

Our Spiritual Home 7-13-03

Key points taken from Purpose Driven Life chapter 17

I don't know how many of you were here three weeks ago when I mentioned how Benedictine monks would use the hourly chimes of the bell tower to remind them of God's presence and work in their lives. It has been a real blessing to me since then. As my watch goes off, I realize that whatever I am doing should be to the glory of God. I silently pray that I will see God's hand and cooperate with His Spirit. I just want to encourage you to give it a try if you haven't done so already.

This week there was an encouraging note in Newsweek. In the Perspective section, actor Mel Gibson is quoted saying, "The Holy Ghost was working through me on this film, and I was just directing traffic." He was directing a movie filmed in Aramaic and Italian based on the last 12 hours of Christ's life. The article goes on to say that 'Gibson attended mass every morning and asserted that agnostics and Muslims on the set converted to Christianity during the making of the film.' NEWSWEEK 7/14/03

This week I'd like to continue on with the same topic we were on 2 weeks ago of the church as our spiritual home. When we come to Christ as our Savior, we are placed into His family. The Apostle Paul wrote that we become members of His household (Ephesians 2:19).

"You are members of God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."(LB)

In our self-centered culture of today, we struggle with the interpretation of just what this means. We like our independence. We have commitments to our natural family and our employers; one thing we don't want is more commitments! Since we are placed in a spiritual household, we can't get around it. We have them. As much as we'd like to shirk them, they are part of the reason we are here. If we are going to find our purpose and be all that God has called us to be we have to face the reality of this new relationship. We can't fulfill God's purposes by ourselves.

We often think of the church as a building or an organization. We use buildings to meet in and organization for structure, but the church is not a building or an organization. The word that is translated 'church' in the New Testament means, 'people called out to an assembly'. We are called out of the world to gather as the household of God (John 15:19). Every household has some kind of order, but the order is not the household. The order can change, but family members are still family members. When we step into eternity, we will lose the buildings and the organization and probably most of the styles, but the members will be the same.

We even belong to one another. The Bible says, *"In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*Romans 12:5 (NIV) The word 'member' is a Biblical word. It means that you are an interconnected, indispensable part of the Body of Christ. We have members who are not on our membership role. They use their gifts and talents here; they consider this their spiritual family; they come for nourishment and to encourage the rest of this family. There may be those on the membership roles who are not members of the body. Church can be a club, a

Commented [notes1]: 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, Eph 2:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. John 15:19 (NIV)

thing to do, and not a spiritual home. My mentor, missionary Dennis Turner, said, "A church is where you feel at home." That is true but I would add it's, "A place where you can minister and be ministered to." You see, to just sit and have no input of any kind is more like a growth than a member.

Some of you make others welcome, some pray for the sick, some care for the needy, others teach or sing or build, or host and so forth. We can't do that without one another. And one without the others would be incomplete. Listen to a few of the together expressions the Bible uses to describe us: *put together, joined together, built together, members together, heirs together, fitted together, held together and will be caught up together*. Does that sound like you can live as a Christian and not be a part of a local church? Remember, the word means people not a building or an organization.

We can't allow our minds to retain the worldly idea of church as a club you join. That kind of thinking makes our commitment to one another shallow. If we don't like this club we can look for another. Thank God there are all types of expressions and styles of worship. I can choose which place I seem to fit but I can't change the fact that all the other Christians in those other styles and expressions are also my eternal family in the LORD. We'll all be adjusting to the heavenly style when we get there.

Listen to how the Message paraphrases Romans 12:4-5 *"Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much would we?"* To be a member means we draw life from the body and act as a vital part of the whole.

