

COVID-19 has captured the attention of the world. Many believe it'll soon reach pandemic proportions. Everyone is talking about it. Everyone is struggling to address the problem. Politicians debate who is and who is not handling this well. There's a legitimate concern over facing the previously unknown. The unknown causes us to fear. It stirs a sense of helplessness.

But it struck me this week that from the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, generations of humans have faced an even worse pandemic — the pandemic of sin. Since sin has infected everyone, it's the worst pandemic ever, and its consequences are devastating. After Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden of Eden, every generation has faced great unknowns and a similar kind of helplessness. Sin brings separation from God, from one another, and even from ourselves.

This is why our vision as a church is so important. We live in a place where the vast majority of people are suffering from this pandemic. But there's a cure. His name is Jesus. Jesus came and died and was raised up to give us new life. And for those of us who have this new life, he wants us to spread the good news that there's a cure. And we live in a place where the vast majority don't understand that. But God loves this place and the people who live here. He's placed us here to be a lighthouse. This is our mission field. As people are being transformed by Him, he wants us to bring transformation to those around us. That's our vision: to be transformed people who are transforming the Peninsula.

To accomplish that, we've created four pillars. These are strategic focuses. Two of the pillars, worship and spiritual formation, are centered on allowing God to transform us. Worship is our God-glorifying response to who God is and what he's done. Spiritual formation is intentionally opening our lives to the work of the Spirit to be more like Christ. We focused on those two pillars last year. Hopefully, we're continuing to engage at a deep level in both. But this year, we're focusing on the two other pillars, equipping and cultural engagement. These are all about us being agents of transformation to those around us.

Last Sunday, we began talking about the equipping pillar, which is all about preparing each of us to serve both inside and outside the walls of the church. We want to create a culture in CPC that enables each of us to identify and use our gifts and to fulfill our calling. We want you to know God has called YOU to ministry.

But this brings up an important question. When it comes to who does what in the church, how does the church accomplish its

mission? When you talk about any kind of organization, that's always what people want to know. How will we get this done?

The answer to this question is largely determined by what we view the church to be. Some people view the church like any human organization. But the church is unlike any organization on earth. In fact, the church isn't an organization at all, and as soon as we define it as such, we lose our way. This is why so many churches are just hanging on for dear life. They've lost a sense of who and what they are. Turn with me to Ephesians 4.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. vv. 11-16

The church is the body of Christ

As we look at these words written by the Apostle Paul, notice he never mentions the word church. The whole chapter is a description of the church, and yet Paul doesn't even use that term. Instead, he chooses to use a term far more descriptive. In verse 12, he talks about the body of Christ being built up. Paul's assumption in this passage is the church is Christ's body.

Jesus had a body. With his body, he touched the leper and passed out loaves of bread. When he sat with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, he broke bread and said, "This is my body which is broken for you." The next day his body was beaten and crucified. His body was removed by Joseph, prepared for burial, and placed in a tomb. Three days later, his body was raised up. Then for 40 days, he appeared in bodily form to over 500 people. Finally, his body ascended into heaven, where he's seated at the right hand of God.

But that wasn't the end. Before he left, he told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until something unusual happened. They stayed

and waited until, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on them. At that moment, this ordinary group of people became something extraordinary — the body of Christ. Today, we're still his body, filled with his Spirit, called to be Jesus in this world.

You see, the church is not, in essence, an organization. The church is an organism; it's alive. A body is an organism; it has a life force within it. The life force of the body of Christ is the Spirit of Christ. Contrary to the old song, a body isn't made by the foot bone being connected to the ankle bone, and the ankle bone to the knee bone. A body is formed as one original cell reproduces until it becomes a body in which every cell and every part shares out of that original life. The secret of a body is all the parts share the same life. That's what makes us different from an organization. Organizations derive power from the contribution of individuals, but a body derives its power from sharing the same life. There's a supernatural connection of all believers as we share together in the life of Jesus through his Spirit.

Recently I spent time with a group of pastors from various churches in the area. I'm sure if we sat down and talked about specific teachings of our churches, we'd find a lot to disagree on. But as we talked together about Jesus, it was obvious; we share in the same reality through the Spirit. Our respective organizations might never be one, but we're one because we share in the same life. All this isn't to say the body of Christ is disorganized or that each part isn't important. The body is very organized. But how?

