

Immersed Into One Body

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, October 25, 2015
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2015 Real Truth Matters

I Corinthians 12:12-14

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

The Christian life isn't like marketing schemes that offer a budget level that gives you basic benefits, but for little more investment you can increase the benefits with their Pro package; however, if you want it all, then for a larger price you can get the Ultimate package that has all the sizzle, nothing missing. Neither the Lord nor faith in Him works in this manner. We all have been given "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." There is nothing left, no higher packages or levels, and no additional funds required. Praise the Lord!

Yet, most of us are experiencing far less than what the Lord has for us. And while Christianity isn't like the marketing program I just mentioned it is designed that you get out of it what you want. All we need is already ours, but we have to want it and by faith appropriate it.

One of the great blessings given to us is the life and power of the body of Christ, the church. This stands as one of the premiums of our great and grand salvation and yet so few of us recognize the blessing to be placed within the body of Christ, a fellowship, a community. Together we shore up and bear one another's burdens and there is great power here. Yet so few of us make ourselves open to all of the life and power within the community of faith.

There are several reasons why Paul used the metaphor of the body to discuss the church. At the moment of conversion, you are placed into the universal body of Christ—the entire assembly of saints gone before and present—but we're also placed within a microcosm called the local church. This local church is to represent the whole body of Jesus Christ so we can say we are the body of Christ right here.

What do you think of when you think of a body? What is this metaphor and why does the Apostle Paul use it?

I. Body Life is Not Programmable

You cannot program the human body. It's not like a piece of machinery that you regulate and control, or a piece of computer software that when you put in the right combination you'll get the right information. No. The church is not such a machine or computer program, it's a life, an organism. The Apostle Paul is talking about something that is real and alive and functions as the human body functions. It has a life principle and that cannot be regulated or programmed.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:12)

The body, the church, is Jesus. That's not blasphemous, that's what the apostle is saying. This unit, this whole body, is Jesus to this community. We are not Jesus bodily, we're His spiritual body and representatives. But we're more than just His representatives, we are His body on this earth. We are the means by which He lives and acts in real time in this present moment. You can't program that.

A. Kingdom Communities Are Unprogrammable.

Kingdom communities are not programmable because life is not programmable. You may try to regulate it, you may do your best, you may try, but there are certain things you don't anticipate and they happen nonetheless. You can't program everything into your life that's going to happen.

Kingdom communities are about life, the life of Christ, which is the life of the Body, the Church. You cannot program Jesus. You can't regulate Christ. He is the Lord God and He will do as He pleases. Therefore the community of the Gospel must be about living life together because we are one body. This community of faith is the laboratory where we learn to live life Jesus' way. That is not something you can regulate or program. But many try.

B. The Problem With Approaching Church in a Programmatic Way.

We try to regiment Christianity just like some try to regiment their lives. How many of you have a to-do list? You work everyday by that to-do list. But can you not testify there are many days where something unexpected blew a hole in your to-do list and nothing was accomplished that you set out to do? Yes. The life of Jesus Christ is a life of the Spirit, it's in a supernatural realm, and if you try to regulate that and work by certain principles, certain systems, what you end up having is artificial life. It's not the real life of Christ, yet this is exactly what we try to do. The problem with approaching church in a programmatic or systematic way is that it strips the vitality of the life of Jesus Christ from that body.

What does it mean to program the community of God? I suggest all you have to do is look at today's bulletin. Have we not somewhat attempted to do that very thing? Look. You'll find a calendar of events that says we're going to get together three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday

night, and Wednesday night. We say we'll get together those three times and then we will experience body life and that will be sufficient for the entire week. In some sense of the word, that's trying to regulate and manipulate this very life and it can't be done.

God did not intend for us to get together three times a week. It's good that we do that but that's not the body life of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament. Someone is going to object after these messages and say, "I think I know where you're going. I think you're saying we ought to go buy us a big piece of property somewhere and all of us should start living in mobile homes and gather together so we can be one big happy family." That's not what we're suggesting at all. What I'm suggesting cannot be programmed like that. That's another attempt at trying to regulate this thing and perform some system so community life happens.

Life happens naturally! You don't force it, it's something that's real and happens on its own.

The life of Jesus Christ ought to be happening between us naturally. There ought to be an interaction with one another that's not regulated within the confines of a "worship service" but is carried out with interdependency throughout the week.

Let me tell you what happens when a church tries to regulate this kind of life and make it happen. There's what I call a minister's graveyard and it is full of men whose ministries failed because of some programmatic approach. Not just their ministries failed because of this but churches have failed when they've tried to make it something completely artificial, not real, not led by the Spirit.

