

# Elevator Ecclesiology Speech

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**Checking for the ‘heartbeat’ of a truly biblical ecclesiology is aided by asking the following questions. 1)** Do you believe that Holy Scripture provides a clear pattern of ecclesiology? **2)** If you answered ‘doubtful’, do you then assume that church leaders may structure the church, or craft an ecclesiology as pragmatically as they see fit? **3)** Do you believe that a truly biblical ecclesiology is to manifest the Lord Jesus Christ as the true ‘Shepherd’ of His church since He bought it, builds it, protects it, sustains its life, owns it, disciplines it, and rules it? **4)** Do you believe that a truly biblical ecclesiology ought to communicate Christ’s relationship to His church? **5)** In other words, do you believe that the N.T. model for ecclesiology is indeed intended to manifest Christ’s relationship to His church by the way we do church?

**It’s incredibly easy to allow a local church to become a Christianized YMCA. Why does that happen?** The answer is that in objectifying the local assembly as a value in itself (as opposed to branches living by union with Christ, the vine), the church is perceived as a helpful institution which exists to perpetuate itself. What is missing from that truncated perception are the ‘big picture’ biblical themes of: **1)** the church is the bride of Christ, and is being prepared for her Lord (Eph 5:22-32), and, **2)** the church by her unity is a witness to the world that God has truly sent His Son (Jn 17:20-21), and, **3)** the church possessing the virtues of Christ is the major ‘teaching device’ to communicate to angels the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:8-12).

**By virtue of her union with Christ, the church experiences fellowship with the Triune God (1 Jn 1:1-6), and fellowship with one another.** The union intended by the possession of life in Christ in common (*koinonia*) is a supernatural unity. Members truly are members of one another by virtue of their union with Christ (Eph 4:25). No human institution, no matter how hospitable or how coercive the rules of conformity can generate supernatural community and unity. For reconciliation by union with Christ has created a new humanity. This is the paradigm and glorious purpose of supernatural unity and community is central in biblical ecclesiology.

**Ecclesiology is inseparable from the corporate life of the body.** While we know that because our union with Christ is to be lived out corporately in what is known as a ‘body life’. But it is at this juncture that churchmen opt instead for a knee-jerk heretical ecclesiology, claiming ‘*it is practical and works best, and it is the way we have always done it, and it is the accepted model of successful churches.*’

**Body life is the core value of a biblical ecclesiology. For each member has been gifted by the Spirit of Christ to do his or her part for the 'common good' (1 Cor 12:7).** Thus, just as the human body operates in health and vigor for the reason of the organic union of its parts, so also the members of Christ's church each contribute what is needed for the effective function of the church. The body of Christ operates in a glorious unity borne of the interdependency of its members exercising their gifts in a Spirit-enabled complementarity. Don't miss this! The supernatural unity is due to the mutuality of the members forming and nurturing close relationships for the purpose of edification—thus always strengthening and celebrating the unity of the body.

**But what is crucial to this other-worldly unity is that Christ, by His indwelling Spirit, is energizing and animating the spiritual gifts He has sovereignly given (1 Cor 12:11-14).** How we need to grasp that our commitment to body life is part and parcel of Christ's lordship over His church. For certainly He intends that the gifts He has sovereignly chosen to give are to be exercised in His power that the church may fulfill its biblical function. Thus, out of union with Him believers steward their gifts which He has given—a stewardship which is how we steward the manifold grace of God (1 Pet 4:10).

**In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 Paul is correcting a disorder traceable to human wisdom, in which visible verbal gifts, signs, and wonders were considered the badge of spirituality, while the 'lesser gifts' of helps, meekness, and discernment, evangelism, etcetera were given a backseat as if unessential.** Do we not see a version of this same Corinthian error in our churches in that Sunday morning has become an event attended by spectators gathered to watch a performance? Paul also corrects a distorted ecclesiology in his epistle to the Colossians. For members were drawn to spiritualism, visions, experientialism, Essene legalism, and veneration of angels. In our Western culture we may not regard these as temptations, but Paul's reproof certainly does apply to the Western church. For he states, ". . .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" (Col 2:19).

**Our ecclesiology must be characterized by 'holding fast to Christ, the Head'.** For from this intimate abiding in our Head comes the fruitfulness of Christ through each 'joint and ligament'. Do we really believe that Christ Jesus' purpose is build up the body through the 'resident dynamics' of *an every member ministry* energized by Him? ". . .but speaking the truth in love, we are growing up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of

body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). The Greek in this passage suggests that because Christ is energizing each member (‘*every joint supplies*’), the body through Christ provides precisely what it needs! That is the biblical model, each member is to be equipped for this ministry (Eph 4:12). But a massive mind shift is needed to think this way, for a professional clerical ministry has inferred that laymen belong on the sidelines, at best in a support role of the professionals.

**Scripture describes each member of the body as God’s indispensable instrument to bring fellow members to maturity (Col 1:28-29).** Christ as head of the body is working through the members toward this end. Thus, the Great Commission begins at home, in our local churches. Christ in each of the members of the body is animating them (as believer priests) to do their part in conforming the body to Christ. “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13).

**But we don’t see this in our local churches. Where did the breakdown occur? How did we come to accept a professional ministry that has buried biblical ecclesiology?** Much of the drift from a biblical ecclesiology is due to preaching and teaching which has marginalized the glory of Christ in His church. When Christ is exalted in His church, and His glory and majesty is exhibited to the members of His body, human agents tend to recede into the background. Exhibiting the glory of Christ is incumbent for a spiritually healthy body.

**As Head of the body, Christ exercises His offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.** To be a saved individual is to have Christ as one’s Prophet, Priest, and King. Thus, a clear view of Christ’s offices constitutes a *theological lens* for viewing our Lord’s relationship to His church. Martin Luther warned that left to itself and man’s devices, the church degrades into an institution honoring men. Paul chides, “so then, let no one boast in men” (1 Cor 3:21). Is seeing, loving, obeying and worshipping the unseen Christ our goal? A heretical ecclesiology raises up a thick miasma blocking a lucid view of Christ. It’s time we *do church* in such a way that the Lord is honored by our ecclesiology. That will require repentance. It will cost us our comfortable ‘religious pillow’ of tradition. Our dependence upon the Spirit of God will have to replace our trusted methods, rigid structures, and hyped-up programs. But the benefits of a biblical ecclesiology will redound to eternity.