

The Leader as Servant

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Our second lecture takes up exactly where the first one left off. We ended up by talking about the unity of the Body, and we continue now talking about the unity and add another word: community—unity and community in the Body of Christ.

Now I often ask classes and church groups to whom I speak: What is the greatest problem the church faces today? Is it the threat to orthodox theology by a militant liberalism? Well, that threat is always there. There is always false doctrine floating around, but evangelical churches seem to be much more troubled at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first by the immature behavior of Christians within their ranks than they are by the heresy outside their ranks.

The issues of ecclesiology form the battleground of recent decades, and our study, which attempts to describe biblical ways God's people work together in leadership, should emphasize issues of unity and community within the Body of Christ. Now I'm not apologizing, therefore, for not beginning this lecture series with some technical aspects of leaderships. There is plenty of that coming down the pike. But we want to begin with the theological and biblical groundwork of what the Church is and what the Body of Christ is, and therefore build a biblical understanding of where all of this fits together.

We have already seen that the universal Church, or the terminology "universal Church," refers to the spiritual unity of all the redeemed in all ages and places. It includes believers, Jews, Gentiles, and those in heaven and on earth. It stretches historically from the origin of the Church at Pentecost to the final day when we're in heaven with the Lord. The focal point of that unity, as Paul clearly declares in Ephesians 1, is the common redemption through the atonement of Calvary and a corporate demonstration of the grace and glory of Jesus Christ.

How can we help people better understand the Church? In recent years, philosophy of ministry has created much confusion and no little controversy. Yet, as we study the New Testament, we seem to find at least a minimal boundary of inclusion/exclusion which helps us understand church, and especially local church. I write and speak out of the context of congregational polity. That may not be your framework, and I'm certainly not arguing that one is more biblical than the other. But in that framework, I'd like to suggest that the local church is—and here is a formal definition— “a body of confessed believers joining together for worship, fellowship, instruction, and evangelism. Led in their efforts by biblical officers, elders and deacons; sovereign in polity; and including as part of its life and ministry observance of the ordinances; discipline; and mutual edification.”

My friend with whom I taught many years ago, theologian Dr. Robert Culver, enumerates six characteristics of a local church: spiritual vitality, doctrinal instruction, fellowship, observance of the Lord's Supper, prayer, and Christian testimony. The popular apologist, Francis Schaeffer, indicated in one of his works eight ingredients which must be a part of the polity of “the church as church,” to use his words. And here are his eight: (1) local congregations made up of Christians, (2) special meetings on the first day of the week, (3) church officers—and he lists only elders—who have responsibility for the local churches, (4) deacons responsible for the community of the church in the area of material things, (5) a serious view of discipline, (6) specific qualifications for elders and deacons, (7) a place for form on a wider basis than local church—by which, of course, he means denomination, and (8) the observance of two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Now that's a very interesting work and a very interesting list. You may want to follow through on that book. One of my favorite books of Francis Schaeffer, by the way, is *The Church at the End of the 20th Century*. You'll find that list in that book.

I can fill hundreds of hours on these tapes with various views, as well as biblical exposition, of the nature of the universal and local church; but that's really not our primary purpose in this study. Our concern is to understand the validity and essentiality of the local church as a visible, contemporaneous demonstration of the universal Church and the primary importance of the unity and community that it must maintain in its interpersonal relations.

One theological concept closely aligned here is the universal priesthood of believers. Actually, there are only five passages in two

Books of the New Testament which refer directly to the priesthood of believers, but they're very important passages. I Peter 2:5, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." I Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." The other references—I won't read each one—you need to check them out however. In Revelation 1:5b and 6; in Revelation 5:9-10; and in Revelation 20:6.

