

Carbondale Connect Part 2

We are continuing our Carbondale Connect series, celebrating the volunteers that serve so faithfully and emphasizing the importance of being connected and involved in the life of the church. Understand, the church isn't a spectator sport. You aren't in the stands watching, cheering the players on. At least, it isn't supposed to be that way. If you are a born again believer in Christ, have repented of your sins and made Jesus the savior and Lord of your life, you are a part of the church, both locally and universally. You're one of the players, one of the participants. You may not like some of what goes on in various churches or in this church. You may not agree with what some churches do or with what some preachers say, including me. At times you may not want to be identified with certain church members, but regardless, you are a part of the church.

The bible uses a variety of images and metaphors to describe the church but I want to focus on the image of the church as the body of Christ. In four New Testament books the Apostle Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ. We are the body of Christ, designed and created to function as a body, joined and connected to one another, interacting with one another and receiving direction from the head which is Jesus Christ himself. Let me share a couple of verses from Paul's writings and see if we can glean some important truth today.

Paul 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** Notice what he says. We don't all have the same function because we represent different parts of the body. We aren't one giant nose, one giant kidney. We are many different parts who connect to form and function as one whole body. “We who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.” There is an interdependence going on. We belong to each other, connected to each other, working together, functioning together as his body.

Get this: It's important what you are, your role, your assignment. “I'm a thumb!” Terrific. That's great, but remember each member belongs to all the others. The importance of that thumb, its' value is in its' functional relationship with the hand and the rest of the body. The thumb isn't of much value if it's not connected to the hand! Relationship and connection is essential! You may be the greatest spiritual thumb in the world, but if you aren't connected, in relationship, with the others members of the body of Christ, as part of the body, the church, you

aren't making much difference as a thumb. You aren't contributing to the overall good of the body. Each member belongs to all the others because we must be connected!

Paul expands on this in 1 Corinthians. **“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.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-20**

Look at what Paul is telling us. We are all parts in the body of Christ. Some parts are more visible than others. Some parts of our body would be considered more valuable, they play a larger role than other parts, but each part has a role to play. Each part is valuable and vital as far as I'm concerned. I admit, my heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, brain are more important than my little finger, but I'm not willing to part with that little finger. It's pretty important to me as well.

Paul tells us we need to recognize, honor and celebrate the diversity that is within the body of Christ. Thank God the whole body isn't an ear, or a nose, or a hand! If the whole body was an eye, we could see really well but we couldn't hear a thing! We need all the parts. That's what I'm trying to tell you this morning, we need you. And we don't just need you in the building, we need you connected to the body. If you're an ear, we need you because we need to hear. If you're an eye, we need you because we need to see. If you're a hand, we need you because we need to hold and receive and touch and grasp and high five. We need feet because we need to go and bless and run and walk along side with others. We need a heart so we can be moved by the needs around us, so we can keep loving and moving. We need a gall bladder and tonsils and adenoids and big toes and little fingers and whatever part you have been assigned. We need you. Connected. In relationship. In this body.

Notice God arranged the parts, every one of them, just as he wanted them. You're here as part of God's strategic plan. Don't take it lightly. This body needs you. Paul continues,

“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!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that 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

Paul is telling us how valuable each part, each member is. With regard to our physical body, we think some parts are more important, some are to be treated with more honor, some with greater modesty, but Paul is making that point that in God’s eyes every part is honorable. Every part is valuable and every part is related. Connected so that we share life with every part. If one part suffers, we all suffer. If one part is honored, we should all rejoice. We are connected.

Paul makes the point that God placed you where he wanted you to be and he may have placed others alongside you. Here is a tip for you: **Don’t be territorial, be productive!** It’s about the function of the body, not the contentment of one part. See the bigger picture. It’s not just what one finger does, it’s what the whole body does and the fingers contribute to it. “I don’t need those other fingers. I’m the ring finger. I’ve got this under control.” No you really don’t. Remember you aren’t the only finger on that hand. Together, five fingers or ten fingers can produce much more than one finger can. We need all the parts to be productive.

Here is another tip: **Don’t be jealous, be effective.** Your talent, your ability is most effective where God has placed you. Don’t be jealous of the hand if God has made you an eye! “I should be out front where people can see me!” Not if you are the large intestine. Out front where people can see you is not a good thing in that instance! Serve where God has placed you and stay connected. Don’t be jealous, don’t try to be something or someone you aren’t. Be effective in making the body all God designed us to be by being the part God designed you to be!

Don’t be judgmental, be thankful and stay connected. When you are the nose, it’s frustrating that others don’t get it. “You can’t smell that? Seriously?” And when you are the eye... “How can you miss that every time? Can’t you see that?” And when you are the ear, “Didn’t you hear that?” You get the point. Because others don’t smell or see or hear as you do,

don't walk away. "I'm going out on my own." Bad plan. "Too bad about the nose." What happened? "Yeah, he went out on his own. He said he could smell danger sometimes, but I don't think he ever saw it coming..." Be considerate of the other members of the body. Be thankful you are all part of the body and stay connected.

