

# Discerning the Body

As we saw in our previous lesson, the Body of Christ is bigger than our particular gathering. We cannot operate correctly if we think that our group is all of the Body nor if we think that the ministries available to us from our group are all of the ministries needed. We also saw that the Body of Christ operates from members who are placed by the Lord and function according to their placement.

Because we now belong to Christ and are a part of His Body, we must look at people and circumstances differently. We can no longer evaluate people according to the world's ways nor by our natural understanding.

## 2 Corinthians 5:16 NASB

(16) Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer.

Since we don't recognize anyone according to the flesh, i.e., according to the natural, how are we to recognize them? We must evaluate all things, including people by the Holy Spirit.

## 1 Corinthians 2:12 NASB

(12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

The only way that we know any of the things of God is by the Spirit of God. That is why the Holy Spirit was given to us by the Father—so that we might know the things of God. This applies to the Body of Christ also. We cannot know people in the natural but only by the Spirit; otherwise, we are unable to discern the Lord's Body.

Why is this important? Because of the consequences of not discerning the Lord's Body. These Scriptures are read at practically every communion service, yet, they are not applied nor properly understood.

## 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 NASB

(27) Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

(28) But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

(29) For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

(30) For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

We must judge the body correctly. This means that by the Holy Spirit we have to discern or distinguish between what is the Body and what is not the Body. Paul is talking about a whole lot more than a piece of bread and a sip of wine. He is talking about the blood that cleanses us from sin (spiritual application) and the Body of which we all partake and in which we are all one (spiritual application).

When we take the communion elements, we are recognizing the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus. We are re-affirming our part in that Covenant and we are also re-affirming that we are in covenant with all others who are a part of the New Covenant. Failure to discern or judge this means that we partake in an unworthy manner. The result is that many are sick and some even die. That is why this is important!

### The Problem

This has produced a tremendous problem for the denominational or institutional Church. The typical denominational Church does not discern the Lord's Body, the real Church. Consider for a moment that the Scriptures tell us that Jesus gave gifts of people who are to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:8-11). As the Head of His Body, this is His prerogative. These functions are fully operative now and have always been fully operative since the time the Lord ascended and gave them as gifts to the real Church. Now, consider, do you know any denominational organization where all of these functions are even recognized much less allowed to actually function? Yet, we know by His Word that these functions exist; therefore, the institutional church is guilty of not discerning the Lord's Body since men who operate in these functions at the direction of the Lord are neither acknowledged nor recognized.

What are the criteria to be a part of the Church, the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ? There are four requirements and we can find them in Matthew 16:15-18 in Peter's response to Jesus question about who He is.

#### Matthew 16:15-18 NASB

- (15) He \*said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
- (16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- (17) And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.
- (18) "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

First, there was a confrontation with Jesus over the issue of who He is. This is the first step—the issue of Jesus. Second, the Father revealed that Jesus is the Son of the Living God (this revelation does not come through people). Third, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. And, fourth, Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God before others.

It was this revelation of who He is that is the rock upon which the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ is built. Therefore, to participate in the Church, the *ekklesia* of Jesus, we must have a personal confrontation with Jesus for the revelation, acknowledgment, and confession of Him as the Son of the Living God. This makes us a member of the Church Universal; that is, a part of all who have become a part of Christ.

To become a part of the Local Church, we must reside in a locality. The Local Church is that part of the Church Universal which is resident in any given locality. There is no room in the Scriptures to have different churches in a locality. To do so is to be guilty of the same things as the Corinthians.

### 1 Corinthians 1:11-12 NASB

- (11) For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.
- (12) Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

The only difference is that today we say, "I am a Baptist," "I am a Lutheran", "I am a Presbyterian", or "I am Disciple of Christ".

Paul goes on to ask in the next verse, "Has Christ been divided?". Obviously, He has not been divided. The Corinthians simply did not discern the Body. That is why Paul spoke to them a little later in the book about the meaning of communion.

It would appear then that if we meet the above listed four requirements, we are a part of the body of Christ and we should be functioning as such in the locality in which we live. However, it doesn't seem to work that way. Although we have met the criteria established by the Lord to be a part of His Body, each denominational church has their own criteria, which their governing bodies have established, with which we must agree in order to be a part of their assembly. Is it proper to add the requirements of our traditions to the Lord's requirements?

In some institutional churches it is required that you attend all meetings and participate in various programs to prove yourself before any form of "ministry" is allowed. Of course, the institutional church's idea of "ministry" is any area in which you can benefit the church, such as, children's ministry, youth ministry, nursery, ushering, bus ministry, worship team, cleaning, and other volunteer work. While all of this can be helpful and is of service, none of it qualifies as biblical "ministry".

In some of these churches if you don't disagree with any of their doctrine or their interpretations of Scripture, then you might be allowed to teach Sunday School or, if you are non-threatening enough, even preach. If you are a good fund raiser, you can even be sent out as an "evangelist" or "missionary". Of course, if you want to advance in the organizational structure you must have the proper educational credentials. This is a deception and contrary to the simplicity of the

Scriptures. Look at what Paul said about this.

### Galatians 1:15-18 NASB

- (15) But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased
- (16) to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,
- (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.
- (18) Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

It is God who reveals His Son in us. It is the Lord in us working through us that produces biblical ministry, not the amount of education which we have received. The deception in our institutional churches is that education can produce ministry. Only the Holy Spirit flowing out of us can produce life. Biblical ministry always produces life, which changes us, conforming us to Jesus. Education produces knowledge about the Lord but provides no experience with the Lord.

No wonder the people of God remain ignorant and immature. Natural man and natural methods cannot produce spiritual fruit nor bring believers to maturity.

### 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 NASB

- (13) which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.
- (14) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

## The Equipping Ministries

Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers to His people for a reason. These functions are Jesus revealing Himself in a person as the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the shepherd and the teacher. He does this for two specific reasons.

### Ephesians 4:12 NASB

- (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

These ministries are to equip the saints and to build up the body of Christ. If these ministries are not recognized and received then the desired results are not achieved.

The expected results of the five-fold ministry given by Jesus is stated plainly in His Word.

**Ephesians 4:14 NASB**

- (14) As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Without this fullness of ministry, the people of God remain immature, unstable, tricked and deceived by men. We have developed a mind-set that is alien to the Lord's idea of Church and Body ministry. It is little wonder then that the American institutional church is so ineffective and extraneous in our society.

Part of the responsibility of the local shepherds is to evaluate, test, and receive or reject the trans-local equipping ministries. If these have a proven ministry, they should be received into the assembly as a co-elder, (1 Pet. 5:1), and a co-worker in the Kingdom of God. The people then receive the benefits of the equipping ministry while the worker is resident in the locality.

In the early charismatic movement the various Spirit filled groups were so eager to learn of the things of God that traveling ministries were received without testing and evaluation. This produced error, deception, and manipulation for offerings. Now, the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction with local group leaders not receiving anyone unless recommended by their denominational structure.

We all must learn to “discern the Lord's Body”, especially the local shepherds. How else will they recognize the trans-local equipping ministries when they visit?