

The Disjointed Body 9-2-01

Ephesians 4:1-6

The burden I have from the Lord this week is something I really need the inspiration, the breathing in, of Holy Spirit to communicate clearly to you. It came as a sudden thought when I was asked if I had any insight about the bones of Christ. The Scripture prophesied: Psalms 34:20 (KJV)²⁰ *He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.* They also predict that on the cross He would look upon His bones and see them all out of joint. Psalms 22:14a (NIV)¹⁴ *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.* Psalms 22:17a (NIV)¹⁷ *I can count all my bones...*

The first thing that came to mind was the prayer of Christ in John 17:12 (KJV) *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.* He keeps all His bones. He keeps all that are His. Since we are the body of Christ I would think the spiritual picture of the bones has something to do with us as His body.

The bones are the framework of the body, the structure that all the rest of the body conforms to. My arm muscles and hands conform to the foundation upon which they function – the bones. So what is the framework of the spiritual body of Christ? Is it not the organization man has placed upon Christianity? The vast majority of Christians are connected to some organizational structure, regardless of how good or error prone or loose knit it may be. I think we are in essence conformed to the structure we have chosen. We have endeavored to choose one we feel to be most Scriptural, the most liberating for ministry, and the least confining in regards to activity that is of a maintenance nature. I like this bone! But is it in joint? Most Christians like their bone – their organization. That is one reason they have chosen to stay with that group. But again the question is, are they in joint?

The true body of Christ has many parts and various functions. It is not bound by time or location. It is Christ working and living in His own. His command to us was to love one another. The extent to which we obey or disobey, that command has a great deal to do with how the body functions. As with Christ upon the cross many bones are out of joint, extended. They are readily visible and a cause of great pain. The pain comes from the lack of unity with the other bones.

This group complains about that group. One group will not fellowship with another because of some doctrine that has nothing to do with who Jesus Christ is and what He did for us. Isn't that the focus of our worship and fellowship? I'm afraid we are so interested in intellectual Christianity that we have lost sight of Spiritual Christianity. If we are so focussed on the right interpretation and mental understanding of side issues that our hearts are not captivated by Christ, we are certain to end up in arguments with other groups, in arguments amongst ourselves, and so become a disjointed bone.

As I began to realize what this picture meant, I became sensitive to the expressions that came from my lips and the lips of those I came in contact with. The little innuendoes and snide remarks about different fellowships or styles of worship, divisions

between individuals in the body over unessential doctrine cause such pain to my Savior. I hope this sensitivity I feel continues because I don't want to become callous to anything that would grieve the Holy Spirit. On the cross Jesus was suffering for the sins of the world. Those bones out of joint are the suffering of the sins of the world in the church. Right in His own people there is worldliness, the darkness we talked about last week, unyielded areas of our hearts that would allow us to compare ourselves among ourselves and claim superiority. We wouldn't dare say, "We are better than that group", because it is too blatantly prideful. Still, that can be an accurate reflection of our attitude.

If we would only compare ourselves with Christ instead of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, then we would see how much work remains in transforming our life into His likeness. The reason we prefer to compare ourselves with others is we are not as convicted. We can feel a sense of pride and superiority that our flesh enjoys. When I am trying hard to be the best, I have forgotten that Christ is my rest. He has done for me what I could never do. So I rest in His accomplished work. My focus is on what He did for me and not on the superior works of my flesh. How can I boast about that? So the Apostle says if he is going to boast, it is in the cross of Jesus. Through that cross he has become dead to the world, which includes comparisons.

In the mission field a wonderful thing often takes place. Christians abroad do not focus on their denomination or their doctrines. If one group cannot reach an area, they encourage another to reach it. The reason is that the focus is on the simple Gospel, that people come to salvation, come to a relationship with Jesus Christ. There is so much need that they are glad anyone would assist in spreading the good news. It reminds me of Paul in prison. He didn't care that people were out preaching to try to make it harder for him. He was just glad the Gospel was going out. Paul wasn't out of joint with the other bones in the body.

Instead of being critical we should be praying for spiritual growth and blessing in that group. Wouldn't you want them to be praying that for you? Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. The World Wide Church of God is a great example of how a whole denomination can grow and change. Their doctrines were very different from most and even salvation was questionable, as works seemed to be involved. But through the faithfulness of others to lovingly share with them and pray for them, the Spirit of God has transformed that denomination.

This problem within the body was just as evident in the first century. That's because the flesh nature hasn't changed in 2000 years. Hear how the Apostle Paul addressed the issue.

