

## INDIVIDUAL FUNCTION AND THE BODY

We saw in previous studies that no member can function independently but each individual member has a unique function. In other words, all members do not have the same function. All are not mouths or arms or eyes. Some members have a speaking function and some do not. In our past 1 Cor. 14:26 meetings we overlooked this fact. Our meetings encouraged every member to speak and share what God was saying to them. This works fine for a testimony but we failed to recognize that all members do not have the ministry of the word of God.

1CO 14:24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; 1CO 14:25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. 1CO 14:26 What is {the outcome} then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

All these functions have to do with speaking. In Romans 12 there is another list of gifts that differ. ROM 12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ROM 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ROM 12:6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, {let each exercise them accordingly}: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ROM 12:7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ROM 12:8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Again we see prophesy, teaching, and exhortation which are all speaking gifts or ministries. From these examples it appears that most all have a speaking part in the assembly.

Our past understanding confirmed this interpretation. However, in actual practice we saw this was not the case. Most do not have a speaking ministry. All may share what God is saying to them and all may have a word from the Lord but all do not have the ministry of the word. ACT 6:3 "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ACT 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

It would be nice if everybody in the assembly had the ministry of the word. Then we could assign each one a Sunday to preach. The simple fact is that is not the way God has constructed the body to function. Reading a psalm, giving a teaching, sharing a revelation, giving a tongue or interpreting a tongue, prophesy, or giving an exhortation are all speaking functions but are not the same as the ministry of the word. My conclusion to the problem of every member ministry function of 1 cor. 14:26 is that this scripture is a valid part of the life of the assembly and we must make a place for this to be fulfilled but it does not take the place of the ministry of the word of God.

In small group meetings this type of function is very helpful and edifying but we can all understand that when 100 people come together this type of meeting is not practical. In the past we saw that some can speak for 20 minutes and not edify the assembly. Paul makes it clear that the purpose of coming

together in assembly is for edification. The correction he was giving the Corinthians was because there was very little edification in the meetings.

Paul was not saying the every member participation meeting should be canceled but that every thing should be done for edification and what doesn't edify should be eliminated. The key phrase in 1 Cor, 14 is " Let all things be done for edification".

In the early church it appears that there were not a great number who had the ministry of the word. Today there seems to be quite a lot of people have this grace. It is evident that not all who preach have this grace. Even among those who spend several years in seminary or Bible school, not all have this grace of being able to minister the word of God. Some can repeat what they have heard but that is not the same thing.

The scriptures are not clear how or how often the ministry of the word type of meetings occurred. Probably not every Sunday but we can't be sure. Some Bible scholars think that "the prophets" were expounding the word of scripture. 1CO 14:29 And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 1CO 14:30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. We may think that prophets only gave prophesy as we know it but some believe that the ministry of the prophet was the ministry of the word. What was the norm for the Old Testament prophet was changed for the New Testament prophet. Not all would agree with that interpretation. If they were only ministering "the scriptures" why should others pass judgement. 1CO 14:39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. 1CO 14:40 But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner. Not all have the ministry of the word but all are exhorted to desire to prophesy. Whoever just ministers opinions, ministers nothing.

None of this is conclusive but whatever does not edify should not be permitted. That much is clear. Paul was obviously giving answers in this letter to questions that were asked him in a previous letter. Therefore, Paul was not presenting "the doctrine of a proper meeting" as we may think. The conclusion of this matter is " EACH MEETING MUST BE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT" and He doesn't direct every meeting the same. There are no standard meetings that can be repeated 52 weeks out of the year.

ROM 12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ROM 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. It is abundantly clear that all members do not function the same way, therefore, it is not reasonable to expect everyone to share in some speaking ministry. However, it is also clear that there are no members that do not have some function. ROM 12:12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ROM 12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ROM 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. ROM 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. There is tremendous diversity in the members of the body and each unique ministry is necessary. Most know that not all who have a speaking ministry also have the ministry of mercy or are known for their hospitality or are devoted to prayer or manifest brotherly love, yet all these are necessary.

It might be difficult for a speaking ministry, that practices beating on the people, to sit quietly while someone ministers mercy and brotherly kindness. If one ministry cuts, another ministry must heal because no one wants to go home bleeding and with bruises.

How, then, do we rise up to find our function in the body of Christ? Like everything in the Christian life there must be foundations on which to build. We may know all the doctrines about the body of Christ, yet not find our function. The church has, in many areas, been satisfied with the doctrine and not bothered with the function.

