The Body of Christ — What It Is, and What Acts 1 Is Not

Ministry · September 7, 2008

No Neck — The Head Is Inviolable

First Corinthians 12:13–20 lists the members that God has set in the body of Christ: foot, hand, ear, eye, and by implication in verse 17, nose. What it does not mention is a neck. There is no neck in the body of Christ, and the reason is significant. A neck turns the head. It can manipulate the head, redirecting where the head looks and what the head does. But the Lord Jesus Christ, our head, is at God's right hand in heaven. He is not manipulable. He cannot be turned from His own thoughts and His own purpose. That is among the very first principles of the body of Christ — that the Lord Jesus is the head, that this belongs to His honour, that He is worthy of it, and that the members of His body should not attempt to take from Him what is properly His own doing as head.

The members have each their function, given by God and appropriate to them. The foot does not serve well as a hand. It does a poor job of the hand's work, and meanwhile the hand has nothing to do. God has set every member in the body as it has pleased Him, and the right response is not to covet another member's function but to ask the Lord — who delights to answer prayer — for whatever gifts are still needed. He has pastors, evangelists, and teachers under His control, and if we desire them, we are to ask.

Acts 1 — Many Things That Look Like the Assembly, and Are Not

The body of Christ came into existence in Acts 2, when God the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost and baptized a company of individual people

into one body. Acts 1 describes the days before that happened. And those days contain a remarkable series of things that can look like the oneness of the body of Christ but are not.

In chapter 1, the Lord was assembled together with the disciples — assembled in the sense of gathering, of bringing in a harvest. That was precious and wonderful. He was risen, He was speaking of the kingdom of God, they were there with Him. But the gathering power in the assembly of God is the Holy Spirit, and He had not yet come. The disciples were come together — that is, they came voluntarily, by their own energy, under their own initiative. Being gathered together is different. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them — gathered, passive voice, by a power outside themselves. That had not yet happened.

The disciples all looked steadfastly toward heaven as the Lord went up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. They all had the same focal point. Their souls were fixed on the same object. That is a beautiful thing and one of the features of true unity — having the same thing before us, the same interest, the same object. But it was not yet the oneness of the body of Christ. That was not until chapter 2.

> *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? — Acts 1:6*

One Accord, Same Address, Same Relatives — Still Not the Body

Acts 1:14 says they all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. Accord means agreement. There is more oneness in agreement than in sharing an address, and yet that too is not what makes the body of Christ what it is. They were all in the upper room — living at the same address. Uniformity in address is not the oneness of the body. They were together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren — natural family ties of great affection. Family

bonds are not the oneness of the body. They were all praying together — doing the same thing at the same time. Prayer in common is not the oneness of the body.

Verse 15 records that Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples. In Matthew 18:20, where two or three are gathered together in His name, there am I in the midst of them. The person in the midst of the true assembly is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In Acts 1 the person in the midst was Peter. And good as Peter is, and precious as his epistles are as the word of God, he is not the Lord. The number of names together was 120. Being numbered together does not make the assembly. Judas had been numbered with the twelve and had obtained part of the ministry. Neither counting nor ministry constitutes the body of Christ.

Acts 1 is not against any of these things — the common vision, the prayer, the accord, the fellowship, the concern for the Lord's purposes. They are all good and right. But the essential character of the body of Christ is this: the Lord Jesus Christ is the head, in heaven, because He is worthy of it. The headquarters of the body of Christ is where the head is, and He is up there. Every voluntary association, conference, union, collective, or ecumenical gathering that has its headquarters down here is not the body of Christ, however much it may have of the other things. By one Spirit have we all been baptised into one body — that is the one that counts, and it happened in Acts 2.

—