

The Church

Linked Up

We continue our series on the church. For us to grow and function as God designed, we have to be connected to each other in relationship. The church has to be linked up, linked together, if we are going to grow up into all Jesus desires us to be. Perhaps the best illustration of that is found in the Bible's description of the church as the body of Christ.

In four New Testament books Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ. He writes, **“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27.**

In Romans he writes, **“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Romans 12:4-5**

In Ephesians, **“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Ephesians 1:22-23**

Again in Ephesians 4, **“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each does its work.” Ephesians 4:11-16** (Notice the idea of connection, relationships, of being linked up, linked together as the body of Christ.)

From Colossians, **“And he is the head of the body, the church.” Colossians 1:18.**

Jesus is the head and we, the church, are the body of Christ. We are His expression in the world. Notice the Scriptures don't say we are “like his body” or that we are representative of his body, instead, the bible says we are the body of Christ! It's an overwhelming responsibility isn't it? We are his body in the earth. If he is going to get anything done, it's going to be through us! Notice too, the passage in Ephesians 4 speaks of us as his body growing and building itself up in love as each does its work. We are supposed to be growing. It's what healthy bodies do. I said last Sunday if we want to not just survive but thrive we have to be a

prayed up church. But praying isn't all there is to being a healthy church. Paul tells us if we want to be a healthy, growing church...

Each member of the body has to be functioning as it should, making its unique contribution to the body. If a body is going to be healthy, thriving, the parts need to be in working order. I've had a few parts not work like they should. When your gall bladder isn't working right, your body can't thrive. Your body doesn't say, "It's no big deal, it's just your gall bladder, just one little part." That one part not working can make your whole body hurt and sick. You can't eat, you can't function, you won't thrive.

If the body of Christ is going to be healthy and thrive, not just survive, we are going to have to have all the parts working. Each member of the body needs to be functioning in the gifts and anointing God has given to that part! Not everyone is a gall bladder, not everyone is a kidney or heart or lung or eye or thumb or toe, but everyone has a part, a gift, a role to play. Everyone has a place in the body of Christ. Everyone is important to the working of the whole. We are greater than the sum of our parts! If we are to grow and thrive and be the body of Christ God needs in this world, we all have to do our part.

Paul writes, **"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free ...Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' ...there should be no division in the body...its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."** 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 We could spend an hour right here, but...

There is to be no division, no rivalry, no rebellion in the body. If there is, we have a

problem. If parts rebel against other parts of the body and against the head, we call that sickness, disease. We call it cancer. For us to be the healthy body of Christ, each of us must recognize our place, our part, serving Christ and serving one another. In order to do that...

Each member of the body must stay connected to the other members of the body through godly relationships. That's what Paul is talking about when he says, "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each does its work." Ephesians 4:15-16 Quoting from *Without Spot or Wrinkle*, **"The joint or ligament is referring to the relationship that exists between members of his body. That joint or ligament, that relationship between us, is the channel through which the life and power of Christ flows into his body. Without relationship the church cannot function. It cannot live."**

It's obvious isn't it? For a body to work, to function, to be healthy, the parts have to be connected! There has to be relationship, there has to be communication. When the head stops communicating with the body, there is a problem. When one part of the body won't or can't communicate or coordinate with the other parts, there is a problem. If one part is separated from the body, there is a problem. We have to stay connected, linked up.

Paul makes it plain, the body is made up of all these separate parts, but if you've got a leg here, an arm over there and a torso somewhere else, you've got parts, but I wouldn't say you had a body. I'd say you had a crime scene. It's the connections that make it a body. It's the supporting ligaments that hold it together. The church is all these distinct, diverse parts connected and held together in relationship with each other and with Christ the head. You get that: we are all connected to the head which is Christ and because of that we are all then connected to each other, whether we've met or not. Our connection to Jesus the head means we are connected to his body – worldwide. But in our local assembly, we must know each other in order to function and thrive. The whole thing is about being connected to Christ - being in Christ, and being connected to one another. That's what the church is all about.

You see, **It's always been about relationships.** God has always valued relationship. It's why Jesus came to die on the cross, to reconcile us to God so our sins could be forgiven and we could be in right relationship with God. It started with God being in relationship with Israel, but that wasn't enough for this awesome God of love and mercy. He wanted more. His love was

so great that he wanted the whole world to be able to come to him in a holy relationship. So as the bible says, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself that whosoever will may come to him and find forgiveness and salvation and eternal life.

Now through his saving grace we are related to God, he is our Heavenly Father, but that wasn't enough. He wanted us to be in right relationship with each other. This was the sign of our being in right relationship with God, that we were rightly connected to each other in love. John declared, **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.” 1 John 3:14.** John continues, **“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:19-21.**

This is one of the keys to thriving as a church, to love God and love one another. It's just that simple and that profound. **“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and to love one another as he commanded us.” 1 John 3:23** In the church world we've fought all kinds of battles and churches have split and divided over all kinds of issues and yet here is his command – Believe in Jesus and love one another! Loving relationships are at the heart of being the church, the body of Christ.

