

The Christian Connection

by Peter John Schrock

Individuality

There are teachings within the body of Christ that the independence of its individual members is bad or at least something to be avoided. This teaching is that Christians should be dependent on each other. If someone is going to make a decision about something then they need to be dependent on the saints to discern the proper choice. If they merely come to a conclusion by themselves, they are being independent and falling short of the ideal/best. If someone is seeking to be the best they can be, under this teaching they are not free to make decision between them and God. As a result, this emphasis on dependence not only affects one's feeling of freedom to be different, but also begins to hit at the core of someone's individuality and can even inadvertently breakdown one's true connection to the body.

An individual is someone who possesses distinct characteristics from others. They are not merely part of a whole, they are something in and of themselves. Take for example a hand and a foot. They are two individual parts of a body. A hand can function independent of the foot. For instance, while someone's feet are resting from a long walk, the hand can spend time writing a letter to a friend. The feet are part of the same body as the hand, but they don't always work together. It merely depends on what the direction from the head of the body is instructing. The hand does not need to be in constant consultation with the foot in order to function properly together. Rather both the hand and the foot must be constant consultation with the head. When this occurs the two parts function seamlessly together with the same heart and goals. A hand and a foot's connection to each other is not as important as their individual connection to the head. In the case of a lame man, the fact that he

has a strong physical connection with both his hands to his feet, makes very little difference. For his feet are not properly connected to the head and so they are absolutely useless to the hands as well.

Members of the Body

Paul uses the analogy of the body to describe how the assembly of saints is supposed to function in 1 Corinthians 12. He starts off by describing that there is only one spirit that empowers and directs the different part of His body. Next he goes on to explain that each individual part of the body has a role in the scheme of the whole. He even states that these parts have need for one another. Nevertheless, what is that need?

The Body has need to be trained and equipped to function properly, healed when damaged, coordinated and administrated, and able to help others outside itself. God gives individuals the ability to function in these roles (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), yet this does not make the body self sufficient (the body needs more than what the parts are capable of supplying). Though each of the individuals are able to supply the body with specific needs, the individuals themselves are supplying those specific needs from what they received from the Spirit. Since there is no part of the body that supplies the Spirit, but rather the Spirit is supplied from God (John 15:26), the body itself is incapable of being self sufficient. In other words, the body cannot get everything it needs from other individuals in the body. For the individuals are not connected to God through the body, but rather it is the individuals connection to God that makes them part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Therefore, each individual must be independently receiving from God.

The Body needs its parts, but in some sense, is not

dependent on these parts. Rather, the body's primary dependence is on God to make each part able to benefit others. For example, the body cannot rely on itself to receive direction and discernment. This must come from individuals inside the body directly obtaining it from God (James 1:5). Now, this is not to say that this wisdom may be given to one person for another seeking counsel; however, the wisdom must come from God and not from a bunch of individuals trying to come to some consensus of opinion. The body needs individuals that are connected to the head and can bring forth something from God. It also requires that those seeking counsel are properly connected to God so that they know what wisdom is coming from above (Romans 12:1-2). Because each member needs others members to be connected with God, the true dependence is not on one another, but on God.

Ultimately, the parts of the body are in place to help the members maintain and develop their individual/independent connections with God. In addition, these members also strive to help others become connected with God. It is to these ends that each member must labor. If each member remains properly in tune with God they will properly function in unity the way that God intended.

Spiritual Unity

True Spiritual unity cannot be achieved horizontally between individuals by intertwining lifestyles together. This can only produce close natural human relationships. The body of Christ is not connected together like other groups of people through personal or impersonal interactions. Rather it is connected together through each person being indwelt by the Spirit of God. When people are not connected well to the Spirit of God, individuals will not be very united. Nevertheless, when a group of people are properly connected with God, there will be unparalleled unity. What does this unparalleled unity look like?

It is not defined by a bunch of people who know each other really well, enjoy daily hanging out, and are transparent with each other. Certainly, there are records of believers walking this way in the Bible and the Bible does encourage these behaviors to some degree. Nevertheless, it does not call this spiritual unity. Two primary sections

of scripture that refer to this unity are John chapter seventeen and Ephesians chapter two through four. In John chapter seventeen, Jesus talks about people being one as He is one with the Father and then He parallels the statement with "I in them and You in Me" (vs. 23). Therefore, Christians are united together through having Christ and likewise the Father IN themselves. Earlier in John fourteen verse ten, Jesus describes what it meant for Him to be "in" the Father: "the words you hear are not my own, rather it is the Father living in me doing His work." So the picture that Jesus describes is that His oneness with the Father means that he looks, acts, and responds as an exact representation of the Father. Therefore, when God's people are completely one like He is one with Jesus, they walk together as perfect representations of God on earth. Such a degree of unity can only be achieved to the level of intimacy that each member of the body possess with God.