One writer draws from these Scriptures five principles which speak to the relationship of believers in community as they seek to worship and serve God together. He says the priesthood of the believer must be held in healthy tension with other concepts. It is not an absolute. Secondly, the believer can delegate some of the authority of his life and ministry to other believers. And, boy, are we going to talk about that in this series! Third, the priesthood of the believers is conditioned by the gifts and roles in the life of the fellowship. Fourth, the priesthood of the believer implies shared responsibility and ministry, as well as shared authority. Fifth, the priesthood of the believer is the basis for decision making in the Church, which is a very interesting observation. I am quoting Ernest White in an article, "Applying the Priesthood of the Believer to the Life and Work of a Church," which appeared in *Search Magazine* some years ago.

Team leadership, commitment to shared responsibility and authority, depends on a proper understanding of what it means to be the Church. It emphasizes again the truth of being "laborers together," not only with God but also with each other. The big passage is I Corinthians 12, but Romans 12 is important, too. On every hand today we heard about Body Life and Body Truth and the exercise of spiritual gifts within the Body, and I applaud that emphasis. This is healthy; this will help us look again at the primitive notions—primitive in the sense of being authentic—which the early church had of itself and at the cardinal principles which governed its life and ministry in the first century.

Scholars expect that Paul probably wrote the I Corinthian epistle from Ephesus about AD 57. Corinth was a metropolis of the Roman province of Achaia, a great commercial center in the Mediterranean world. Paul visited the city twice. He found it living up to its reputation as a center of sin and depravity. Corinth presented an enormous challenge to the Gospel. One

could reasonably expect the principles of Christian faith to operate at Jerusalem, where the members of the early church had been schooled for years in Old Testament theology. To motivate that kind of behavior and that value system in pagan Corinth, however, presented very unique challenges. Deplorable factions had split the Corinthian church into hostile fragments. Some believers claimed to follow Paul, others Apollos, others Peter. Some claimed such a pharisaical piety they wished to bypass all human leaders and refer directly back to the Lord. So Paul deals with a number of the problems resulting from the schism which drained both unity and community at Corinth.

In chapter twelve he comes to an explanation of the nature and use of spiritual gifts. Interestingly, the bulk of the chapter does not deal with specification of gifts, but rather with the kind of people who will be ministering those gifts. Let's not forget that. The words of the old hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" well depict the intent of I Corinthians 12, at least the words that say, "We are not divided, all one body we. One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

If you think this is going to be a one-guitar song throughout this whole series, you're right. I am going to come back and back and back and back to the unity of the Church. In my opinion, a local congregation that has not solved the problem of spiritual maturity and unity has no business even monkeying with evangelism or building programs. There is no purpose for building a new building, and there is no purpose for inviting people to a congregation that is fighting among itself. The Scriptures are just absolutely clear on this.

Well, what about this "Body" metaphor? Typically, Paul used common illustrations to explain difficult spiritual truths. I Corinthians 12 demonstrates in detail how the unity of a physical body offers a model for the kind of unity that ought to radiate from Christ's spiritual body. In verse thirteen, the apostle points out that the baptismal ministry of the Holy Spirit places people into the universal Body of Christ, the Church. Most evangelical scholars agree that the treatment of baptism in that context is less likely a reference to the ritual of water baptism than of the spiritual implantation into the Body. We should always remember that symbolic acts exist only to emphasize spiritual realities.

So what comes through in the essence of that wonderful chapter, I Corinthians 12, is the old philosophical principle: The whole is

greater than the sum of its parts. Diversity of parts characterizes the operating body—human or spiritual, physical or spiritual—but unity and community of the members allow the body to function properly. Paul draws the argument to ridiculous extremes to make his point. “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?” What kind of a functioning organism would one’s body be if it were composed of nothing but one giant eye, or perhaps one giant ear and no nose? Apparently autocratic leaders were already manifesting their power in the early church. People whose strong personalities overwhelm the Body of Christ and dominate its life and ministry have plagued the Church from the first century until now. Such overpowering control by any one member—pastor, deacon, elder, regardless of title—such overpowering control by any one person, in my view, shows an inaccurate concept of the Church and certainly a failure to understand team leadership. That’s going to be another string on that guitar or banjo that we’ll be playing with regularity.