One of the first indications of a spiritual problem is when people drop out of fellowship. We don't want to be reminded of the conviction we're feeling, so we avoid other Christians. The body is the first place we should run for help. I hear people say that they didn't come to Bible study or to church because they were discouraged or depressed or struggling. That makes me think either one of two things is wrong. The person doesn't want to humble himself and get help, or the body is not very encouraging and helpful. When we are down, we should push ourselves to go. A few songs, some Scriptures, some prayer together or specific prayer for your trial, and before you know it you don't know why you were so depressed. The other thing that happens is that you hear about another person's battle and you realize yours isn't so bad after all. As you share their hurt, yours becomes insignificant. Church – we need each other, we belong to each other and we are part of each other. *"If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor."* 1Corinthians 12:26 (NCV) We should be sharing other's pain and honor, concerns and joy.

One of my favorite expressions is this: "A body part by itself is an ugly sight." Right? We're supposed to be connected in a living vital way. Don't let the way our society operates keep you from becoming close to the family of God. God bless Ida for her

wonderful invitations to meals. We need to be in one another's homes sharing meals and time together. And while you're there, pray together for each other's needs.

We need Jesus' attitude about the church. *Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.* Ephesians 5:25 (GWT) We can't really say, "I love you Lord, but I don't like your wife." Nor can we say, "I like you, but I just don't get along with your body." In 1 Peter 2:17b we are told, "*Love your spiritual family.*" (Msg) When we talk about the church we need to remember what it is we are talking about and that we are all a work in progress. When I talk about the church, I am talking about my family and myself.

Some escape their obligations by insisting they are a part of all believers and not any one congregation, but nearly every time a church is mentioned in the New Testament it is specifically referring to a local congregation. Think about the seven churches in Asia that Jesus addressed in the book Revelation. If you were a believer, you met and worshipped with the church in that particular city, in spite of its shortcomings. If we are one of the weak ones then we are there to grow. If we are one of the healthier ones, we are there to strengthen the church. We're all there to learn from one another. There is no Biblical excuse for refusing to meet with a local body of believers.

Let me give you six benefits of belonging to a local church. Identifying with a local church is a declaration that you are a genuine believer. Jesus said, "*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*" John 13:35 (NLT) Loving others is witnessed in your spending time being with them. Remember that love is spelled T-I-M-E. It should also be demonstrated in words and actions. The Logans shared with me that in Puerto Rico everyone greets one another with hugs. Maybe we need some island attitude here. The early church greeted one another with a family kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20). We ought to be known as the hugging church. Guys, you can hug the ladies appropriately from the side. And don't forget to say, "I love you!" We have some of the dearest people in Sedona in this church. They won't live forever, and none of us knows if we have tomorrow, so tell them you love and appreciate them today!

Commented [notes3]: 20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 1 Cor 16:20 (NIV)

I love it when we have diversity in the church. It is so unlike the world. Rich and poor, casual and formal, young and old, from various cultures and yet we all believe the same basic truths and love the same wonderful Lord. It is a foretaste of heaven. The church should be an example to the world of how to get along and love one another. You can't express this truth of discipleship that is a witness to the world without being in a local congregation.

Identifying with a local church family moves us out of self-centeredness. Being in a local church teaches us to express the fruits of the Spirit like gentleness, patience, and endurance. Oswald Chambers once said that God brings people into our lives that teach us what we are like toward God. Am I faced with inconsiderate people that don't follow through with their promises? Perhaps I am like that toward God. Are people listening but not really hearing me? Perhaps God is trying to tell me I hear

the words but not the message. Only when I meet with imperfect brothers and sisters in Christ am I challenged to grow in these areas. Church is a learning center.

We are expected to not only share the ups and downs of life, the hurts and honors, but we are to lay down our lives for one another! *Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* 1John 3:16 (NIV) In loving your brother and sister in Christ, you are demonstrating your love for Christ.

Identifying with a local church family helps us to mature spiritually. That identification is more than warming a pew on Sunday morning, but by participating in the life of the church. *"As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.* Ephesians 4:16b (NLT) There are 35 individual "one another" verses in the New Testament. We are instructed *to love, pray for, encourage, admonish, greet, serve, teach, accept, honor, forgive, submit to, and be devoted to one another.* Those are just a few of our family responsibilities. But we can't do that unless we are together, sharing our interconnected lives and ministries.