In Ephesians chapter two through chapter four, it not only mentions this unity of the Spirit, but also explains a little more about how it comes about: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18-22). This passage emphasizes that believers are being joined and built together IN Christ Jesus. Jesus himself is the glue and mortar that spiritually unites saints together, not horizontal interactions between people. The tighter the bond one has to Jesus, the stronger the connection one will spiritually have to others connected to Jesus. This same point is further brought out in chapter four: "...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). It is Christ that unites and it is Christ who supplies the love which is capable of building up the body. All in all, it is each individual's connection and personal relationship with Jesus which determines the level of unity among the

whole body.

God's unity among saints does not destroy individuality, diversity, or independent operations (1 Corinthians 12:27). For God's unity is not defined by saints sharing the same life activities or personal preferences, but rather the common sharing of their personal relationships with God (1 John 1:3-7). This means that people from two totally different cultures can be just as united as those who live in the same neighborhood. Paul speaks of such a reality in Ephesians chapter two when referring to the union of the Jews and the Gentiles through Christ. These two, very different groups, are described as being "one" in God's eyes (vs. 16). Therefore our primary view of spiritual unity must not be defined by the depth of our relationships with other saints, but based upon what makes God see people as one (i.e. their union with Jesus).

When a local group begins to define the body of Christ by their personal relationships with one another, unity can become merely a form of devoted comradeship. This loyalty to one another can be centered on anything from doctrines to lifestyle practices and even close friendships. All are weak foundations for building the body of Christ. For this unity is not primarily derived from a mutual upward connection to Jesus, but on the parallel plain of daily life. Therefore Paul says, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Those who build on the foundation of having close relationships or common doctrines have lost the preeminence of Jesus within their assembly and are building on wood, hay, and stubble.

Properly Joined Together

If individuals within the body are properly seeking to inspire faith, hope, and love in others as they walk in the Spirit, there will be a natural outgrowth of spiritual fruit among their midst (Hebrew 3:12-13, 2 Peter 1:5-10). This is not to say that people need to attempt to act religious or spiritual when interacting with other saints. Rather, they are simply to live up to the level which they have attained as an empowered people, overflowing with rivers of living water from the God of the Universe. As people walk in the Spirit, God will knit hearts, minds, and groups of people together as He sees best.

In various locations and cultural settings, the practical manifestation of how God's people function in their

assembly will appear in several different forms. In one group there may be a clergy laity system, in another, there may be group of friends with very little structure, and in another still, there may be something totally different. God can join people together in whatever form He sees best. The unity and spirituality of the group is not determined by the form. It is determined by each member's connection and unity with Jesus. When people are properly united with Christ, they become just like Him, possessing the same faith, hope, and love that He walked in while on the earth (Romans 6:5-7). Carnality and division are simply qualities of those who are deficient in the connection with God (Galatians 5:19-21).

In trying to correct carnality and division, people have tried to create several different forms. In order to eliminate chaos, people have formed structure and leadership. On the other hand, in order to prevent the tyranny of certain leaders, other groups have eliminated most forms of church oversight. Still other assemblies desiring to eliminate a lack of depth and reality in their midst have created forms about daily lifestyles and what Christian relationship are supposed to look like. Each of these groups can open up the bible and point to scripture to support their form. The reason for this is that the bible is not clear that there ever was supposed to be a specific form of assembly that every group was to conform to.

The devil has so greatly deceived people into believing that difference in form is the solution to their lack of faith, hope, and love that denominationalism and division have reigned since the time of the Reformation. This terrible smoke screen has blinded the eyes of God's people from their own personal lack of true unity with Christ and has turned Christians against each other for centuries. Oh when will God's people wake up and realize that their problems originate from their own deficiencies in spirituality! It is not until each individual dies to themselves and is united with Christ that they will find real unity among God's people (John 17:21).

If there is a problem with a lack of unity and independence among God's people, it does not come from them having the wrong form of church. It is because each individual needs to be dependently connected to Jesus. Only when the emphasis is on a personal connection with Christ and not forms or doctrines, will saints truly find freedom to walk among God's people as one.