The body of Christ is directed by its Head, Jesus

Paul tells us in verse 15 that the head of this body is Christ. We see an even clearer statement of that back in Eph. 1:22-23,

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The head of any body is responsible for growth and all the activity that takes place. Everything that happens is to happen under his direction. Unfortunately, when we think of the church today, we don't normally think of Christ as the head. We think of a man, usually the Senior Pastor, as head. We figure he's responsible for directing the body. If something goes wrong, we look to him. If a decision needs to be made, go to the top. Every once in awhile, someone comes into the office of our church and says, "Who's in charge here? I want to talk to him!" We say, "Good question!" But the Scriptures are clear — Jesus Christ is alive; he's in charge! That's not just verbiage. That's the truth, and the challenge is to live that truth and look to him. This is the challenge Israel had when all the other nations had a king. God told them he was their King. But they looked at the nations around them and said, "We want a king like they have."

Samuel said, "God is your king!"

They said, "No! We want a king like everyone else."

Samuel turned to God, and God said, "Don't worry about it, Samuel. They've not rejected you, but they've rejected me" (1 Samuel 8:4-9). Then they chose Saul to be king. He was handsome and tall, an impressive leader, a guy they could be proud of.

Many churches do the same thing. Christ is the head of the church, but we look around at how businesses are run, and we say, "We need a man. We need someone who'll lead us and take us to the next level like everybody else." So we hire someone like that, and maybe the church grows, and the preacher becomes famous and all the while Jesus is looking on and saying, "You've rejected me."

There might be a lot of activity and a lot of programs, but this is when the church ultimately becomes boring. You look around, and you know it's all about us. There's nothing here that couldn't have happened without God. This place may be impressive, but a lot of corporations are too. People may join and sign up, but lives aren't really being changed. Why? Because we've lost our connection to the source of our life, Jesus.

How often do we hear of pastors of large churches who've fallen into sin and been disqualified from leadership? It's a sad story repeated over and over again. The saddest thing is those churches are devastated because they've become far too dependent on one man. Now he's gone and what will happen to that church? Well, the upside is maybe that church will actually become stronger because they'll be less centered on a man and more dependent on Christ.

You say that sounds good, but how then do things get done?

The body depends on the proper functioning of each part

It's clear from this passage each member of the body has a different role to play. And he gives us the pattern for how that works. He says Jesus has given to the body certain people with certain gifts whose role it is to equip others.

That word "equip" is a really important word with several nuances. The word can mean mending or restoring something that's torn or broken. It can also mean establishing something on a firm foundation. Finally, the word can mean preparing or training people for a particular kind of work. Together, these three ideas describe the role of those with equipping gifts. These equippers are to help broken and struggling people become well and whole. They're to see that people are building their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ and his Word. Finally, they are to prepare and train people to use their gifts and fulfill their individual callings. This is the job of these four equipping gifts.

He starts with apostles and prophets. Together, apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church. In Eph. 2:20 Paul says the church is "*built on the foundation of the apostles and*

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." The church today is built on the foundation the original apostles and prophets Jesus laid.

The gift of apostle refers to the special calling given to the 12 men who Jesus appointed as Apostles. They witnessed His ministry first-hand and were given remarkable powers to spread the Gospel. By this definition, this gift no longer functions. But we do see apostle in a secondary sense today. Missionaries are apostolic as they're sent out to plant churches in unreached areas. That's a secondary use of apostle.

Prophets were people appointed and inspired by God to convey God's Word. In this sense, this gift no longer functions either because the Bible is closed, meaning nothing more can be added to it. But here again, there's a secondary kind of prophesy today, where someone offers a supernatural message from God to the church, perhaps a message of encouragement or warning. Many people believe that preaching and teaching is a prophetic gift.

Evangelists are gifted in sharing the gospel and leading people to faith in Christ. They're like obstetricians who aid in birthing new believers. By the way, we're all called to be witnesses, but not all of us are gifted as evangelists. We should all be able and willing to share our own story of how Jesus saved us with those who don't know him. Peter says, *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"* (1 Peter 3:15).

Finally, there are pastor-teachers. These are like pediatricians who care for, feed, and shepherd these new babies with first the milk and then the meat of God's word. At CPC, we have men and women with the gift of pastor-teacher. In the case of some of them, we've freed them up so they can serve in that capacity full-time, but they're not the only ones who have that gift. We have some very effective pastor-teachers in this church who've never received a paycheck. An example would be community group leaders.

Notice nothing is said about a group of people set apart for ministry as members of what we call clergy. The word clergy comes from a Latin word, which means priest. I can remember growing up in the Catholic church and thinking of priests as almost another race of people. They wore different clothes, spoke a different language, and didn't marry. I never even considered the fact they were regular guys. I remember seeing my priest at a golf course, smoking a cigarette. I almost fainted. How could my priest play golf? And smoke! But the Bible knows nothing of that and says we're all priests.

