

I. A Corporate Expression of Christ

- a) The *ekklesia* (the Greek word for church) is a people who are called out of the world and the busyness of life to an assembly. Together, they gather under Christ's headship and express His life as an interdependent body.
- b) From God's perspective, the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be an organic expression of Christ's indwelling life, as the individual parts of the body function together in related coordination.
- c) The church is Christ's body. Only those who have the indwelling life of Christ belong to the church. As the body learns to function together interdependently, together they give expression of Christ's beautiful life to the unbelieving world and to the demonic powers in the heavens. Gathered under Christ's headship, governed by elders, the body expresses Christ's indwelling life corporately.
- d) Paul said, "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 the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).
- e) In Ephesians 4:16, Paul revealed how the maturity of the individual parts of the body affect the maturity of the whole. The "growth of the body" he mentioned is not referring to numeric growth but to growing up to spiritual maturity. Namely, being formed into Christ's image and likeness as a corporate representation of Him.
- f) Notice that "the growth of the body"—"the building up" of the body—is the result of "what every joint supplies." A joint is a connection. When we are connected to each other in a real relationship and we express Christ's indwelling life to one another, the body grows up together as a mature man into the image and likeness of Christ.
- g) For the body to grow up as a mature man, interdependence is crucial. Interdependence is when we each have our own independent relationship with Christ in the secret place. We don't rely on others to connect with Christ deeply. We have come to know Him intimately through prayer, fellowship with the Spirit, and the Word of God. But we also realize that this is not enough. We refuse a "me and Jesus and there is no other" attitude. Instead, we embrace our need for the body. We stay connected with other like-minded Christ followers in real and authentic relationships. Though having our own relationship with the Lord, we are nonetheless dependent on the other members of the body to grow up together into a corporate representation of the Man, Christ Jesus. This is what it means for the body to function interpedently by divine life.
- h) You've probably heard the statement, "A chain is as strong as the weakest link." This means that a group or organization is only as strong as the weakest or least powerful person.
- i) Applied to the body of Christ, corporate maturity depends upon the maturity of the individual parts of the body. If one part of the body remains immature, the whole body is affected. If one part of the body is not in divine order, the whole body is affected. The corporate man that the Father desires depends upon the individual members of the body maturing into Christ's image and supplying the other members of the body with their revelation of Christ and their expression of His indwelling life.

II. Open and Participatory Meetings

- a) Church was never meant to be a 2-hour service where you sit as a spectator, hear a worship band play music, listen to a sermon, and then you go home to resume your normal life. Nor was the move of the Spirit in a local church meant to come solely through the pastor or the worship team. The Lord desires to express His indwelling life through the entire body. That means each Sunday, we all have a role to play. We are to be dependent upon the Lord and interdependent upon each other.

- b) More and more, the Lord will use the body in the congregation to bring the right expression of the Spirit at the right time to bring us into the presence of the Lord. Perhaps a tongues message. Perhaps a song. Perhaps a prophetic word. Perhaps silence. We want to learn how to flow together as an interdependent body who knows how to draw from the indwelling life of Christ together.
- c) Describing the function of the local *ekklesia*, Paul said, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26).
- d) The most staggering truth about this statement was that the Corinthian church was full of carnality. Reading through 1 Corinthians, you see that the church was filled with strife, jealousy, sexual immorality, soulish attitudes, and just plain childish behavior. 1 Corinthians 14:26 is the last thing most church leaders would suggest. Most modern-day church leaders would take control of the meeting and forbid anyone in this church from speaking out publicly. But Paul does the opposite. He actually encourages an open and participatory meeting from the entire body.
- e) Having said that, divine order is crucial. The body is meant to freely express the indwelling life of Christ in divine order. Paul said, "All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner" (1 Cor. 14:40).

III. Charismania Kids

- a) Perhaps you've heard of the *Garbage Pail Kids*. If not, this collection of cards was originally released in 1985 and was designed to parody the *Cabbage Patch Kids*. Each card had a character with some humorous trait. Some examples are: Adam Bomb, Corkscrewed Drew, Up Chuck, and Unstitched Mitch.
- b) Having spent over 25 years helping to lead a Charismatic church, I have accumulated numerous stories of charismania. I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly in the Charismatic movement. With that in mind, I want to introduce you to the *Charismania Kids*.
- c) These *Charismania Kids* are fictitious characters that have been developed using various traits that I have witnessed during my 25-plus years of being in the Charismatic movement. The point of this is to teach us valid principles for divine order.
- d) In 1 Corinthians 10:1-14, Paul used the failures of the Israelites to teach us vital principles so that we would not repeat their mistakes. Paul specifically said, "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved" (1 Cor. 10:6).
- e) As it relates to the *Charismania Kids*, these fictitious characters contain lessons for us so that we would have divine order as we learn to express Christ's life together.

