

12

The Change

The change from the Pastoral to the Elder/Body System takes vision and goal.

Corporate Prayer

Our concept of spiritual life and vitality has to change. In America we tend to be self-focusing. We see powerful spirituality to be gained in a well developed personal devotional life. There's no doubt we need that, but we forget some drastically important messages constantly shown through the New Testament.

The "Lord's Prayer" is a good example:

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus gave this prayer example to His disciples teaching them how to pray. It starts with the corporate view in mind. You see, if Jesus was just teaching how to pray in their private prayer life, he would have started with something like, "Dear Father" or "Heavenly Father". He didn't, and it's important to note Jesus

didn't lightly use the term "Father". He referred to God as His Father often and He referred to God being the Father of other followers. Since He was different in this Father relationship with God than the relationship is for us, we don't find Him personally ever saying, "Our Father". The Lord's Prayer was an example He gave to help His followers commune with God. That "Our" is us believers.

If we're able to see this as the corporate prayer He intended, we must also see the incredible corporate togetherness it outlines. Just look at it! "Give us..", "forgive us..". Even more so, notice the subject found there, DAILY BREAD! Do we see this? This corporate prayer was one showing the daily gathering of His followers seeking for daily needs, not just weekly needs. This is a true community prayer! You may wonder if this is a little extreme, but remember back to the book of Acts:

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Acts 2:42-47

To the modern American reader, this may seem insane, but the start of the early church confirms the communal body life Jesus is alluding to in that famous sample prayer.

Found A True Functional Body

So how do we go about bringing this change about? The starting point will be to seek God's face. Most believers see the necessity of this, but back off just hoping change will come. This is too important and the longer the delay, the longer a nonliving entity we pass off as a "church" will continue to exist, and just

that long a true functional “body” won’t exist. For that length of time, the Kingdom of God, we’re to pray for in the Lord’s Prayer, will be postponed because we wouldn’t stand up for war. Remember Nehemiah’s rebuilding of Jerusalem:

14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the LORD, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. 15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. 16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. 17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. 18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

Nehemiah 4:14-18

In many ways Nehemiah’s task was the same as ours. He was working at rebuilding the City of God for the sake of the House of God. When the enemy is ever trying to keep the work from prospering, we must be equipped as men for war. Prayer is good, but the weapons and work must follow or the enemy will take over the city and keep it subdued as Nehemiah well understood.

Gatherings working toward this establishment must begin. It must follow with prayer for God’s guidance, and the decision to commitment to stand for what’s right. The body of Christ has to be our priority. It’s hard to get a quadriplegic body to do much in the way of proper functioning. Repentance must first come for not caring, or not loving Christ and His body. Second, repentance must come over the laziness to strive for a pure, holy and functional body.

GATHER WHATEVER MEN YOU CAN FIND AND START REBUILDING THE WALL!

I would love to say you can go into your local community church and bring about the reform. Unfortunately I can't. I've tried that. From my experience you come up against the walls of those who enjoy the present popular system. The "Pastor" enjoys having the final say and the congregation doesn't want to either take action or stand for righteousness. The only way to see a church established in a locale on the grounds of the body is by starting such a meeting. From day one, you can gather in this functioning body with others who see the biblical demand. When the Lord provides or directs for some place to hang some kind of official shingle, you will have such a place. Until that time, you can do as the early church did. They met from house to house. In some persecuted countries the believers meet out in the woods. Whatever solution you come up with for a meeting place, you can begin breaking bread around the Lord's table and all functioning as the part of the body you were designed to be.

In such a group, holiness has a chance to take root. Spiritual strength and proper defences stand the chance to get developed.

The danger of trying to reform the local community church is that people become attached to them. They strive for a reform that won't happen. They find they get rebuked for being "judgmental" (their stand for the Bible, instead of just leaving the people alone). The break will have to come, but for most, the pain of the break with the friends that were made, will be more than they can bear. They collapse under the strain of the break and just give up, step in rank and go with the flow. They will neither get a properly founded church going, nor will they stand for righteousness. The danger to the seeker for body life is so great, the odds are for their failure in trying the reform method and eventually just conforming.

You alone may share the biblical vision of a church founded on body grounds and operating as a true body with Christ as Head. Blow the trumpet for the change to a functioning body and establish an assembly on body grounds.

My Experience

I wanted to be able to say the body-based assembly could be established by reform of the Community Church. I felt strongly enough about it that I tried. I read something by Watchman Nee where he said the “Pastor/Congregational” Church was not a true body. I had a hard time accepting that. I thought maybe it could be compared to a quadriplegic, but to say it wasn’t a body at all, I couldn’t accept at the time. After trying for the reform, I have had to come to that same conclusion. When you see the power of the other system struggling for survival, you realize you’re dealing with more than just a poorly set up church government. You’re dealing with powers of darkness. In the end, I found I was staring into the eyes of the powers of darkness itself. Where I thought I had seen true love, there was only performance.

