

Chapter 20 (The body)

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But if we are the body, why aren't His arms reaching?

Why aren't His hands healing? Why aren't His words teaching?

And if we are the body, why aren't His feet going?

Why is His love not showing them there is a way?

It's too easy taking a song and using it to shame the church. I could find a plethora of examples of songs that church shame all day long. If I want to blast the body for not doing its calling, it's not hard. I could glean the internet for stories of abuse. Pastors and their denominations make easy targets. Yet, the musical act Casting Crowns made their point. Why aren't we the body?

Every Sunday, a call is made from the alter to be better. The church body needs help. How often are we asked to serve? We have heard the call for funds. There are prayers to pull on our heartstrings. I'm assuming it's to have God shame us into action. Yet, why is a call needed if we were all in this together. Don't we get the program of God? I have been asking for a very long time. Why does Gods people need to be cattle prodded? Aren't we the body?

Jesus the Christ was a promised man of God who will lead the church into the millennia. We all believe this because of Colossians 1:18 "*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*" If we are all Jesus followers, then why must Jesus have such a hard time getting us to do anything? Casting crowns wrote "we are the body" directly because they could see it. The body is not doing that well.

Chapter 20 (The body)

One of the reasons we have church is the mention of a sanctioned body through Christ Jesus. We call it the church. We are the body of Jesus. There is another song about being the hands and feet of Jesus. People want it. They want to be those hands and feet. I feel that all along through the Bible, the reason the Christ figure changed into a man is exactly that: being the hands and feet of God.

What if Paul never wrote Colossians 1:18? What would the church consider its cornerstone verse? How would Christians approach the body? Would we still be the body of Christ? 1 Corinthians 11:3 says “*that the head of every man is Christ.*” Down in verse 12 Paul says we all come from God. I mentioned before that the Christ is a vision of the best representation of God. As Christians we are forever attached to Jesus the Christ. What I’m getting at is that even if Paul never wrote Colossians 1:18 we are still connected to Jesus. We are also connected to God because he made us. Each one of us should be on the God train going His way.

This body is important. We are the current hands and feet of Jesus. I suppose he let us have a turn at the wheel. We are his body. So, why are we not doing what was intended? Some would argue we are. Come on man, do you really believe that? Songs like “we are the body” did not come out of thin air. My book comes from hitting Christian disaster after disaster. My wife asked me the other day which denomination is the most corrupt? I had to think about that one.

I want the body to flourish. I would love to sing praises of the church. I am sure there are many wonderful stories. I know a church that has started fixing cars for the poor. I know another who housed shut-ins during storms. There are many good stories. Yet, from the outside all we hear about is the church terror. In the beginning of my faith, I expected more from Christians. I

Chapter 20 (The body)

know the lost world does too. I knew a friend who said they would rather go to hell than go to church and be treated like hell. I get it.

I sat in church today just a little giddy. I'm at a new place. It's another church plant. Yes, I had heard good things about them. He pointed out that their core values are on a sign in the hallway. The pastor said "we don't want to apologize or make excuses for how we view church." Here is a snapshot of what they believe.

1. **A LIFE SAVED IS WORTH EVERYTHING.**
2. We believe in Jesus as He is. (Not as we'd like Him to be.)
3. Jesus saves people. (Everything we do revolves around this.)
4. We keep it simple. (We don't apologize for not doing everything.)
5. We have candid conversations.
6. We take risks.
7. Our church is specifically designed around our vision. (It might not be for everyone. We're ok with that.)
8. We love and *honor* people.
9. We do life together.
10. Real boats rock. (We are not a cruise ship.)

I don't see three words that personally describe Jesus. I don't see a revolving door. However, are they more than their fancy slogans? Do they do what they claim to believe? I am intrigued. Yet, putting feet to the fire is required. Are they willing to rock their boats for Christ? Is one of the final installments of who Christ is, this church? Are they going to be those hands and feet? Stay tuned!

I was pondering this morning on Eden. It's what we all do. Not! God placed man in the Garden. I always think of it as God bringing down his hand and picking the man up and placing him down like a pawn on a chess board. Maybe he was playing army like I did as a kid. You know those little army guys in a bag. We played God by putting army men all over the place. Did God play army with Adam and Eve?

Chapter 20 (The body)

Here is my rabbit trail. God placed a flaming sword over the entrance to Eden. To me, that means its Gods blockage. We can't get back in until God removes the sword. The Christ began right there before the fall of humans. God promised (gen 3:15) to make a way back. Through the centuries we have developed this hope into Jesus. All roads led to Rome and all Christ-like prophecies lead to Jesus. Then Jesus died. The Spirit of God now indwells within his believers. What if the Christ now resides within us? Is it possible that we will not be placed back in Eden or heaven? Instead, we will walk back in as Christ followers. In the beginning we hid in shame. Now we will proudly stand in public as people with enough belief, faith, and trust to boldly walk into Gods presence. We are the body!