Let me say again the only way to be effective in the body is to be connected in the body. Paul tells us in Ephesians that Christ 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."** Ephesians 4:11-13

What is my role as a pastor and teacher in the body of Christ? "To prepare God's people for works of service." I'm supposed to be helping you discover your gift, your place, your calling. I'm to help equip you so you can effectively carry out your "works of service" God has designed for you. And what is your role? As part of the body of Christ, you are to be fulfilling your call, your function, filling your place so that "the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and become mature...until we measure up to the fullness, the completeness of Christ." You are part of God's plan to build up the church, to bring us to fullness and mature and unity of the faith. Your role is vital. Essential. We need you.

Now look again at Ephesians 4. Paul continues, **"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 part does its work."** Ephesians 4:15-16.

From him the whole body grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. You have to do your part, each part working. But notice what he says. The whole body "joined and held together by every supporting ligament." We can't grow, we can't function, if the body and all its' parts are not joined together and held together by every supporting ligament. We have to be connected! The supporting ligaments are the relationships that hold us and bind us together. It is only as we are connected to each other that we can be effective, healthy, that we can grow up into Christ and be built up in love and in unity. We have to be connected! **Why is it so important for us to be connected in the body of Christ?**

First of all, **It's vitally important to your own spiritual health and progress.** Dan Reiland, a pastor and former VP with John Maxwell said regarding the importance of the church, **"We tend to drift spiritually when not connected relationally."** **Dan Reiland** God intended we be connected to one another in the life of the church. It is vital to our spiritual health and well being. We are a life giving, life sharing, gift evoking, gift sharing, grace filled, worshiping, community of faith. Without the life and blessing that comes from being connected to Christ's body, his church, I suffer spiritually. I am diminished. I must remain connected to the body. It's where life comes from. If I put a tourniquet around my arm and tighten it and leave it there, I cut off the blood flow, the flow of life to my arm and it dies. If I cut off the life flow of worship and grace and fellowship and encouragement and blessing that comes from the members of Christ's body, spiritual decline and death is the outcome. We must be connected.

I know some can't physically be present. Some are watching on line because you are restricted and unable to be here. I understand. But the discipline of attending church and being a part of a local church, being connected and serving the church, when you are able, is a vital part of spiritual health. Your spiritual life grows when you are connected and serving as part of his church. I've watched too many people get out of the habit of church attendance, dis-connect from others, stop being involved in the life of the church. I won't judge their salvation but if you ask them, they'll admit they are not spiritually healthy. I've never seen anyone with a growing relationship with Christ that wasn't part of a church. You must be connected to the body. Why is being connected so important?

The body of Christ can't function if we aren't connected. You've heard me say it repeatedly, you can have body parts scattered all over the platform but it doesn't make a body. It may make a crime scene, but it doesn't make a body. It's the connections that make the body. I've shared these verses that tell you we are all members of his body, each one of us, important, valuable, of equal concern to God. But if we aren't connected to each other, we can't grow up into all he wants us to be. If we aren't connected, the body can't function as he intended. We can't grow, we can't serve, we can't bless, we can't minister to the lost and hurting. This isn't a matter of recruiting volunteers, this is a matter of pledging ourselves to Christ as members of his body, connecting with others so we can effectively carry out the purpose of Christ in this earth.

That's what this is all about. Why is it so important to remain connected to the members of the church? **The body of Christ is the only hope for this world.** It doesn't get any more

important than this. We are engaged in the most important work on this planet. We are trying to bring the message of God's saving grace through Christ to people who are living and dying without hope. They are facing eternity without God and the work has been entrusted to us, the church, the body of Christ. The bible says, **"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..." Ephesians 3:10**

His plan involves us, his body. If we aren't healthy the world has no hope. If we aren't healthy, connected to one another, functioning in harmony as the body of Christ, then the message of the gospel can't be presented to the world and without Jesus, the world has no hope. That's how serious this is. The only hope for this world is the gospel, preached and proclaimed and taught and lived out in and through the lives of all of us, His church. The church, all of us, connected to Jesus and connected to each other, building each other up, growing up into Christ who is the head of the church, sharing our lives with each other, weeping and rejoicing together, volunteering and sacrificing and serving and sharing hope and life with each other and with the lost and hurting and dying in this world. That's the hope for this world.

That's the church. That's our church. Not stylish or trendy but honest and real and full of mercy and dependent upon his grace. That's who we are. That's how we live and grow and function and breath and develop as the living, body of Christ at Carbondale. Connected to each other, looking to Jesus. Connected, bearing each other's burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ. Connected to each other, in relationship. Multiple generations serving and worshiping and sharing our lives with each other and with the lost and broken and hurting of our world. And guess what? Jesus said we were his body, the church. He said he would build his church and he was talking about using each one of us. He would use us as building blocks and body parts and he would build his church and by his grace make us stand. He would build with us and empower us and not even the gates of hell could prevail against us. That's who we are! Come connect with us and get involved with us and let's tear down the gates and plunder hell and bring hope to this world. The world is waiting on someone to help them. Turns out it's us. His church! We need each other and he needs us to connect and serve and bring hope to the world. That's what it means for us to be the body of Christ, his church in this world.