IV. Close-Talker Carl

a) Profile

As his name suggests, Close-Talker Carl is a close-talker. Lacking self-awareness, Close-Talker Carl doesn't know how to speak to you unless he is three inches from your face. He gets so close that you can both smell and feel his breath. During a conversation, Close-Talker Carl never notices that you keep backing up. It gets so bad, you are eventually pinned into a corner as Close-Talker Carl keeps talking without taking a breath, inches from your face.

If that wasn't enough, Close-Talker Carl is a shofar blower. But he doesn't just blow it once or twice in a service. Close-Talker Carl blows the shofar every time the speaker makes an important point during their message. In one hour, Close-Talker Carl blows the shofar 30 times. This is his way of saying "amen" and of putting an exclamation point at the end of the speaker's statements.

b) *Lessons*

1. If you are going to give public expression of what the Spirit is speaking to you or doing in you, be self-aware.
 - Ask yourself: Is this the right expression at the right moment? Am I being overly loud or too quiet? How is what I'm expressing affecting those around me? Is my expression beneficial to the body or am I being disruptive? Is what I'm saying or doing drawing attention to myself or building up the body?
 - Self-awareness will keep us from saying or doing things that are out of order.
2. Beware of your favorite external manifestation becoming a charismatic ritual.
 - Some Charismatics, when they experience the Lord in a particular way, try to repeat that experience so that they can encounter the Lord again. They falsely believe some type of outward manifestation is the key to experiencing the Lord.
 - Galatians 3:3 states, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"
 - What begins by the Spirit can easily be carried out in the flesh.
 - We have to be careful that we don't try and recreate in the flesh what the Lord did by the Spirit. One week the Lord might move as we shout. The next week He might nudge us to be silent. If we're not careful and sensitive to the Spirit's voice, we can easily repeat what worked the week before, shouting instead of waiting in silence.
 - The same type of thing can happen with tongues, prophecy, spontaneous singing, and travail.
 - Beware of rituals and formulas. Make sure you are being led by the Spirit and that you are not trying to repeat what allowed you to experience the Lord last week.

V. Puffed-Up Patrick

a) *Profile*

Puffed-Up Patrick has been saved for 2 years. Though he loves the Lord, hears from the Lord, and desires to please Him, Puffed-Up Patrick thinks he knows more than anyone else. Puffed-Up Patrick believes that if God wants to speak to him, the Lord will speak to him directly—not through another member of the body. Puffed-Up Patrick believes that he is constantly hearing from the Lord and that what he hears is absolutely, one-hundred percent correct. Puffed-Up Patrick doesn't believe that He could possibly miss the Lord or interpret what the Lord is saying incorrectly. In Puffed-Up Patrick's mind, it's inconceivable that what he's hearing could possibly contain soulish mixture.

Because Puffed-Up Patrick knows the Lord so well and knows the Bible so well, at least in his own mind, he's not submitted to authority. He doesn't need to be because he hears God's voice directly from the throne. Puffed-Up Patrick constantly interrupts the meeting with prophetic words, prefacing each prophesy with "thus saith the Lord," "the Lord says," and sometimes when he's feeling extra close to the Lord, "Pappa says."

b) *Lessons*

1. Walk in humility and honor toward one another, knowing your need of each other.

- 1 Peter 5:5-6 states, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."
 - It's much easier to humble ourselves before the Lord than it is to humble ourselves before other members of the body. But Peter tells us that humility toward individual parts of the body is humility toward the Lord. That also means pride toward the body is pride toward the Lord.
 - The litmus test of our humility is this: How humble are we toward individual members of the body?
 - Walking in honor toward all the members of the body is crucial. Paul exhorts us to bestow honor to all members of the body, especially those we esteem least (1 Cor. 12:23-24).
 - Not only are we to honor all members of the body, we also need to know our desperate need of each member. We can never say "I have no need of you" to any individual member of Christ's corporate body (1 Cor. 12:21).
2. Be humble about what you believe you're hearing from the Lord.
- Unless you have been taken to heaven and have heard directly from the risen and glorified Lord, be humble about what you think the Lord is saying.
 - Be careful using super-spiritual phrases like "thus saith the Lord," or "the Lord says," or "Pappa says." Instead, say things less dogmatic, such as "I sense the Lord saying," or "I feel impressed in my spirit," or "I believe the Lord put this on my heart."
 - With humility, realize that what you think you are hearing might just be your own mind, will, or emotions. Therefore, approach what you sense from the Lord with humility. If you have truly heard from the Lord, it will bear fruit without your "thus saith the Lord's" attached to it.
3. Share words with an elder and let them determine if and when it's appropriate to share corporately.
- We are responsible for the words that we share corporately.
 - It's a safeguard to share these words with the elders first and to let them judge and evaluate them. Otherwise, if you share a word corporately apart from elder approval, you could be corrected publicly.
 - The elders are responsible for the overall direction and flow of the service. As we wait for the Lord's corporate direction, we can sense if the word you received is appropriate for that service and when it is appropriate to share.
 - Make sure that if you receive approval to share a word that you don't go off on a bunny trail. Share the word you received approval to share.