When we first come into the knowledge of salvation we are individualistic and self-conscious. God permits us to be individuals but He does not permit us to be individualistic. Those who are individualistic cannot fit into the body and support every other member. They are primarily concerned with their own goals and rewards, their own relationship with the Lord, their own personal advancement and their own ministry. They are focused upon their own function. Their own life and holiness. Some focus on personal power and gifts. Those who have some revelation of the Kingdom will tramp on anyone to attain the Kingdom.

The first thing that God must do is to deal with this "individualism". In the past we saw God blessing ministries that were just serving themselves. The church became their individual servant and the source of their prosperity. They could point out "the fruits of their labor". Everything is spotlighted on the "I", "ME", "MY". This "I" ministry cannot be "the body" ministry. The two are contradictory. Every ministry, no matter how successful, is just a very small part of what God is doing and saying. The greatest minister is just a member of the body that has received grace. His work may be acknowledged but he cannot stand alone. Whoever stands alone will fall. This has been true in every generation because it is not the principle of the body.

For this reason God must break down individualism and replace it with dependence upon the body. Some are very slow to learn and the transition is dramatic and painful. JAM 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; JAM 5:15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. The elders are representatives of the body. It may not be convenient to get the whole church together but we can call for the elders, who will represent the whole church, to pray and anoint with oil in the name of the Lord.

Why is the elders prayer more effective than the sick person's prayer? It is not a matter of more effective prayer but a matter of dependence upon the body. This may be the only deliverance for a super independent person who thinks he has it all within himself. But what purpose is the anointing with oil. Isn't this going back under the law of commandments and holding to the type rather than to the reality? The anointing of oil was a type and picture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This would be like burning incense today instead of praying.

In this past year God has directed me several times to PSA 133:1 (A Song of Ascents, of David.) Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! PSA 133:2 It is like

the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, {Even} Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. PSA 133:3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the \Lord\ commanded the blessing-- life forever. Aaron here is a picture for us of the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest. God's anointing oil is primarily poured upon the head of Jesus Christ. From there it flows down over the garments to encircle or immerse the body of our High Priest. It is within the body that the blessing of eternal life is experienced.

There may be a unique sickness that attacks those outside the blessing of the body. If a person is caught in this "sin" of independence or individualism, he is open to sickness. This sickness can be overcome by coming back into the body, under the Head, where the anointing will break the yoke. Why should this sin be treated any different than any other sin? Isn't sin handled by just trust the cleansing of the blood of Christ? 1JO 1:7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1JO 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why should we have to pray the prayer of faith and anoint with oil to receive forgiveness of sin. The sick person, by himself, should be able to believe for forgiveness and apply the blood for cleansing. The anointing with oil by the elders is not a standard way to handle sin.

Then what is the meaning of all this. Some treat this as a religious ritual like sprinkling holy water. According to this scripture, we should always see the results in deliverance. Why don't we always anoint with oil when someone is sick? Aren't we instructed to always do that? Verse 16 puts this practice into a different classification than evangelistic healing. JAM 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous ( a right standing) man can accomplish much. It appears that the sick person should confess sins to the elders and the elders should confess sins to the sick person in order to effect the healing. This may seem strange and somewhat Catholic in nature. If one member is sick, all the other members suffer with it.

If we have the right interpretation it appears that if one member is sick the whole body must take responsibility. The elders represent the whole body. The whole church must be involved in the solution. It is possible that the church didn't practice the principle of the body or practice love and acceptance and for that reason the person stepped out of fellowship and began to function individualistically. When a person gets separated from the unity of the body, he is open season for the Devil. Then why not just rebuke the Devil and call him names? Because that is effect and not cause. The solution is to call for the representatives of the body and get back into fellowship with the body and under the protection of the head. This may require us to confess the sin of our independence from the body and require the elders to confess their independence from the member. The anointing with oil brings the sick person back under the anointing and authority of the Head and into fellowship with the other members. If this interpretation is correct, it explains why much of the time the sick do not get healed through the anointing with oil. They just get oily. Not all sickness is of this kind but some most likely is. Not all sin is of this kind but some most likely is.

Why does taking the Lord's Table cause sickness? 1CO 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and

drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 1CO 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. The Lord's Table is a great blessing when all who partake are under the anointing of the Head and stand in the unity of the body. There God commands the blessing: life for evermore! However, to participate in the cup and the bread as an outsider is quite dangerous. The wolves get the sheep who are straying from the flock. The sin of independence is dangerous for a straying sheep. The shepherd can protect those within the flock as David testified about the Lion and the bear, but those outside better learn to run fast. Taking the Lord's Table while standing separate from the body is like thumbing your nose at the Devil and inviting him to do his worst.