What makes a body of Christ? It's a loaded question. Christ is many things. I bet the body is many things too. One church serves the body by fixing cars. Another serves the business community. There are so many church bodies doing different things in the name of Christ. Do you see it? There are so many different attributes of Christ. He is a warrior, peacemaker, teacher, and comforter. My goodness, Jesus was a king and servant. How can he be all those things? If God is infinite then God can do anything. Does that mean his body could do anything as well?

Again, I will ask: what makes the body of Christ? In my Christian beginning I was asked to read my Bible. There were a few things that stood out to me. Remember, I come from the unchurched. Your religious world should have been angry, unforgiving, and boring as I entered into the Christian life. Yet, the Bible was alive, and God was loving. That blew me away.

What does alive mean? The human side of Adam and Eve touched me. The realness of David and Abraham inspired me. The Bible was alive because I saw me and my situation within its pages. I have lived some of the stories. Yet, this God was working out salvation through the

Chapter 20 (The body)

whole book. The words in the Bible resonated within my heart. God's word said I am special. It has encouraged me. This big, old, irrelevant boring book was nothing like I had heard. As I read it, I began to change. What kind of book can do that over and over? An alive, in the moment, book could.

My one big criticism of unbelievers and religious mockers is the Bible. You blast it because of rumors. You hate and ridicule it because of Christian actions. You dismiss it totally because you can't see God. However, you believe in the Big Bang Theory, not because you can see it, but because (by faith) you believe it. Each one of you are hypocrites just as the Christians are. You cling to a theory and call it gospel. Christian's cling to the physical Bible and call it the gospel too.

So, with that said, I was asked to read the Bible and follow it. First off, follow a book? It's God's word! What I found is that this book was way more honest, human, and real life than I first thought. It challenged the way I thought. The way I lived, and the way I viewed everything. This book opened my world. I never realized how grey and black I had seen everything. The Bible added color and depth that I did not know existed. In a nut shell, that is why I love the Bible.

I read the Bible through the first time within 6 months. I doubt I could repeat that feat. I ate up that thing as if I was starved. Then I made a fatal error. I began to ask questions. Why don't we wash feet? Why don't people give regularly. Why don't we go to the lost? I asked a ton of questions. Why? The Bible opened up my world. I saw everything in a different light. Yet, I saw a body not acting like the Bible. That confused me.

Chapter 20 (The body)

What I got was a pause. Oh, did I ever. I could see the confusion. Remember when your computer gets confused. You see the little circle going around and around trying to figure out what to do next. My autistic daughter can get confused. Everything is so linear with her. She does not like grey areas. She will pause when her mind is not quite working it out. My pastor looked the same way. He knew the Bible. He knew the answer to my question. Yet, he was stuck in pause mode. That's not how they did church. He was probably computing how to answer me in a holy way.

Why don't people read their Bibles? Why don't we have Wednesday Bible studies like they used to? The Bible says to consume the word of God. Finally, the pastor responded to me. He carefully replied "it's complicated." If the church of Jesus the Christ is to unite as one body, then why do we have 50 million denominations? "It's complicated" he says. Why don't we serve at the food bank? Can the church raise some money for them? "It's complicated" he stammers. There are programs and budgets to consider. "We'll see what we can do" he lies. But... the Bible says we are to feed the poor? "I know" he says exhausted. Then he looks at his watch and says he has another meeting.

We read the Bible. People say they follow it. However, there is a slight change. Do as I say. Don't take the Bible that literally. The do as I say is the tricky part. It's complicated! How many pastors have told the story of the poor woman giving all she had? Then the pastoral team heads out on a luxury weekend retreat with Gods funds. I made a call to walk around the church every Tuesday night to pray for the church. In those two years only one other person joined me with my wife. One, and they were not the pastor.

Chapter 20 (The body)

Let's face it. the body does reflect the head of the church. The problem is that Jesus is not the head. The pastor is. Imagine a pastor not visiting anyone in three years. Three years!! Do you think the body visits? The pastors have their tithe taken off before they get paid. So, the body will take off the tithe after they get paid by their own free will? I know pastors that have preached against the very things they do. Yet, a church body is a lot like its pastor. I think Jesus designed it that way. We are supposed to follow our spiritual leader. Maybe we are not acting like the body of Christ for a reason?