There are some churches that can do it and do it very well, but what do you have? You do not have the life and power of the Holy Spirit. You have an organization but you don't have an organism. I'm talking about something that transcends Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. I'm talking about something that is alive and real—that's what you've been placed into, whether you like it or not. I cannot believe a true Christian does not believe that they've been placed into something bigger and better than themselves, namely the body of Jesus.

You cannot program this.

II. Body Life is Rhythmic

A. The Rhythms of Life.

The word *rhythm* is a term used to speak of the things we all do on a repeated or continual basis. For example, we all eat at least three times a day. We all sleep on a regular basis.

According to many sociologists, these are six simple rhythms of life:

I. Eating

Everybody eats. If you don't eat, you don't live very long. We all eat. It's a regular rhythm. It's something we do on a regular and repeated basis. If I do that on a repeated basis, why don't I do it with other believers every now and again? Not everyday, not every meal, but more than once a month or a Wednesday evening like we do now. Taking the regular rhythms in our personal lives and doing it with others in the church is living in community.

2. Listening

We all listen. We receive information and we give information. That should be part of the rhythm of the body life of Jesus Christ. We ought to be listening to one another, caring for one another, and knowing and meeting their needs. But how can you do that if you don't spend time with the other believers?

3. Story

We all listen and we all tell stories. Why? Because life is one big story. Your life is a story and my life is a story with smaller stories flowing into each one. It's like a large river with its tributaries and little streams flowing into it. Your life is a big story filled with smaller stories. How do I get to know you and find out your story without coming together and listening to you tell your story? Sunday morning won't afford us that, nor Sunday night or Wednesday. There has to be times other than this where the real life of the body can happen and we can tell the real stories of our lives to one another. And not just to believers but unbelievers.

4. Blessing

Part of your life is to bless and to be blessed. We do this all the time and we're unconscious of it because it's just like sleeping or breathing, you just do it without thinking about it. We're either blessing or cursing someone. We're either aiding or distracting, helping or hindering others. Blessing is one of the key tools God has given the church.

Wednesday night we heard a testimony where a brother was going through a period of discouragement and all he received one day was a text from another brother in the church. In that text of encouragement, God granted him the gift of repentance and he was turned back to the Lord in his heart. That happened all because someone blessed him through a text.

5. Celebration

We celebrate birthdays, holidays, new babies, graduations, these are normal rhymes of life. Why does the church not come together and celebrate these things? There is no way the whole church can collectively do this at one time but what if a few families of the church over here fellowshiped more regularly and a few over here did the same and they got together and celebrated birthdays and holidays and baby's births and weddings? Don't you think they would learn each other's story? Don't you think there would be some meals involved, listening, and blessing

taking place? Absolutely. How can these things happen without you coming together and interacting? It can't.

6. Recreation

Re-creation is where we recreate. Resting, hanging out, relaxing, being reinvigorated with others.

If we're going to do these six rhythms of life, why don't we do it with other believers and therefore have body life? This isn't a stroke of genius, it's not a statement of great intellect, and it's just a simple principle. If we're doing these things, why don't we take advantage of them and do them with other believers? Why don't you bring other believers into your family gatherings and let it have the Spirit of Christ in it so that Christ's body would be advanced?

B. Separate Rhythms.

We want to have our own separate rhythms. We look like the fellow trying to be a one-man band. You laughed because it is comical. It's quite a feat to watch a man try to beat a drum, blow a harmonica, honk a horn, and strum a harp all at the same time. It's entertaining and comical because we know music isn't played that way. We know that fullness of sound translates into more people and more instruments coming together. Even the best band has to have more than one instrument. But us? Oh, we want to be the one-man band playing to our own rhythms. Tim Chester in his book, *Everyday Church* said,

It is hard to grasp the significance of this community identity, because we live in a radically individualistic culture. We bring this worldview with us into the church so that it shapes our understanding of the gospel. So we have a loose connection with Christians on a Sunday, but then largely we go back to living our everyday lives on our own. No wonder we struggle to thrive. Our faith is animated on Sunday mornings as we sing God's praise and hear his Word. But it limps along during the week when we live apart from the body of Christ.

That's what happens when we have separate rhythms. When you and your own family live in your own rhythm and this family over here living in their own rhythm and there's no coming together, we limp and do not thrive. We are not suggesting that perfection is what is found in the church and that the members of the body of our Lord are perfect. We must not believe that we should be perfect before coming together, although that's what some of you are thinking right now. *I don't want people coming into my life and being that close to me because they're going to discover how imperfect I am.*

Please listen. Perfection in the church and in the body of Christ is not what we're after. You and I cannot perfect one another. That's Jesus' business. Only He can do that. I want to suggest to you that is the constant rhythm the Spirit of God who is wanting to play, the music He's wanting to create with our lives individually and coming together into a whole, is the rhythm of failure.