Jesus Christ takes His body quite seriously. Anyone who attacks His church is attacking Christ, Himself. Paul got a first hand revelation of how Jesus feels about His church. ACT 9:3 And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ACT 9:4 and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ACT 9:5 And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He {said,} "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, Jesus was in heaven far removed from Paul and his attack on the church. Never the less Jesus said Paul was persecuting Him. Whoever touches a member of His body is directly touching Jesus. For good or for bad! Paul had the highest revelation of the body of Christ. This is the first mention of the principle that Jesus is one with His body, the church. Paul's revelation unfolded from this confrontation. Therefore, if we sin against a member of His body, we are sinning against the Lord Jesus Christ. This is awesome! He who hurts a member, hurts Christ.

How much we suffer and how much we lose because we don't discern the body. All who live independent from the body, live independent from the Head. It is not and never was, just me and Jesus. If we judged the body rightly, we would understand how often we have acted independent of the body. If we judged the body rightly, we would fear not being in harmony with the body because we would be at odds with the Head.

For years I have wondered why sometimes the presence of the Lord is so real and tangible and at other times it appears the Lord doesn't show up for the meeting. We may blame the song service or prayer time but the lack of unity or hostility is most likely the cause. The Lord anoints unity and manifests Himself on the basis of body. When the body is united together in unity, the authority of the Lord is manifested. We can discern it in the prayer, in the music, in the praise, in the message and in fellowship. The body means that no one is trying to function as an individual but each one is functioning on the basis of the body. Then the life of Christ is released in the prayer, in the music, in the praise, in the message and in the fellowship. We may call it the anointing but it is probably more accurately His life that is manifest.

In the past, God has surely used individuals but His plan and purpose is to use the church, which is His body. It is easier to get one man who will be motivated to do something than it is a whole church. God's desire is to get the church to move as one man. Now there is a mixed multitude with various opinions and goals all going in different directions to seek God on their own. Christ will manifest Himself when He can sit as Head on the body. Satan knows that if the church begins to function as one body his work will be destroyed. For that reason he is highly motivated to keep the church fragmented.

In the past and probably somewhere today, there are those who are experimenting with "body type" communal arrangement of living together. There seems to be valid reasons for this arrangement. However, the body of Christ is not a system of holding things in common and everyone living in the same location. We are not saying that is wrong but the body of Christ is a life and not a system or an arrangement for living together. It is possible to have a very organized system and still not have the life of Christ. The monastery system was like that in many cases. In many cases the monastery system isolated people into solitary confinement. They were not even permitted to speak with those who brought their food. The key word for understanding the New Covenant meaning of "the body" is the Greek word "Koinonia." This means fellowship, partnership, the share that each one holds, a participation, communion, and communication. It means to be one among many who partake and participate. The body means to join together with others who are also holding their portion of Christ. It is not necessarily holding "things" in common but holding Christ in common. The body is not just those who have taken a vow of poverty but those who are holding to Jesus. Many religions take a vow of poverty but only "the body" is holding to Jesus Christ, the Head. COL 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on { visions } he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, COL 2:19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

The supply from the Head flows down through the various members that are joined by joints and ligaments. Each member is supplying life to some other member. If one member is not present we feel a lack of life flowing to us from the Head. Once we get the revelation of the body, we should recognize our responsibility in helping the body receive life from the Head. No one who has the revelation of the body can say it doesn't matter if I assemble together or not because I am insignificant. No member who supplies life within the body can be insignificant. It is within the body that we experience the authority of the Head. If we are without authority it means we are separate from the body. Because of the Head, there is authority in His body. Members of the body experience both the authority of the Head and the authority of the body. As members we can't ignore the authority of the body because we would be rejecting the authority of the Head. We could call this horizontal authority and vertical authority. Both are related but function on a different basis. One is the personal authority of Christ and the other is the corporate authority of the body. The individual authority of a member is where we experience the most problems, especially if that member is lording it over others. Corporate authority is much safer than individual authority and is not as easily abused.

If we don't recognize authority how can we think we are members under authority. If we are not under His authority how will we exercise authority. The shepherding movement got into trouble when individuals set themselves up as the ultimate authority and wanted to make personal decisions for the members.

Most evangelicals know that their spiritual life is dependent upon their union with Jesus Christ. All "Life" is in Him. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son, does not have life. In Him was life and the life was the light of men. The power of eternal life rests wholly within the Lord Jesus Christ. 1JO 5:11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 1JO 5:12

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. Our power of spiritual existence rest wholly upon our union with Jesus Christ. JOH 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither {can} you, unless you abide in Me. JOH 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

If we see this "abiding life" as the life which the body has in relation to the Head, we will see why we must find our place in the body. The vine-branch union is the same as the Head-body union. Dry branches are equivalent to dry members.