So after he focuses our attention on the functions of the physical body, Paul nails down the argument for which he really intends this section of the epistle to radiate. God has a place for everyone in the Church, and everyone’s place is important. Remember the context of the passage. It’s the use of spiritual gifts. Every Christian has a spiritual gift, and some may have more than one. Just as all members have spiritual gifts, all members have distinct functions. God gifts people to carry on the work of the Church and then places them in the Body for a particular purpose of ministry. Not only that, but He does that in His own divine sovereignty, just as He arranged the organs of the physical body to create the best possible working relationship. Only when all members of the physical body do their tasks does that body function properly, and the same is true of the Church.

What about the broken body? What happens then? Well, ministry unity and community break down when some fail to exercise their gifts, or take their roles in the body, or when certain members are considered to be weaker or stronger or more necessary or less necessary or, God forbid, indispensable! Mutual care in the Body can eliminate discord, but a ruptured organ could destroy the entire system. An oversized gland creates abnormality, and the entire organization, or organism, suffers desperately.

In verse twenty-six, Paul points out that the unity of the Body is most apparent during a time of pain or suffering. A broken

leg sends splinters of pain throughout the entire system. Even a common cold, let alone flu, can produce at the same time a runny nose, red and tired eyes, an earache, an aching head, a sore throat, an upset stomach. You want to die! And there's just general discomfort all through the whole body. In the same way, the Church works that way. All members of the spiritual Body share the suffering and unhappiness of each other. Since a unified Body enjoys community when one of its members feels well or receives some particular benefits, the Body rejoices in its entirety. Paul once wrote "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep," Romans 12:15. So the crucial application comes in verse twenty-seven of our chapter: "Now you are Christ's body and individually members of it." Note the emphasis on the word *you*. Even this fractured Corinthian church, with all its doctrinal confusion and personal bickering, could demonstrate to the world the Body of Christ. Now the bookends of this passage—twelve through twenty-seven, basically, is the passage—the bookends fit the classic Pauline logic. Verse twelve: "For even as the body is one," and verse twenty-seven: "Now you are Christ's body."

Alan Redpath suggests that the kind of unity which Paul describes in this chapter is only possible "as we recognize that within the Church we have fellowship in our diversity, as we learn to love and to care for our brethren who are different, always recognizing the utter futility of identity." Francis Schaeffer wrote often about community. He emphasized that horizontal relationship can only follow vertical relationship, because a Christian community can only be made up of individual Christians. Let me dip again into *The Church at the End of the 20th Century*. Schaeffer writes:

Therefore, as we meet in our groups, we know who we are. We're not like those who march in our streets and do not know who they are, who call for community but have no basis for community beyond biological continuity. Now we are ready to begin real personal living, to practice the orthodox of community corporately as community. Real personal Christian living individually and corporately as a community that rests upon the individual's and the community's personal relationship with a personal God gives us the possibility of Christian community before the eye of an observing world.

Well, what about implementation? It would be delightful to spend the rest of the chapter and the rest of our time together and the rest of our tape and the rest of our lecture continuing the discussion

of the biblical nature of the “communitied” church. But this study deals with team leadership. Up to this point, I’ve tried to draw some biblical implications regarding the relationships we must maintain if leadership teams are to work together effectively in the Church or in other Christian organizations. Now let me deal briefly with four concepts which help form a pattern of ministry based certainly not on specific verses of I Corinthians 12, but at least upon the general concept of the Church as a unified Body.