C. Failure is the Constant Rhythm.

You heard me right. God and the tune He wants to play through you has something to do with your imperfection. The life of the Spirit of God is the Great Conductor of a beautiful orchestra.

The melody and rhythm He conducts is not harmed or sabotaged by the inadequacies, brokenness, and flaws within the community. No one in this community need to be fixed or healed in order for the harmonies to please the ear of the Maestro or the audience, which is the watching world.

In fact, it's just the opposite. The music that God is wanting to play through your life is really the weaknesses, brokenness, and the problems that the Holy Spirit will use to demonstrate to the world His great grace, mercy, and love. It's just the opposite of what we think. We think we've got to get better so we can then be closer to other believers so they won't see our problems because we'll have already overcome them. No. The music in which God wants to play from your heart is the music of your weaknesses. This same Apostle Paul said that familiar text of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, it's not in your strengths that God's music is heard but in your imperfections and weaknesses, inabilities and inadequacies. This is the life of Christ in us, not our life. It's the Spirit of God in you and me, not our own.

It is our imperfections that display our immense need of such a Savior who can redeem and heal us. That's the music He wants the world to hear. It is the very flaws that shows the world what God can do when the Kingdom community is transparent, not hiding the imperfections, but allowing the audience to see our Lord make His music with us. Someone has said that we are not professional soloists trying to impress the world with our talent as great Christians. Rather, we have been called to come together like an orchestra, defective as we are, not capable of figuring life out on our own, but displaying what Christ can do in, through, and for us.

God takes several individually broken people and transfers His love from one member to another member. This is body life. His mercy, correction, strength, is transferred from one member to another member so that the world doesn't see a bunch of perfect people, but people who are learning how to navigate life together, which they cannot do without Christ. Do you see this?

The one thing that will hinder us from becoming the church God has dictated and designed us to be is this idea that we've got to be better than we are. No, what we must be is real with one another because when we take our masks off we can see the real us. I can see who you are, you can see who I am. There is a great deal of risk, but it in the realness of our weaknesses, the love and power of Jesus Christ will minister to us and through us to each other that we will stronger and more in love with one another. I guarantee it. The more I see you are not as spiritual as you lead me to believe you are, the more I can identify with you. The more real we become with each other the more we have in common. And together in our common flaws and imperfections we help one another, we bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

That's why he uses this term *body*. It has a program and rhythm that cannot be regulated.

But lastly,

III. Body Life Has Identity

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

You've got to understand the time in which this was written. Jews and Greeks did not like one another. They despised one another. Jews had a really lovely name for Greeks: dogs. And you can only imagine what the Greeks called the Jews. The conflict is still going on today between Jews and Gentiles in the Middle East. Yet Paul said God saves some Jews and He saves some Greeks and both Jews and Greeks lose their identity as Jews and Greeks and become one new man—the body of Jesus Christ.

A. The Holy Spirit Is the Identity of the Body.

The Spirit must define who we are rather than popular culture and secular society. The Spirit of God has been given to us to restore what Adam and Eve lost in the garden.

B. We are Immersed into the Community of Christ.

You are to lose your personal identity into the identity of the whole and that, to Americans, is terribly frightening and difficult.

What forms and feeds Christian community is the Spirit of Christ. What was His Spirit?

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Self-sacrifice. He was willing to lose His true identity—the Son of God—to be called a blasphemer and criminal. You talk about loss of identity, Jesus lost it and He lost it willingly for the church, for you, for me, for us. We lose our identity in order to gain a greater identity. We really don't lose; we gain.

Lest you think I'm trying to program this kind of community, I'm telling you it can't be done. What forms and feeds Christian community is not commitment to community but a commitment to Christ and His body. Sometimes people place a big emphasis on the importance of community and neglect the Gospel. If we just set up to have small group ministries, which we're going to

introduce soon, if that's our whole focus and that's what we're all about and that's the emphasis, it will not work. We will be guilty of trying to create something that cannot be created—the life of Jesus.

Focus cannot be on community but on the body of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Community then becomes a goal toward which we work, but Paul says that human activity cannot create life that endures. So this exclusive focus on community and getting together and doing things together is not sufficient. That's not what this message is about. This message is about the life of Jesus in us and how that life works. It cannot work as separate individuals doing our thing during the week and then getting together for a couple of hours on the weekend.

It is only the Spirit who creates an enduring and thriving community. And how does He do this? By the Living Truth. The Spirit and the Truth. The Word of God and the Spirit of Love.

C. The Body is Known By its Love.

As the body is at work and the Spirit is moving through this body, it will be known by its love.