Eph 4:1-6 (NIV)¹ *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

"As a prisoner of the Lord" He was literally a prisoner because of the cause of Christ and yet spiritually too, his words are confined to those of Jesus'. Is that true of our

speech? Are our words confined by the will of God or are they free to express the works of the flesh, envy, jealousy, hatred, dissensions, and factions. (See Galatians 5:20) As one whose mouth is in submission to the Holy Spirit he urges us *to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*. What is the calling? It is a call to Christ likeness. (See Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18) That is a life that expresses the fruits of the Spirit not those of the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit is the life of Christ in us.

The Apostle Paul goes on to explain what living a life worthy of our calling looks like. *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love*. There it is, the fruits of the Spirit, a life expressing the life of Jesus. When we compare ourselves with others, or put down a differing opinion we are often expressing pride by saying, "I know better than you. You err in your understanding but I do not." That is the opposite of humility. Humility listens to the difference and examines the Scriptures to see if there is anything to that opinion. It looks to learn and grow, not correct and condemn. He didn't say be somewhat humble. He said, "Be completely humble..."

I really like the Apostle Paul's expression in Philippians 3:15 (NIV)¹⁵ *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you*. He was saying that if you are mature in Christ, you will have the same view but if you see it differently, God will make it clear. He trusted the Holy Spirit to be the teacher and knew it wasn't his job to make everyone see things like he did. That is gentleness and faith. We can have confidence and conviction about a doctrine or God's will and not have to convince others when we have confidence in Jesus the Great Shepherd.

Gentleness is a much-overlooked fruit of the Spirit, especially when we differ with one another. Our society sees gentleness as weakness. When in fact, it is strength and self-control. Imagine how the body of Christ would be drawn together if we could express this one fruit of the Spirit. Too often the volume of conversation rises and tension mounts and the atmosphere could not be described as 'gentle'.

"...be patient, bearing with one another in love." When others insist on their issues or perspectives, be patient and bear with them in love. Love does not seek its own, to be understood, but to understand. Consider how patient Christ is with you, how He bears with you in love. How should we then be toward our brothers and sisters in Christ? We need to operate in the love Christ has for them. Only then can we show them the patience Christ shows us. I want to consciously consider how much the Lord loves the brother or sister I am talking to or talking about.

³ *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*. Unity is not in the details of doctrine, but in the Lord Jesus. I am one with you because the same Christ that lives in me, lives in you. I am one with my brothers and sisters in different organizations because we have the one faith that God saved us through the same blood of Christ. I am one with my brothers and sisters in the Lord, past, present and future because we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is unity. The Spirit of God would have us all functioning in peace, not disjointed, painful separation of argument and comparisons. KJV says 'endeavor' and NIV 'make every effort'. The Word of God is declaring that it takes some work, some effort to yield to

the Holy Spirit on this issue. Our flesh is so eager to manifest itself in our words and so we must make every effort.

Why? ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--* Because we are all part of the same body and a body that is arguing with itself is handicapped. There are many organizations but there is only one body. The same Spirit works within each of us. We all have the same hope of being transformed into His image, and of an eternity with our loving Father.

⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* We don't worship a different Lord – He is one and the same. We have the same faith that God has provided all our need in Christ Jesus. We were all baptized into His death and resurrection. Doesn't that make the little issues we get on our soapboxes about, rather insignificant? Now, please don't misunderstand me, I don't mean we can't discuss them and ponder our different understanding of God's word together. That is good and even a healthy thing. How are we to learn and grow if we do not consider new things? The problem is the attitude in which we discuss. Is it full of the fruit of the Spirit or of the flesh? Are we discussing to learn or to influence others to think like we do? Are we discussing, realizing we are serving the same Lord and in the same faith and the same baptism?

⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

It is the same God who is our Father. That makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. I relish the fact that we are family in the Lord regardless of our differing ideas. It is such a blessing to run into brothers and sisters in Christ when you travel. Wherever you go they are there, around the globe, and we share in the same Spirit. I am always tempted to ask what denomination they are with. Yuck! That is the flesh looking for the difference instead of what we share in Jesus. Do we have the same Father? Then we are family. He is over me, in and through me, just as He is with you and them. What a joy to have people around the globe fellowshiping with us each Sunday. I don't know anything about their denomination, just that they desire the word of God.

Let's make every effort to watch our attitudes and speech with each other, with and about those of other groups. I know none of you want to see the bones of Christ disjointed or to grieve the Holy Spirit. Hear your brothers and sisters in humility, and share with patience, considering our oneness. If you see an error in a group, don't use the chance to criticize but to pray for them. It is one thing to speak the truth in love when necessary, and quite another to enter into a critical spirit to exalt self. Remember the seven ones when you talk of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

1. one body
2. one Spirit
3. one hope
4. one Lord
5. one faith
6. one baptism
7. one God and Father of all

