

The dynamics of the collective spirituality of church

Today we see various facets and models of 'church', both historic and modern. What seems to be very rare is a spiritual expression of "church", a manifestation thereof that goes beyond the church member cards and orientation programs; the superficial get-to-know-one-another-better functions and large crowds gathering to attend various special programs. These activities and program has its own benefits. If there was no benefit in it very few people, however, would have attended. But the deeper connection and spirituality of church is in question. Remember, the church is a spiritual entity! Church should be more than just activities, programs, and buildings.

How spiritual your church is, ultimately means: How spiritual are the members? This brings us to the question of how spiritual the people really are! A simple biblical definition of Christian maturity is to grow into the likeness of the character and life of Jesus Christ. The spiritual maturity of church members is thus determined by how much they do and act like Jesus.

Actually, my focus at present is not the spirituality of the individuals - that is a very important subject on its own - but the specific level of collective spirituality of a group. The Bible calls this togetherness 'fellowship', or: communion, companionship, friendship, camaraderie, partnership and association. Acceptance being one of the primary needs of humans, I would consider this an important aspect of church, but it is often overlooked. The question furthermore is: Are our Sunday celebrations, prayer meetings, home cells and other programs adequate to develop a deep and mature Fellowship or church? Remember that the biblical definition of 'church' does not derive from the Latin translation of "Kirche" which comes from a root word that can mean circus, as well as assembly or congregation. A more acceptable translation for the word, church, is from the Greek "ecclesia" which, when directly translated means: called-out-ones. The origin of this word comes from Caesar's group of specialists who were intentionally called together to fulfil the will of Caesar. So, by definition "church" refers to the collective gathering of individuals with the purpose to fulfil the will of God.

Paul explains the dynamics of church using the metaphor of a human body. Remember that in a body there are no dead parts, no passive inactive members! In a body every part exists for the sake of the other parts. The human body is a magnificent collective genius of parts functioning as one! When this biblical blueprint of church is compared to what is offered by man-made-governed organisations called 'church' today, it is hard to find any resemblance. If the collective genes of church and its spiritual statue depended on the brilliant organisation and administrative skills of man, then most successful businesses today can be called church too!

Let's look at some Biblical differences and characteristics of the spiritual temple God inhabits today:

Know another by the Spirit

For any deep relationship to develop, we need to know one another in the spirit. Judging people by their cover is a common problem in the world, but it ought not to be so in the True Church. When I grew up our church had "get-to-know-one-another" evenings, usually after the Sunday evening service. I believe most people only came for the snacks and cake! Is it really possible to get to know someone by casually chatting 10 minutes after the church service? Some suggest that you actually get to know a person by working with him or her; however, this is not altogether true either for many people portray a certain persona in the workplace. Another suggestion is to undertake a hike or to experience a crisis together. There is truth in this, but does this mean that we all have to have some shared crisis before we get to know a person? Surely not! The way of the spirit is more accurate and also quicker! Jesus knew the heart of Nathaniel even before he had met him. (John 1:47) Similarly the Lord revealed to Ananias not only the change in Saul (Paul), but also his destiny before he actually met him. (Acts 9:10) Phillip was divinely led to meet the servant of the court of Ethiopia. (Acts 8:26) Jesus knew what was in the Pharisees' hearts. He knew the woman at the well in the spirit. (John 4) Imagine a church where people know each other in the spirit, where everyone knows their place and function, and naturally work together without complaining and strife because they do not feel threatened by one another.

