

By Jay Wegter

But God has put his Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure (real edification takes place when we see the gospel believed by our brethren—Romans 1:11-12.).

The church of Jesus Christ is a supernatural, Spirit-indwelt, Spirit-empowered, living community of Christ-like servants who minister Christ's love and care for one another (1 Cor 12:7; 1 Pet 4:10). The same Spirit who grants life in Christ in common and links us together, also empowers and enables every believer.

Ministry is the sacred privilege and duty of every member in the body. All the members are to perform a vital function; caring, building up, ministering to one another. With each member functioning as God intended, the body/community of believers will grow and an amazing interplay of gifts and services will result.

The church as a family/community captures the fact that only the most intimate human relationships could express the love, closeness, privileges, and new relationships that exist between Christ and the members of His body (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 15-17).

Our identity as Christians is defined by the gospel and the community. Often we do not do truth well because we neglect community (intentional body life). The number one reason truth is not applied and lived out, is because people are not sharing their lives for the purpose of mutual edification (Chester, *Total Church*, pp. 16-17).

My being in Christ means being in Christ with those who are also in Christ (shared life). This is my identity, this is our identity—our identity is lived out in our relationships. To fail to live out our corporate identity in Christ (living as real members of one another) is analogous to an act of spiritual adultery. The loyalties of a new community supersede even the loyalties of DNA (Matt 10:34-37) (Chester, Timmis, pp. 40-41).

The body of Christ is the context for transformation; it is where equipping, nurture, and edification are to take place. Sanctification and disciple-making are 'group efforts' within the body.

Truth cannot be taught effectively outside of close relationships. The truth of the gospel becomes compelling as we see it transforming lives in the routine of daily messy

relationships. ‘Life on life’ discipleship means shared life public and private--this is essential to holistic discipleship. Body life exists to fulfill the Great Commission. The Christian community is the context in which commitment to obedience is nurtured and maintained.

The main business of body life/assembly life is the equipping and edification of believers. Body life exists to nurture disciples. When mutual ministry becomes central to the life of the body, the results are: unity, maturity, stability, and growth (Eph 4:13-15). Maturity is a mutual process in the body of Christ achieved by interdependent ministry of body life; that is Christ’s pattern, or ‘blueprint’ for His body (1 Cor 12; Eph 4).

The fellowship of the members of the body exists to nurture disciples. Care is the catalyst for a congregation’s spiritual growth. The church’s spiritual growth catalyst is soul care. Body life is expressed through the mutual edification of the members of the body. That is *koinonia*. Thus, the fellowship of the church exists to know each other closely enough to edify, build up, bear burdens; confess faults; rebuke; exhort; admonish; teach, minister (Col 1:28-29). Care catalyzes the church so that a caring church becomes a healthy church (1 Cor 13—a better road, ‘hodos’) (Stone, *The Caring Church*, p. 74).

Jesus defines mission as a process of discipleship. In the Great Commission He establishes the necessity and means of universal discipleship. In the family of God, I am able to care and be cared for, love and be loved, forgive and be forgiven, admonish and be admonished, encourage and be encouraged – all of which are essential to being a disciple of the risen Lord (Chester, Timmis, p. 112).

The believer has been equipped by Christ through regeneration and the indwelling Spirit to be a blessing to others. In that sense, none of our reception of spiritual benefits from the Lord makes us an ‘end user’—we are called by God to be a blessing to others. We love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). We are to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly so that we might prayerfully speak the Word of God to our brethren. This should be increasingly natural for the Christian, so that it does not involve courage or risk. A huge part of embracing the biblical perspective is for each believer to see himself as truly ‘an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer’. *We are commanded to think about and consider ways to stimulate our brethren to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25).* There is intentionality here; premeditation, planning. Our encouragement of our brethren ought to be the overflow of our devotional life and fellowship with the Lord (Wegter, “Summary of Disciple-making).

The Great Commission is about obedience-based discipleship.

Why must the members of the Body of Christ ‘excel’ at admonishment? Spiritual, mutual care involves constantly exposing the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is deceitful, that’s why it never presents itself as sin. It creeps up on us camouflaged and reasonable—disguised as fulfillment. Often we are the last to notice its deceit. But, others can and often do. That is why being part of a gospel community is so vital. So much of church ministry, especially counseling

is not preventative, but reactionary (Chester, Timmis, p. 151).

Perhaps the greatest weakness in the body of Christ today is that we have relinquished and surrendered our responsibility to discipline (admonish) one another (Prov. 9:8). Pop psychology's mantra, "I'm ok, you're ok" has eaten up all of our courage to admonish one another. That makes for very unhealthy churches, for the Apostle Paul establishes that ongoing mutual admonishment is a mark of a healthy church body (Rom 15:14) (Hendrichsen, *Disciples are Made not Born*, p. 74).

We must take Christ's command very seriously: "Teaching them to observe/obey." The hermeneutics of community is closely related to the hermeneutics of obedience. There is a close connection between understanding the Bible and obeying the Bible, between knowledge and discipleship. The readiness to obey Christ's words is the pre-requisite to understanding them (Chester, p. 161).