

Let's Be the Church

Intro

When you get a haircut, are you less yourself than you were before the haircut? When you trim your nails, is there somehow less of you than before? Okay, a bit more serious, what about those who lose a limb in an accident? If "Bill" has any or all of his limbs amputated or organs removed, is he any less "Bill" than he was before?

Where do we draw the line? *Talk about it* (5 min.)

Does getting sick affect your mindset at all? When you have been physically injured or physically ill for any length of time, do you find it harder to think clearly (and with hope) about life? *Talk about it* (5min.)

What we're talking about is the connection between our bodies and ourselves. Past the age of infancy, many people understand that *we* are not *our bodies*. We understand there is a separation between our physical self and our mind and heart. Still, there's this weird connection between how we feel and how we think! Our bodies and our minds are linked!

What a privilege and an honor, then, when God calls the Church (all those who have been called out of the world and into fellowship with God through believing the Gospel) the *Body* of Christ! God has called us by the name of the very near and personal part of Jesus Christ.

What is The Body?

One of the worst mistakes we can commit is to assume we understand some important concept of life in Christ without ensuring that our understanding comes from Scripture. The Church as the Body of Christ is a very important concept! Let's spend a few minutes on that. Go around in a circle and each person read a verse. After the verse is read, someone summarize what is being said about the Church, the Body of Christ:

-John 10:28-30 _____(our salvation is brought by Jesus)_____

-Romans 8:9 _____(we have access to the Holy Spirit through Jesus)_____

-Romans 12:5 _____(we are united together through Jesus)_____

-1 Corinthians 12:25 _____(we should care for one another)_____

-Matthew 28:18-20 ___(we have a commission to make disciples for Jesus)___

Okay, so from this brief introduction, we see that the Body of Christ is ___SAVED___ by ___CHRIST___, given ___ACCESS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT___ through ___CHRIST___. We are ___UNITED___ in ___CHRIST___, ___BOUND TOGETHER___ because of ___CHRIST___ and ___CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES___ of *CHRIST*!

The presence of The Church in the world is initiated, sustained and given purpose by Christ.

Ephesians 1 concludes with two points; 1) that Jesus Christ is completely Dominant and Victorious over all and 2) that God has given Jesus Christ, exclusively, to the Church.

This week, we turn our gaze towards Ephesians 1:23, where we will briefly consider the meaning of the final phrase in the first chapter.

(Next person please read aloud.)

Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV)

"And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

So, God gave Jesus Christ...

-as ___HEAD___ over all things (He's dominant and victorious)

-to ___The CHURCH___ (exclusive access)

and

-the church is ___HIS BODY___

-the church is ___THE FULLNESS___ of Christ

Since it says that the Church is the fullness of Christ, some take this to be a statement about the importance of the Church to Christ. One author said that the church is as important to Christ as Christ is to the Church.

We know, however, that the rest of Ephesians 1 demonstrates just the opposite. Ephesians 1 reveals that the Church is utterly dependent on God. We depend on God for:

-(v.4) his ___CHOOSING US___ in Christ

-(v.5) his ___ADOPTION___ in Christ

-(v.7) his ___REDEMPTION___ & ___FORGIVENESS___ through Christ

-(v.7-8) his ___GRACE___

-(v.13-14) __THE HOLY SPIRIT_
and...
-(v.18-20) his __POWER FOR US_

Clearly, God is the giver and we are the recipients. So, what does it mean that the Church is the fullness of Christ?

One very helpful tool for Bible Study in unclear teachings is to let SCRIPTURE interpret SCRIPTURE. Fortunately, there is a very similar restatement of this passage in Colossians 2:9-10. There, Paul, by the Holy Spirit, wrote that the Church has been filled in "him." The Greek wording for Ephesians 1:23 is helpful for understanding this passage as well. When it says that the church is the fullness, that word for "fullness" is a noun, meaning "that which has been filled." So, when we learn that the Church is the fullness of "him," it is like saying that a balloon is the fullness of the air. The Church is the one that has been filled. We are the passive recipients of all that God has done.

All that God has done for us -his choosing, filling, and empowering- all has been done by God's grace, initiative and power.

Of whom, then, are we the fullness? We are the fullness of "...him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:23)

It may seem simple enough when we read this passage, but these verses have been used in attempts to justify some very bizarre and ungodly teachings about the nature of the Church and more-importantly, the nature of Jesus Christ.

Some believe and teach that when the verse says that God "fills all in all," it supports a kind of Christian Pantheism or Panentheism. Is that true?

Pantheism: the belief and teaching that God is inseparable from the Universe he created. This teaching does not distinguish a personality of God from the creation. Rather, it teaches that everything is God and God is everything.

Panentheism: the belief that God is personal; that he inhabits everything created and that God extends beyond what God created.

Neither of those is true. Christianity never equates God with His creation on any level. Against the pantheists, Christianity demonstrates repeatedly that God is personal, has a mind, emotions and will and is capable of interacting with His Creation because he is separate entity from His Creation (Exodus 6:29; Romans 8:22; Ephesians 4:30).

Likewise, against panentheism, the Scriptures repeatedly make a distinction between God and His Creation. God is said to have given rise to Creation, sustains Creation, rules over Creation, rebukes Creation, and one day will consume and rebuild Creation (Genesis 1:1; Mark 11:21; Colossians 1:17; Revelation 21:1).

