opportunities He gives to us.**

A fundamental principle that we can observe to be operating in the world around us continually is: **Growth and reproduction are natural by-products of health.** If we truly became a community of people who visibly loved and supported each other, and consistently walked with one another through the hurts, broken places and unskilled areas of our lives, helping each other to develop into healthy, productive, joyful, fun-loving people, we would have no problem with having an impact in this world for Christ. *People would see that we have something different, and they would be attracted to it.*

If we do what it takes to learn to be a healthy, functioning organism, we will find that growth and reproduction will happen quite naturally. It will not need to be manipulated or "forced". The key to this statement is the phrase, "If we do what it takes...". **First, and foremost, that means we must invest in our own walk with Christ.** We must invest time to study His word, pray and respond to what He shows us. *It means we must honestly, vulnerably, repeatedly come to God, and to like-minded brothers and sisters, to share our needs and hurts, and be open to receive the counsel, help and encouragement given.* **We must also be willing to stretch ourselves to radically obey God and serve and support others.** Not only will *we* be strengthened, but also the relationships, the "joints and ligaments" of love, will be opened up and developed. By honest and loving sharing, we are to grow in every way *into* Him, who is the Source and Completer, and then, *out from* Him we are to serve one another according to our own unique functions. As we do these things, **the Body will build itself up in love.**