Fellowship in His suffering

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (Philippians 3:10) The word 'know' in the beginning of this verse means to know firsthand, to have proof of, to be absolutely sure, and for the Jews, meaning intercourse. Paul's desire thus is to really know God personally and intimately! But, in the same sentence he explains that this knowledge of God means to also have fellowship in His sufferings – note the plural! There is nothing that binds people together more than facing trouble together. Paul goes a step further; we should conform to His death. This word, "summorphos", means: to take on the same form and likeness of someone. We should therefore live in the same manner as Jesus did, because He gave His life in obedience to the Father. We should too, daily and in every circumstance be willing to deny self and surrender, yielding completely to Him. This attitude and lifestyle of every person in the group, becomes the adhesive that unites us on a higher level. In serving one another we lay down our lives for each other. Understanding fellowship also gives us a whole new perspective on our personal suffering. Like Paul, we know that our suffering is to the benefit of the body, and therein we fulfil the sufferings of Christ. (Col 1:24) For example, being publically corrected is humiliating. Nevertheless, by receiving it positively personal growth is established and everyone learns. We should not focus on how the pastor of the church is serving us, but on how we serve the people in the church. We are not to seek our own interests, but the interests of others. (Phil 2:1-11)

Divine Connection

In the discussion of the first principle I have used biblical examples of how people were brought together, not by circumstance, but by Divine guidance, e.g. Ananias and Paul. Another example is Peter and Cornelius. (Acts 10) A spiritual church is also a spiritually connected church! It even goes beyond this.

In Paul's letter to Philemon (with whom he has a good relationship), Paul asked Philemon to accept Onesimus, his former slave as a brother. His relationship with Philemon was the steppingstone to introduce Onesimus. This is a powerful insight into the spiritual mechanisms of church. For instance: I call on my friend Johan in Cape town, asking if he knows someone in the printing industry... one of his friends owns such a business. By linking us, Johan acts as the catalyst and originator of a new relationship. Without knowing each other, Johan's friend, and I begin our relationship on a deeper level, due to our common friend, Johan.

We need much integrity concerning this methodology. Looking in the spirit, is the way that the Spirit helps us to interact and relate on multiple levels.

Equal care and service

The spiritual house of God is not made up of man-made structures and positions. Although we have different responsibilities and have diverse functions and workloads we all have an active part to fulfil, no matter how small. If one member suffers, even slightly, the whole body suffers. (1 Cor 12:26) The body is not made up of positions but of the functioning of the different parts. Positions imply titles and superficial paper structures that do not work naturally without external pressures and systems. When each part functions fully, there is no need for external systems to ensure accountability and productivity. Because we work together, we are closely knitted. Doubtlessly everyone immediately feels the weight and pressure if one 'part' malfunctions. For the body to operate efficiently each person in the group must serve! Have equal care for the house of God. (1 Cor 12:25) Each one serves according to his/her level of faith, expertise, internal natural gifting and grace.

The Spiritual fellowship of the True Church cannot be localised

Although Paul was not present in the flesh, he was present in the spirit. (Col 2:5) This means church goes beyond the parameters of meetings and address lists. This is not an excuse for not meeting or attending church services. However, it does imply that if I have revealed my heart and is in unity with a group, I can physically be far away and still be one

with that group. On the other hand, if I take offence and become bitter towards the group, and thus choose not to attend any further meetings, I'm not only cut off physically, but spiritually as well.

The question now remains: How do we become such a spiritual church?

Does church meetings and programs make people a body? A short history of church according to Rev. Sam Pascoe, is described as follows: Christianity started in Palestine as a fellowship, it moved to Greece and became a philosophy, it moved to Italy and became an institution, it moved to Europe and became a culture and finally when it moved to America became an enterprise. When David Ryser taught this short illustration to his School of Ministry class, one of the students asked the following question: "But Sir, an enterprise is a business, and isn't the church suppose to be a body?" and then, before he could say anything she enquired, dropping this clanger: "A body that becomes a business, isn't that called a prostitute?"