You see, Jesus is the head of the church. He is the head of man and woman for that matter. When Jesus departed, he left the Spirit to run the church through Christians. What if the Christians stop acting like Jesus? It begs me to think the Spirit is gone. How is that possible? I have asked three pastors in my life time to make me a list to pray weekly for them. I was ignored each time. It would not be fair to say the Spirit is gone. I could say that the filling of the Spirit is minimal. Is there a reason for that?

What happens to a pastor that is not prayed for? What happens to a body that does not pray? In one church our prayer team was reduced to a broom closet. It's true. Why are prayer meetings sparsely attended? The passion for the Spirit is missing. A dare says this and I'm trying hard not to be cyclical. If a pastor makes the Spirit a priority, then the Spirit makes him a priority. I get that. Do you think God makes the pastor a priority just because men ordained him or her? I wonder if that is it. Men made you a priority so you made men a priority, not the Spirit.

What I'm getting at is this. The body of Christ begins at its head. It's the person at the head that counts. The body of Christ will only go as far as the head will. For starts, I have never preached something I don't do or believe in. I always wanted to be real from the pulpit. I could

Chapter 20 (The body)

be a head of a church, yet we are stronger together. Sure, there is a leader. Yet, the church is the body. What the body acts like should reflect Jesus as its head. How are you representing Christ in the body?

I feel one of the problems is size. Throughout this book I have disputed the intentions of the pastoral. Why do so much to grow your church size? To be sustainable? Yet, the body of Christ is not doing well. Hardly anyone feels the desire to tithe. Hardly anyone is reading their Bibles. Who visits the poor? Who takes care of the widows or those in prison? To be honest, we have discarded those ministries to charities that are not even Christian.

A body of believers should be family. A family of 300? We have it in our heads that 200 is better than 70. In God's world is that true? God always joins a few good people together. Ask Gideon, The 12 disciples, or David's 37 men. Even Moses made a group of 70 elders to judge. Why so small when God is so big? I believe it's because God knows us. We don't do well in big numbers. Why do people say they miss the old days? We were a small community in the old days.

I heard this saying the other day "if you're not advancing your probably retreating." I suspect deep down that is the church philosophy. Bigger, better, faster, more. Yet, throughout Gods history is time. A ton of time. So many have concluded the first 12 chapters of Genesis are incomplete. Possibly that is all God needed to say. Either way, we have so little in the first half of the Bible timeline. What if God took his time? What if it was about growing people more than getting to the finish line. Maybe a big God is not that concerned with being bigger.

Chapter 20 (The body)

Did you notice that it appears God rushed to the Abraham era? Actually, the opposite is true. We have a varied timeline from Adam to Abraham of (argued) somewhere between 4,000 to 2,000 years. Who knows? That is going slow. Then God slows it down even more to one tribe, one man (Abraham). God is in no rush. However, all I have heard in my church years is time is short or speeding up to the second coming. The pulpit screams you better get with it. you better get moving fast Jesus will be here any day now. Yet, it's been over 2,000 years since Jesus died. God is in no rush, but we certainly are.

How could church be unique in this crazy fast paced society we live in? Slow down! We are entrusted with people. Jesus could have tried to reach thousands in three years. He did but he could have reached far more. Instead, he reached 12 men. He reached to a handful of others like Martha and Zacchaeus. The church has touched many lives over the centuries. Yet, by population it's been a small number. God is in no hurry. This new idea of faster, better, bigger, more needs to take a pill. The church needs to slow down. The body is not that healthy. Take the time to nourish them not run them ragged.

Within the Bible are many verses about a healthy body. We all know it's double minded. Our body is a temple. Jesus said his temple must be killed and a new will rise. It all points to the breaking down of what was and building towards something new. A new body of God believers must be built. However, Jesus spends a ton of time concentrating on the here and now. He works on Peter. He works on Martha and the woman at the well. They will build his physical church. They will be his body.

I just finished writing a small study on Joshua 10. What I noticed is that there is a lesson to be gained from Joshua 6-10. They needed to involve God in their lives. When they did it went

Chapter 20 (The body)

well. When they tried to do it on their own it went poorly. Yet, another story crept into my study. It is the parable in Luke 12 about the barns. What do we store up and covet just like Achan did in Joshua? What distracts us? Is it success, gold or God? I suspect we can't gather people in a bigger barn and remain faithful to God. The Bible screams it's true. The bigger you gather the more mess you will make. This body of Christ is a group of people. I don't care if they call it a church or denomination. How do you measure greatness? How do we measure success? Is it storing up more people in a bigger church barn? Or, is it the quality of the people in the barn?

