

Proper Body Function

By: Keith R. Keyser

Most people take their physical and mental well-being for granted. Until there is a problem, we seldom think about ordinary tasks like putting on our clothes, brushing our teeth, or feeding ourselves. It is only when there is a health crisis that we become mindful of how wonderfully made we really are. Recently my father suffered two “mini-strokes,” which had debilitating effects on his health and movements. (Calling them “mini-strokes” reminds me of a cynical definition I once heard for the phrase “minor surgery”: Minor surgery is surgery performed on someone other than the person dubbing it “minor.” Whoever prefixed the term “stroke” with “mini” obviously never had one!) In all seriousness, the strokes could have been much worse. By the grace of God my father retains his faculties and has an excellent prognosis to recover most, if not all, of his normal abilities. In viewing the aftermath of this episode, it has turned my thoughts toward the common biblical metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The brain is an amazingly complex thing. It is more sophisticated than any computer that man has developed, and scientists are still probing its mysterious workings. It is capable of doing an astonishing array of tasks and is involved in all of the intricate workings of the human body. When a clot or arterial blockage cuts off the flow of blood to the brain, however, severe repercussions follow for this multifaceted organ. Due to brain damage, what had been easy tasks suddenly become difficult or nearly impossible. As traumatic as this is in the human physical body, this can happen to “the Church which is His Body” as well.

Ephesians 5, Colossians 1, and 1 Corinthians 12 all use the body to describe the functioning of the Church. Not surprisingly, Col. 1:24 & Ephesians 1:23 call it “His body,” informing us in no uncertain terms that it belongs to the one who “purchased it with His own blood” (Acts 20:28.) He has the right to tell it how to conduct itself. What is more, as the Head of the Church, He is its intelligence center and life source, giving guidance and direction to the members. These truths practically motivate the Christian to live holy lives, as well as to “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6.) When he arose, He gave gifts to men, and has the Holy Spirit sovereignly distribute them to the Church (Eph. 4:8-13; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11.) These gifts are to be employed under the Spirit’s direction in the up building of the saints for the glory of God. 1 Cor. 12 ably develops the comparison with the human body, showing the interdependence of the various members. When it submits itself to the control of the Head the body functions efficiently, glorifying the Lord and ministering to the needs of the believers.

Happily, Christians never need fear that their Head will suffer any impairment or inability to function. Our Head is in Heaven, invulnerable to injury, and sovereignly able to bring about His will. Nevertheless, it is possible for there to be a breakdown in cooperation between the Head and the members; this results from the failure of the latter, not the former. Regrettably, believers sometimes live heedless of their Head’s wishes, not

bothering to spend time delving into His wishes for them through Bible study and prayer. Others attend the meetings of the local assembly sporadically, and do not get involved with the activities of the saints. Like the man in the parable of the talents, some “bury” their gifts and abilities rather than lay them at the feet of the Master for His usage. Still others are just too busy with the affairs of this life, to engage in activities that pertain to the age to come. These Christians are “absent without leave.” Just as the human body suffers when a kidney or a lung ceases to function, so the spiritual body often struggles in the absence of members who were designed to work for the glory of God. If you are such a one, dear reader, please repent, submit yourself to the Lord, and ask Him to restore you to viable service in the Church.

Through the ordeal of my father’s stroke, our family has discovered something wonderful about the brain – after being damaged it “rewires” itself, by delegating tasks to other parts of itself. The part of the brain that used to control my dad’s right side is currently impaired, so other sections are picking up the slack, and his movement is slowly returning (with the aid of rigorous physical therapy.) In like manner, when some parts of the Body of Christ refuse or fail to heed the Head’s direction, He still performs His work. He simply uses other members of the body to do it. Those who should have been serving Him will account for their failure at the Judgment Seat of Christ; while their counterparts who stepped in to fulfill the Lord’s desires will be rewarded. This does not excuse a failure to listen to the Head, but it does give us the confidence that our Lord will build His Church (Mat. 16:18.)