Born into this Body – We cannot create the body of Christ by means of any programs or activities. The body of Christ is formed by people getting saved and born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. All of the spirituality mentioned so far is evident in a group of believers when they all have met God firsthand. This spirituality is often stifled by church structures and man-made systems and controls. I once lead a Pastor's gathering in Gobabis, Namibia. The theme was: Unity amongst churches in a location. I started out by asking the leaders: "Why isn't there unity amongst churches in a town?" One pastor simply remarked: "Because there are so many unsaved people in the church." This is a huge generalisation, but in reality it is so true! Godly unity cannot be created by man; we are only called to preserve it. (Eph 4:1-4)

Frequency of the spirit. Unity of the spirit in the first church is described by the following phrase: "one mind, one heart, one accord, one soul." Unity is God's heart; *that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.* (John 17:21) This means that the same oneness that exists in the Godhead, God wants us to have with another! This unity in the Godhead is a real mystery to explain, because although they are three, we serve not 3 Gods, we serve one God! They are one, yet they are 3 persons – it is not logical. This oneness should be present in the church amongst believers.

The reality is that in Christ we are one, but there are many gospels preached today, and because of wrong doctrines we have various minds tuned into various different frequencies of the spirit. For a church to experience true collective spirituality we have to be tuned into the same frequency. That is why in the early church, the church basically kept herself busy with four matters: 1) Doctrine 2) Fellowship 3) Breaking of bread 4) Prayer. (Acts 4:42) It is interesting how many people in big churches today come to be 'fed' with a program on a Sunday, yet how few attend the prayer meeting on a Friday night! The same applies to the attendance of Bible School. If all the members attend the Bible School, prayer meeting and home church meetings, this collective unity begins to develop and grow, becoming more and more evident. Breaking of bread is also very important, for the Bible teaches that we cannot have communion if we bear a grudge against somebody. By regular communion we are forced to confront offences that ultimately will divide us, if not dealt with!

A church that accepts the fivefold ministries into their midst and make room for these gifts to nurture the body of Christ, will experience true spirituality and maturity. Carefully read Ephesians 4:11-16. The fruits of the fivefold ministries equipping the church- each according to the inherent grace that is active in every specific ministry:

the edifying of the body of Christ

unity of the faith

everyone having a personal knowledge of the Son of God

perfect man (Holiness)

the measure: the stature of the fullness of Christ (our ultimate creational purpose – Rom 8:29)

no longer being children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine; by the trickery of men; in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Maturity and stability)

the whole body, joined and knitted together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working and every part doing its share, causing growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (an organism that is alive and self-sufficient).

The Number 150

In a recent study done by Dr Dunbar, he has found that there is a direct relationship between the size of a mammal brain and the size of the social group of that mammal. He even came up with a scientific formula, based on studies of animal behaviour that suggest in relation to the size of the brain and specifically the Neo-cortex of a certain mammal, the maximum size of the social group of this mammal. The maximum number for humans is 147.8 or 150. In anthropological studies this number pops up everywhere, in what scientist say is the ideal functioning size of a group. When a group or unit gets bigger than 150; complicated hierarchies, rules and regulations is needed to maintain cohesion and loyalty.

Jesus had 12 disciples, he send forth a team of 70 (Luk 10) and 120 gathered at the upper room, waiting on the Promise of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:5). Large crowds often followed Jesus, 5000 were fed, and 3000 got saved on Pentecost. It is thus difficult to determine a specific magic number biblically. But what we do know; when it came to preaching the gospel large crowds was drawn, but when they met as a church, they met in houses. Although the church grew quickly, it seemed that the apostles kept the units small to preserve the unity and natural dynamics of a small group. It is easy to hide in a big congregation and to fall into the trap of just attending services. But the growth that the body supplies according to Ephesians 4:16 is seriously lacking. People grow spiritually more in a small church, because people know one another, and cannot hide, and they rely heavily on each other, so there is no passivity.

I thank God that He is building His church and that we are seeing the reality of what has been explained here above! All over the world true biblical accurate churches and companies of people are being raised up as we all - looking with unveiled face, beholding Him as in a mirror- are being changed from glory to glory into His fullness.

God is building the church... a church not controlled by man, nor protected by man, but ruled by His Spirit!

Let everyone who has an ear, hear what the spirit of the Lord says!