The Apostle Paul will finish this twelfth chapter and will commence chapter thirteen, which known as the love chapter. He ends chapter 12 saying, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Then he moves into that eloquent chapter and describes love. But it's not just the love of a believer; it's the love of Jesus. This is a description of God's love for us. Look at those verses.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Can you imagine what a community of faith would be like if that was the influencing motivator? If love was the supreme motivation we had one for another?

Think about it. “Love suffers long.” We suffer the indignities of a fellow brother and sister and we do it long. We put no time limit on when they've got to start treating us right. Love is kind, you don't envy your brother and sister—you're not jealous of their advancements—love doesn't parade itself. You don't vaunt yourself over a brother and sister and tell them they must take care of you; it's not puffed up. Love doesn't act rudely toward other believers or seek its own. If the love of God is active in you and me, we won't be seeking our own welfare we'll be seeking the welfare of one another. In fact, we're willing to sacrifice our welfare for the help of the other. That's what love does. It doesn't seek its own, it's not provoked, it doesn't rejoice in the sin of a brother or sister, but it rejoices in the truth and speaks the truth in love. It will always bear all things, it will believe the best about one another and it will hope that with God they, our brothers and sisters, will persevere to the end because it endures all things.

Can you imagine a fellowship of brothers and sisters like this?

The Apostle Peter summarizes what Paul wrote by saying,

... see that you love one another fervently from a pure heart."
(1 Peter 1:22)

That is a command designed to create a distinctive community. We can't form this kind of community with only our work and efforts. Small groups will not create that kind of community. I believe they will help but only if the small group is not the focus but the body of Christ is the focus according to the truth of Christ. If we love one another like this, the music the maestro will play will be heard by the world and they will have an attraction to it.

This means we are to care for one another. I did not say care *about* but care *for*. There's a difference. There's not a person in this room who would not be able to say, "I care for everyone here." You truly and sincerely care for everyone in this room, but I didn't say care *about*. Genuine, fervent love does more than care about; it cares *for*. Like a nurse treating a suffering patient it sacrifices and does what it can to help the other. It cares *for*. When we have this kind of fervent love where we're caring *for* one another, ah, there's true body life. That's the life of Christ demonstrated.

This means we are to pastor one another. We are to shepherd and help one another in real life. Life is too vicious to try and do it by yourself. It will eat your lunch and more.

When Ira Gillett, missionary to East Africa, returned home to report on his activities overseas, he related an interesting phenomenon. Repeatedly, Gillett had noticed how groups of Africans would walk past government hospitals and travel many extra miles to receive medical treatment at the missionary compound. He finally asked a particular group why they walked the extra distance when the same treatments were available at the government clinics. The reply: "The medicines may be the same but the hands are different."

When we, with loving, fervent hands care for one another like this, the world will walk long distances to come and get what we have. Not all the world, not most of the world, but the ones God has chosen to save, they will come.

I recently read a moving story about the founder of World Vision, the international Christian relief agency. Bob Pierce had advanced leukemia, but he chose to visit a colleague in Indonesia before he died. As he and others walked together through a small village, they came upon a young girl lying on a bamboo mat next to a river. She was dying of cancer and had only a short time to live.

Bob was indignant. He demanded to know why she wasn't in a clinic. But his friend explained that she was from the jungle and wished to spend her last days next to the river, where it was cool and familiar.

As Bob gazed at her, he felt such compassion that he got down on his knees in the mud, took her hand, and began stroking it. Although she didn't understand him, he prayed for her. Afterwards she looked up and said something, "What did she say?" Bob asked his friend.

His friend replied, "She said, 'If I could only sleep again, if I could only sleep again.'" It seemed that her pain was too great to allow her the relief of rest.

Bob began to weep. Then he reached into his pocket and took out his own sleeping pills, the ones his doctor had given him because the pain from his leukemia was too great for him to sleep at night.

He handed the bottle to his friend. "You make sure this young lady gets a good night's sleep," he said, "as long as these pills last."

Bob went ten days his prescription because there was no way he could get the prescription re-filled. The cost was ten painful and restless nights. That act of love cost him greatly.

Christian love inevitably has to pay a price. True love always costs. If there is no cost there is no love.

I pray the Lord will help us stop trying to be a one-woman or one-man band, living our own rhythms but will help us to have fervent love for one another. May His love be the cohesion between us. I am thankful for the unity of this body. I'm thankful there aren't divisions in this body, but we cannot congratulate ourselves because we're a peaceful church. There is more to a church than the absence of strife. It's to come together for something bigger than us. What's bigger than us? Jesus! His body. One another. He is more important than we are so we come together, losing our identity for the larger, grander purpose—one another—so that Christ plays in our lives a music and a melody that the world will hear and some will be drawn to it and be saved by it. May God do this. Amen.