God fills all, not in the sense that he is part of everything but in the sense that God is the origin of all that has origin.

Application

Jesus Christ is God, who fills "all in all." He is dominant and victorious over all. Jesus is given exclusively to the church as head. We alone are the container for the specific power and gifts of God. How then should we behave?

This week, we want to apply the Scripture to our lives and act on the truth we've received from the Scriptures. This week, we will be going out into the communities where we live and preparing to live out the blessing of being the Church, the fullness of Him who fills.

Here's Our Task:

1. Go! Get out of your house, out of our church room/facility, out of your office, and get into your community. Try to go in a group of more than one or two. Go with your family, roommate, housemate, mentor, etc.. (If you drive, have one person designated to pray for your time, another to read the Scriptures and questions out loud while the other drives; and someone to write your observations.)

a. Go for a drive. Sometime today or in the coming week, spend 30 minutes driving through your town and... (go to #2)

b. Go for a walk. Sometime today or in the coming week, spend 30 minutes walking / sitting through your town and... (go to #2)

c. Sit down for coffee. Sometime today or in the coming week, spend 30 sitting in a coffee shop or similar location and... (go to #2)

d. Go serve. Sometime today or in the coming week, spend 30 minutes serving your town by picking up trash, cleaning, painting, washing, etc. while... (go to #2)

2. Observe. Learning to live like Jesus involves learning to see like Jesus. When Jesus experienced the world around him (as a man), he saw things differently than most of us do. What do you see in the people around you in your town?

a. When Jesus saw people, he looked past their outer appearance and occupation and into their true state (Luke 7:36-40). Note the subtle: how do people seem to be? Are they joyful? Are they sad? Depressed? Lonely? Bitter? How do people appear to be as you see them?

b. When Jesus saw people, he set aside offense in order to regard the matters of the soul (John 4:1-42). Who do you see that you could care about beyond the image/impression they project? If there is a homeless person or someone who is dirty, uses profane language, smelly, or otherwise offensive, how can you see past the outer and into the heart? This is often a challenge with people who talk, think, look, dress, smell, drive, walk, eat...differently than we do.

3. Act! When Jesus saw people, he considered their true needs and sought a way to meet the needs himself (Mark 6:30-34). You've already been trying to see the people around you according to their spiritual needs. Do they know and live in the (spiritual) kingdom of Jesus where there is true righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit? If not, how might you be able to influence a change in their experience? For Jesus, seeing with compassion led him to feed people (spiritually [Mark 6:34] and physically [Mark 6:37-44]). Write down some things that you see:

Who seems to be hungry/malnourished physically? _____

Who seems to be hungry spiritually? _____

Who could use a warm greeting? _____

Who could use an offer to pray for them? _____

4. Report. Come back next week ready to share how God impacted you with this exercise.

What did you do (drive / walk / sit / eat / drink)?

Where did you go (town / library / coffee shop / campus / restaurant)?

What did you see (hunger / injuries / needs / despair / happiness / anger)?

What did you / can you do (give food / pray for a person / encourage someone / invite someone to BRCC)?

5. Be Confident. This isn't some legalistic exercise or occasion for criticism of how "bad the world is." Instead, it's an opportunity to take the benefit we have - with Christ as our Head over the Church- and share the many benefits and blessings with others. God wants to use us in this way. If we will learn to see the world like Jesus sees and saw the world, we will be used to change the world like Jesus changed and is changing it now! God is for us doing these things!

Encouraging Quotes:

1. "Thank God for the place where you live. Pray for God's peace and prosperity for it, and that you would have love for it and its inhabitants." - Pastor Timothy Keller in [Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything](#)

2. "Proclaiming the whole gospel, then, means much more than evangelism in the hopes that people will hear and respond to the good news of salvation by faith in Christ. It also encompasses tangible compassion for the sick and the poor as well as biblical justice, efforts to right the wrongs that are so prevalent in our world...The whole gospel is truly good news for the poor, and it is the foundation for a social revolution that has the power to change the world." Richard Stearns, [The Hole in Our Gospel](#)

3. "I'd heard about Christ,' she said, 'but the name was just a word. Then one day a friend told me that Christ could take away my lonesomeness and my fear. We went to church together. The preacher invited me to come forward, and I did. I knelt down in front of everybody and asked this 'Christ,' who had just been a name, to work a change in my life. And nothing has been the same since then...I really am a new person, which is why they say you're 'born again,' I suppose.'" From David Wilkerson's book [The Cross and the Switchblade](#)

4. "If we were left to ourselves with the task of taking the gospel to the world, we would immediately begin planning innovative strategies and plotting elaborate schemes. We would organize conventions, develop programs, and create foundations... But Jesus is so different from us. With the task of taking the gospel to the world, he wandered through the streets and byways...All He wanted was a few men who would think as He did, love as He did, see as He did, teach as He did and serve as He did. All He needed was to revolutionize the hearts of a few, and they would impact the world." David Platt, [Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream](#)

5. "Faith today is treated as something that only should make us different, not that actually does or can make us different. In reality we vainly struggle against the evils of this world, waiting to die and go to heaven. Somehow we've gotten the idea that the essence of faith is entirely a mental and inward thing." Dallas Willard, [The Spirit of the Disciplines](#)

6. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Jesus. Luke 6:46