It is easy to be holy when you are a hermit. The real test and place of growth is when we bump up against people that are as immature as we are. Isolated holiness has no muscle, no roots. Real maturity shows up in relationships. We grow faster and stronger when we live in a relationship of accountability with one another. I learn from your growth and you learn from mine. That is why I want to encourage testimonies. If you want to share one with the congregation please come see me about when you can do that. Wednesday evening Bible study always has a time to share what God is doing in your life, or teaching you.

Identifying with a local body is important because the local body needs YOU! *"A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church."* 1Corinthians 12:7 (NLT) You have a gift and talent that the body needs. You are a piece of the puzzle that makes a whole picture in the place you attend. The tendency I see is for man to think his ministry and calling is the main thing or nothing. Please hear this: Your gift and calling is just as important as everyone's, not more, and not less. We tend to emphasize the teaching and preaching gift. Where would that be without hospitality, without helps, without compassion? Bodies don't function well with a missing organ. If you have been a mere observer here, God has more for you. He wants you interconnected in a life giving way.

Identifying with a local body helps you share in Christ's mission to the world. When Jesus walked the earth people could see God's love in the way He loved and served them. Today they should be able to see the same thing when they look at a genuine body of believers. The church, as a body, often ministers to community needs. We have become Jesus' hands and feet and heart to the world. The homeless come by my office. Needy families call. Fire and Police personnel as well as people who experience a sudden death in the family rely on Pastor Ed. People show up for prayer and counseling, for marriage and for burials. Why do they come here? They expect us to be like Jesus. I'd love to see us minister to the needy in our community in some new way as a church body. *"He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him*

in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."Ephesians 2:10 (Msg)

And finally, identifying with a church family keeps you from slipping away from the faith. The enemy of our soul knows our weaknesses. He is always waiting for you to step away from the protection and accountability of the sheep pen. Then he pounces like the predator he is. The Bible calls him a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1Peter 5:8). Some folks that attend church don't want you to point out anything that might be convicting, and don't you dare speak out against sin in their lives. That is one reason we are in a body, to encourage each other to walk in step with the Spirit. Solomon said the wounds of a friend are faithful, it is the kisses of an enemy that deceive (Proverbs 27:6). It takes a lot of guts to tell a friend he or she is off track. Rare is the friend who will risk the friendship to spare you the destructiveness of sin. "Mind your own business" is Cain's expression, not the Christian's. In fact we are ordered to confront someone who is erring from the truth. *"If you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back."* James 5:19 (Msg) Godly leaders are suppose to watch over you like a shepherd does his flock. *"Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God."* Hebrews 3:17 (NLT) We aren't anyone's conscience, but we are to speak up in love when some one is obviously straying from the truth.

Commented [notes4]: 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Prov 27:6 (KJV)

God *"created the church to meet your five deepest needs: a purpose to live for, people to live with, principles to live by, a profession to live out, and power to live on."* Rick Warren

The moment you were born you became a part of the human race, but you still needed a specific family to grow up in. The same is true spiritually. When you are born again you become a part of the universal family of God, but you still need a specific congregation to be a part of. There are no perfect churches. If you find one, don't join because then it will be imperfect. If there are humans involved, it is imperfect. That is partly by design. It is in the imperfections that we learn some of our most important lessons. But in commitment to the people, not the building or the organization, you will grow and develop and find your purpose. You will be a part of the expression of Christ's body.

The early church was so powerful and influential partly because of this kind of commitment. *"They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers."* Acts 2:42 (Msg) Should it be any different today? A commitment to Christ is also a commitment to His body. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes the Macedonian believers. *"First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will, they gave themselves to us as well."* 2Corinthians 8:15 (TEV). Committing your life to Christ is a step of salvation. Committing to a local body is a step of real fellowship.

I'd like you consider this: I am called to belong, not just believe. Let's say that together. Would you take time to really consider what belonging should mean to your attitude about church and your involvement in it?