We must be connected to each other. It is through the relationships within the body of Christ that his life and love and grace and healing flow into the church. We have to be connected to each other in order to keep that life flowing and gracing the body of Christ.

We've got a problem. It's a great problem to have. We've got a lot of new people coming to Carbondale. New faces on Sunday. New faces on Wednesday. When we move into the new facility we expect more new faces. How do we make the connection? It requires effort. It's not easy. We're all a little reluctant to try to meet new people or make connections, but it's to the benefit of the whole body for us to be linked up, together. We are all going to have to move out of our comfort zone. Make the effort to talk to each other. It's the grown up thing to do. If this is your first Sunday or your 50th year, we are all made better by connecting with each other. It's how the body of Christ is to work. Let's all make the effort to connect.

How about attending a Sunday School class? We will be back in the Sanctuary in a few weeks and we will have some additional classes starting. Find a place to connect.

Try a life group. We need life group leaders. It's time for some of our life groups to

multiply, to divide and grow, to launch out. We have a group right now that needs someone to help lead it. The body will be healthier if we can make the connection. Volunteer. Connect.

The body can't move if the ligaments aren't connecting the parts. If the right hand doesn't know the left, it's hard to lift the load. There is so much more we can do together. We are better together. Stronger together. We can accomplish more together. Introduce yourself. Meet someone. Let's make the effort to connect.

We must value one another. We value our body. We take care of our parts...at least we should. We watch our blood pressure and salt intake because we value our heart. We don't smoke because we value our lungs. In the same way we are to recognize the value of other parts of the body of Christ. Can you think of a part of your body you would be willing to do without - other than that 25 pounds of extra weight? Every part is important. You aren't willing to lose any part. We value each other so we recognize the importance of being connected to each other.

We need to communicate that in word and action to everyone in the body of Christ. "You are vitally important to this body and that means you are vitally important to me because I'm part of this body, too. We'll all suffer if we don't have your contribution, your gifts, your talent, your resources, your love, your prayers." We need each other!

Every time you start to think you aren't that important or there isn't a place for you, think about your own body. What part would you say is unimportant or unnecessary? Every part is valuable. Every part is needed. Every part is useful and has a role to play. Every time you think, "It's too much trouble to connect with other parts of the body of Christ," stop and think about your own body. Is it too much trouble for your hand and your eye to co-ordinate and connect? Aren't you better and richer and stronger because of the connections? Aren't you happy your hand when it's holding a hamburger can coordinate and connect with your mouth? We are all part of the body of Christ and we need to connect with each other. If you've been missing a body part, get in touch and tell them, "we aren't the same without you. We need you in the body of Christ." If you've been trying to make it as a body part without being connected to the rest of the body, you aren't going to grow or thrive. You'll find yourself dying. It's time to get connected.

We must love and care for each other. There is something wrong with a person who goes around punching themselves in the face or slamming their hand in the door. We love our body too much to want to harm it. The same must be true for the body of Christ. We must love

and care for the body of Christ. Paul speaks of this kind of love when he talks about marriage as an analogy of the church. **“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body.”** Ephesians 5:28-30.

We feed and take care of our body because we love ourselves. We are to feed and take care of our wives as husbands, and we are to participate in feeding, caring for and nurturing the body of Christ because that is our body, the body of which we are apart. The church has to stop harming itself by attacking and judging and criticizing and gossiping about each other. We aren't here to hurt or injure each other but to build each other up in love because we are members together of his body!

Let me read from *Without Spot or Wrinkle* one more time. “There is no jealousy in the body. My appendix is not upset because it couldn't be a gallbladder. It is satisfied with being the appendix. There is no selfish ambition in the body. Instead, each part finds fulfillment in being what God created it to be within the body”

“There is no dissatisfaction in the body. The toe is glad to be the toe, glad to be part of the body. There is no leaving the body by any of its parts. The toe is not looking for a better body to join. Instead, the toe understands better than we, that each part actually serves all the other parts....We don't throw wounded parts of the body away or abandon them because they are hurting or aren't so pretty. On the contrary, the body rushes to give aid to the wounded part, to assist and compensate, to bear the extra burden until the injured part is healed and back to full strength...One part of the body doesn't belittle another part or berate it for weakness. Instead, all of the body pulls together. Together we function. Together we are strong. Together we accomplish each task.”

“My identity is tied up with you because together we are part of the body of Christ. How I act affects you and how you act affects me. That's why it's important that I know you. That's why it's important that as members of the body of Christ we share our lives together. That's why it's essential that we can trust each other and be real with one another. That's why it's important that we love, care for, honor and support one another. We need each other, because together, we are members of the body of Christ. Together we will serve and love one another. And when the world looks at us, they won't see a collection of body parts. Instead, they will see

one body. His body. The body of Christ.”

God help us be the church, the body of Christ in this world. With all of our weakness and differences and struggles, help us to love one another, to find ways to connect, to make opportunity to link up, to link arms, to link hearts, to serve God and serve one another as his church, his body in this world.