The first is a focus on people-centered ministry. In one sense we could say that the Church should be the most person-centered organization in the world, but the Church must also be God-centered before it can be person-centered. So finding the proper balance between these two very important ingredients of biblical life has proven too great a responsibility for some congregations. What do they do? They slip from the path, either to the left—which would be an overemphasis on human relationships to the neglect of God’s sovereignty; or to the right—a greater concern for souls than for people. Christian love always finds its outworking within the context of relationships. Yet precisely at this point so many Christian leaders go sour. Our problems testify not so much to our inability to perform publicly, as to our inability to get along with people in interpersonal relationships. The church is, and always has been, people and service in it; at any given time this requires necessary relationships with these people. Adequate leadership requires awareness of and sensitivity to human needs all around us, as well as an appreciation of how we can meet those needs through the supernatural dynamics of God’s truth and God’s Spirit.

Let’s take an example. Here’s a pastor who finds self-satisfaction and fulfillment amid the books in his study where he spends all his time. Although his theology may be orthodox and his sermons very scholarly, the dimension of reality could very well be missing from his ministry. His lifeline to meaningful ministry demands constant contact with people so that he can learn to relate God’s truth to real problems in real lives. Our Lord’s ministry always centered on people. He focused on meeting their spiritual and eternal needs, but that priority didn’t keep Him from showing interest in temporal and physical needs as well. So if the various bodily parts—to get back to our language of I Corinthians 12—are to function together properly, it will be because we have discovered and implemented a new-covenant view of interpersonal relations.

There is also here the gift of leading in conjunction with the spiritual gift of administration—*kubernesis*. There is also a gift of leadership, which appears in Romans 12:8, where Paul uses the word *pro histemi*. Let me tell you that it also appears in I Thessalonians 5:12, in I Timothy 3:4 and 12; and in I Timothy 5:17; as well as Titus 3:8 and 14. The word literally means to “put before or to go before.” Originally, some years ago, I had the wonderment of whether *kubernesis* and *pro histemi* represented two different gifts or two dimensions of the same gift—some kind of congregational leadership. But I conclude now that as closely as these ideas are linked, we probably must recognize two different gifts, both essential to effective ministry, though not necessarily both held by the same person.

In spite of popular emphasis on prestige and publicity, the New Testament concept of leadership emphasizes service. Those who utilize the gift of leadership or administration must exemplify service and unity as models for the Body. Somehow we must balance between delegated authority and loving concern, and that balance must be our constant quest in biblical leadership.

A writer by the name of D. Swan Haworth identifies three interesting concepts of staff relationships. He says, first of all, a loosely organized staff can exist with several soloists but no director, no regular rehearsals, and consequently very little harmony. He argues that people on such a staff relate to each other only by necessity. A second type of staff is an integrated staff held together by one “commander”—his word. A third and, of course, one that I think is the only biblical model, is a colleague relationship in which each staff member trusts the others, despite their differences. This colleague relationship, says Haworth, requires each member of the team to be a responsible person. Relationships of the professional staff stand as a model for any Christian ministry. Confusion and bickering at the top will not only destroy the working effectiveness of the management team, but will filter down the ranks to distort interpersonal relations between other workers and among other workers, all the way up and down the line.

A third issue here is the requirement of a biblical lifestyle. The Christian leader’s behavior toward other people is determined by inner qualities. To put it another way, interpersonal relations on a horizontal plain arise from interpersonal relations with God on a vertical plain. We face so many people problems in the Church because we have somehow confused ourselves into thinking that

what we *do* for God is more important than what we *are* before God. But a distinctly Christian lifestyle with shared ministries in a communal setting requires the grace of mutual acceptance. It requires a willingness to enter into mutual burden bearing and certainly a generous dose of active love, a subject on which the Bible is hardly silent. Understanding one's fellow leaders involves seeing and knowing them as persons, not just other employees.