After working with weekly men’s meetings and getting the “Pastor” to try working for the same goal, we came to a wall. The “Pastor” was eager to give tidbits for the men to decide on but in other areas he wanted control for himself. Those weren’t open for discussion. Even to the point of moral concerns. I wrote a paper on the concern, which I’ve included in this book* (*See Appendix A - Generic Christianity). I had presented my concern about a year prior, when the same offense had been committed. The following year I couldn’t let it go without thoroughly addressing the sin being committed. The sin wasn’t dealt with, and this led to a breaking away. During this same time, several other serious sins at the church became apparent. In standing for righteousness, we were informed that numerous people felt it was essentially, “good riddance” for us to leave. Facing such is very hard and is what has made me see the dangers of trying the reform method.

Starting an assembly surrounding the Lord’s Table and being an open assembly where the men are all called upon to speak as the Lord’s Spirit directs doesn’t need to have a large group of elders to start. Though there will need to be that in time, all the men are to operate as mouthpieces delivering what the Lord would have. You see, the functioning body is quite

easy, it just takes the desire to see this, and not be content with sermons by a hired professional speaker every week. Believe me, if there's an issue or concern of any of the brethren, it can't be simply swept under the carpet! All issues must be openly and honestly faced. Such issues as a brother's concern about Christians celebrating Halloween would have to be openly addressed and responded to. As it was in the assembly we had to withdraw from, the issue of Halloween actually wasn't publicly addressed because of lack of concern of the Pastor. Due to that lack, there were members making their Halloween costumes and decorating their windows with ghosts and skeletons and the like. What a terrible testimony to the community about the Christian stand, yet no outcry went out.

Starting a new gathering may seem a scary road to take, but as we follow Jesus, we won't be left helpless and isolated. He will see to it that those seeking Him with all their heart will be directed into the right path:

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. *Proverbs 3:5,6*

George Mueller's Experience

I was reading the biography on George Mueller, a famous man of God who built an orphanage through faith. It contained a section on his church life and involvement. I was amazed at the same parallel I saw of what we had gone through. He had his orphanage ministry, along with "The Scriptural Knowledge Institution" that disciplined and dispersed Bibles. Those ministries were his own along with some other brethren. He also was the co-pastor of a church. George Mueller, along with this other pastor, saw the biblical call for a functioning body as the church. These men tried to bring about the church they pastored but found they couldn't. After pastoring for six years in this way, they saw they would have to break away and found a church in that community that would start right off on the biblical foundation. Some out of the church they left joined them. Others

preferred the popular style and stayed where they were. The new church became a light that wasn't part of George Mueller's ministries and was functioning on body grounds. George Mueller and his fellow co-pastor operated on equal grounds with the rest of the brethren. They also blasted the trumpet call for all the members to utilize the gifts God had given them.

The main service on Sunday was the communion service, and they did exclude unbelievers from joining in the service. They would undoubtedly be allowed to watch, but they had to give clear testimony to conversion before they would be allowed to partake of the communion meal. The other service the book mentioned was the Monday night prayer service. For illustration sake of a functioning, living body at work, let me quote from the book:

*To have any adequate conception of the fruits of such teaching and such living in church-life, it is needful to go at least into one of the Monday-night prayer meetings at Bethesda. It is primitive and apostolic in simplicity. No one presides but the unseen Spirit of God. A hymn is suggested by some brother, and then requests for prayer are read, usually with definite mention of the names of those by and for whom supplication is asked. Then prayer, Scripture reading, singing, and exhortation follow, without any prearrangement as to subject, order in which or persons by whom, the exercises are participated in. The fullest liberty is encouraged to act under the Spirit's guidance; and the fact of such guidance is often strikingly apparent in the singular unity of prayer and song, scripture reading and remarks, as well as in the harmonious fellowship apparent. After more than half a century these Monday-night prayer services are still a hallowed centre of attraction, a rallying-point for supplication, and a radiating-point for service, and remain unchanged in the method of their conduct. (Quote from Chapter 21 in *GEORGE MUELLER OF BRISTOL AND HIS WITNESS TO A PRAYER-HEARING GOD*; The originally "authorized memoir" by ARTHUR T. PIERSON 1899 Public Domain.)*

After George Mueller's death, the book went on to say that the assembly he founded became the seed point for other such similar assemblies in a number of towns. Such gives powerful testimony to the biblical foundation for such a gathering and the Holy Spirit's guidance in its creation and growth.

MAY WE SEE IT AGAIN!