You see, each one of us is called into the ministry. Paul says it's the job of these foundational gifts to "equip his people for the work of service, so the body of Christ may be built up." That word service could also be translated as ministry. Who does the work of ministry? Not the equippers, but everyone else — God's people.

Paul uses the word *hagios*, which means saints. The saints do the work of ministry! Who are the saints? They're not those people on stained glass windows who lived in the Middle Ages. He's not talking about St. Joseph, and St. Claire. He's talking about St. You. If you know Christ, you're a saint!

I spoke earlier about the pandemic of sin, but let me tell you about a virus that infects the body of Christ. It infects people with the idea that being a part of a church means nothing more than being a consumer. In this case, the church becomes more like a shopping mall than a body. You come solely for what you can get out of it, and as soon as your needs are not being met by what is found there, you find somewhere else to shop. That kind of thinking is a deadly virus that weakens the church.

Let's be clear: As the head of the body, Jesus distributes gifts to each member of his body. Some of these gifts are equipping gifts. As these equippers do their work, the rest in the body is restored and built up and prepared to do the work of ministry so the body can grow. Far too often, it's the other way around. The ministry is left to the professionals while the people equip them by showing up and paying their salary. So church becomes a spectator sport where the most you ever do is bring people on Sunday so the minister can minister to them. It's like that great definition of football — 11 men down on the field in desperate need of rest, and 40,000 people up in the stands in desperate need of exercise!

You see, as a believer, you have at least one spiritual gift that comes from the Lord and is meant to build up his body. We'll talk more about that next week, but besides the ones we see here, there are gifts of service, helps, administration, leadership, giving, showing mercy, exhortation, words of wisdom and knowledge.

Here's what I want you to know today: The church can't afford for you NOT to discover and use your gift. That's what he says in verse 16. He talks about the body *"joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* Each part, even the smallest part, is crucial. I recall so well ten years ago when I cut off the tip of my finger on a lawnmower. It was just a tiny piece, but I was a mess! You may feel invisible. You may think you have a tiny contribution to make, and it doesn't matter, but I want to tell you the body will be a mess if you don't function as you should! If each part doesn't contribute, the body can't grow and mature.

The body is to grow into maturity

That would be a travesty because the goal of all of this is maturity. What does maturity look like? In verse 13, Paul describes it as becoming *"mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* In verse 15 he says, *"we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."* Maturity is defined by the person of Christ. We grow into what he is. When

babies are born, their heads are disproportionately large. As time goes on, their bodies grow into their head. In the same way, we grow into our head — Jesus. This isn't talking about numbers; it's talking about the quality of our life together and our impact on the world. We grow into what he is.

Normal, healthy bodies grow. As a kid, I was always small for my age. When all my friends got their growth spurt, I was left behind. To make matters worse, my brother was 6'4" as a freshman! My parents always told me, "Don't worry. You're healthy. You're going to grow." I didn't believe them. But finally, in my sophomore year of high school, I grew about a foot. My parents were right. Growth in the body of Christ may take time. We can't always see the changes. It doesn't always happen on our time schedule. But if we focus on him, and do our part, we'll grow.

Paul says he doesn't want us to remain like infants. We all love babies, right? They're so cute and cuddly, but if a baby doesn't develop, grow, and learn to do things like feed herself, walk, talk, and just become a responsible human being, something is terribly wrong. It's wonderful to have spiritual infants in the church, new believers excited about their faith, but you don't want them to stay infants! You want them to grow and mature.

Spiritual infants, Paul says, are thrown around by every passing religious fad. Paul defines spiritual immaturity as religious gullibility. He says, *"I want you to be stable and mature; able to discern truth from error. Here's what I want you to focus on to stay healthy: 'speak the truth in love.'"* To stay healthy and grow to be like Christ, we have to maintain truth and love. We have to hold to the truth of God's word, but not in a cold, arrogant, merciless way. We have to love people, but not in a compromising, wishy-washy, purely sentimental way.

All this is based on four basic truths:

1. **The church is the body of Christ.**
2. **The body is directed by its Head, Jesus Christ.**
3. **The body depends on proper functioning of each part.**
4. **The body is to grow into maturity**

Let me encourage you to find your place in the body of Christ. I know many of you have done that, and you're serving in that capacity, but many of you haven't, and it's time. It's time to put your gifts to work so the body of Christ can be built up and strengthened. When we serve, we feel connected to one another and a

greater sense of home. When we serve, we're part of something bigger than ourselves — the Body of Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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