Paul Tournier, a Swiss psychiatrist, points out two great fears which keep people from understanding each other: fear of being judged and fear of being advised. Harsh criticism and flippant answers to troubling problems are apparently two clubs which can bludgeon human relations to death. For example, some adults have no ministry with teenagers because they greet every attempt at communication with something like *Oh yeah, I used to feel like that, and you'll get over it*. But remember the immorality of manipulation is not confined to Madison Avenue. It's just as wrong for Christian leaders as for the advertising executive who designs television commercials geared to trick people into buying what they do not need and cannot afford. In our pressure-cooker society, we find it difficult to grasp and practice the biblical concept of patience. We tend to be obsessive and compulsive about our behavior, particularly leaders; and frequently we come on too strong in relationships with other people. One writer, by the name of Hudson, put it this way in just one very poignant sentence. "Impatience is a heresy of the soul and an apostasy of the disposition."

Francis Schaeffer calls unity in love the mark of the Christian, and he refers to that unity as "the final apologetic." I love that phraseology. When you're all finished with everything else, when you've used up all your arguments and all your systematic theology and everything you can possibly say, and you've pointed to a thousand Scripture references that ought to convince anybody of anything, and nothing has worked, try love, the "final apologetic." Schaeffer points out that "the world cares nothing for doctrine but has been given the authority to judge the effectiveness and authenticity of the Church on the evidence of a loving lifestyle among members of its community."

We have to also understand interpersonal encounter. In one sense, we can think of the whole social order as a communications framework if unity and community are to be realized. A third concept of communication—a term obviously related to the first two—must function properly. Communication can be verbal or

nonverbal and should not be confused with the information theory of hardware and software systems. Some sociologists remind us that no one person can be held responsible for communication. It's always a mutual process. The word "mutuality" becomes very important, then, in recognizing the interrelated nature of communication. And another term that the sociologists like a lot is *simultaneity*. Communication is not like a ping pong game in which messages are batted back and forth. Rather, the ongoing relationship between communicating people forms a simultaneous process. People who would effectively relate to other people recognize that both what they say and what they hear all pass through an emotional and cultural grid.

Think about a Sunday School superintendent speaking to one of the teachers. The meaning of her words is not so much inherent in what she says as in the way the teacher interprets them. These two people are simultaneously active in the communication process, therefore mutually responsible for what happens in their dialogue. They sort of load up little trucks called words with cargo called ideas and send them on their way, and at the same time each unloads the trucks and reloads the trucks with their own cargo.

Sociology assumes that human beings develop their human abilities through social interaction, and the community—church, school, whatever—provides the context for an analysis of relationships. We might also add that it provides the context for believers to function as the Body of Christ in keeping with the kind of patterns delineated in I Corinthians 12 and similar passages in the New Testament. We are certainly not passive recipients of everything sociology and psychology tell us about human relationships, but we must be astute discerners of truth and willing to integrate information which fits our understanding of the special revelation of God's Word.

Let me end this lecture sort of where it began—with the Church. Surely any recognition of relationship styles must stand under a proper delineation of the Lordship of Christ. Friend and former colleague, Walter Liefeld, has put it this way:

A local church functions as a Body of disciples devoted to their Lord and transmitting His teaching. The Church remembers the past insofar as it reminds itself and the world of its origin in the death and resurrection of Christ. And it faces the future as an eschatological community in

which the characteristics of the Kingdom and the presence of the King are realized in its daily life.

Now we want to go on from here to develop this concept more fully in lectures three and four. I'm going to stay with the theological theme, but before you go on to lecture three, it is important for you to read a document that appears in your syllabus entitled "Biblical Theology of Leadership," or something very much like that. I don't have it in my hand, but you can't miss it. It's a study of Old and New Testament texts on the concepts of leadership, and it will really form the theological base for the whole book. So that document, plus the first four lectures, will form the spiritual, the theological, the biblical base for everything else that we want to talk about. There's really no point in talking about a distinctive kind of Christian leadership or Christian view and practice of administration unless we can derive it from the text of the Scripture and base it on passages like I Corinthians 12 and understanding of spiritual gifts and the very important dimensions that the Bible offers us in all of these various aspects. And so that's what we'll do, and that's the kind of pattern you can expect in the lectures ahead.