1 Samuel 16:7 *"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

We roll our eyes. Of course, you will quote this verse. How many sermons have I heard on this verse? It's a good one. One of the biggest downfalls of this current generation will be disregarding the past. Disregarding tradition and habits. You can try all you want but you can't change two things. Human tendencies and history repeating itself. The heart of any church is reflected in the leadership. What does it say if the people don't pray or give like they should? Possibly, the leadership is not that healthy either?

There are also two church tendencies you can never change. One is pastoral power. They will never play second fiddle to the congregation. Secondly, is keeping the body at bay. A body of Christ that moves is a dangerous thing. It creates food banks and prison ministries. It changes healthcare and slavery. Comb through your church histories. Leadership has always opposed the outgoing Christian. There is a very good reason why most famous ministry is birthed outside the church. Pastors will never play second fiddle to passion greater than theirs.

Chapter 20 (The body)

I don't care that every church has a pastor. Really, I don't. Every McDonalds has a manager too. Is church a pastor? Is it a denomination? Is it the Spiritual world? How would you define the body of Christ? Is Hillsong Brian Houston? I pick that name because many of you might say who? Many of you know Hillsong music. Do you know the pastor? I will give them credit. They took one thing and they did really well and exploited it. That body has moved the world.

What is First Baptist Church in Atlanta known for? They are probably more known for their pastor Charles Stanley. How about Billy Graham? We all know him but do we know his church? Instead, we know the south Baptist emergency response team. We know his radio programs and crusades. We know Samaritans purse and the north American missions board. I could go on and on. A church could be famous but I hope not. Instead, their body should be famous.

What is the body? Yes, I know I keep asking that. The body of Christ keeps making the world a better place. J Vernon McGee left the church to spread the gospel on radio. Billy Graham left the church to evangelize the world. Did they rebuke or denounce their home church? No! In reality their church trained them to expand who they are. Yes, of course, there is division. Some church leaders don't want a rock star congregation. However, when they do, all heaven breaks loose on the earth. Drop-in centers arise. The Salvation army grows.

This is my point on the body. Church is the rock. It always has been. Peter was never flashy. He was more or less a no-nonsense guy. To him just fish. Just be the messiah. Can't you see Peter being not that keen on complicated church. Keep it simple stupid. I can see that in all the New Testament writers. Stick to the basics. That is church. I get that. We need to be grounded. Yet, the body needs exercise. To be a solid rock it must be strong. It must exercise the word all over the place to be healthy.

Chapter 20 (The body)

So, we send them out. I wonder if Jesus sent out the twelve just to get their feet dirty. You know what happens when a church sits too long. They start to keep their feet clean. They get a little fat. Then the barn starts to fill. The attendance rises. The money flows. I just think Jesus was not dumb. Sending them out keeps the church lean and mean. To reach the world first you have to live as they lived. Duh, it's the Jesus rule. Keep a little dirt on your feet.

The body of Christ must move. Their gifts and talents must be exercised. If you read on Billy Graham, you will notice that he was restless. He had to extend himself beyond the church walls. I bet Hillsong was the same way. William Carey was restless too. He desired to reach India. It's too bad that all these people met church resistance. A. B. Simpson, founder of the missionary alliance was restless too. He expanded his mission and refused to be a church. He desired to see the body move. I'm betting he resisted becoming a denomination directly because he knew what church would do to the body.

I don't want to pick on pastors. They were brought up to do church a certain way. A way that has maintained a certain look and feel for many years. How could they change? Has change ever entered their minds? Yet, the fact remains, some sort of change is needed. We as a church body are stagnant. I see it so well in the few church plants I have attended. They have a program that is cookie cutter. They have a system that models modern church. It looks fresh but it's still the same old. Drop the idea of begging for money at the end of a service. Serve the people and then go home. If your church congregation does not have the passion to give, Houston you have a problem. Drop begging for people to serve on Sunday. If your church congregation does not desire to serve on Sunday, Houston you have a problem. The change? Start exploring your congregation's gifts and passions outside of Sunday. That will inevitably solve Sunday's giving

Chapter 20 (The body)

and serving issues. Passion desires to give and serve. Dead souls don't desire to give and serve until they are begged to.

I had mentioned a few times a friend who was weary of church. He has told me often "Patrick, what makes you think a new church won't become old church?" He is bang on. It will if we don't move away from what we know. Preaching is good. serving on Sunday is good. We still need those things. Yet, throughout history the body has always found a way to move out from the church. Why? It's because, far too often it's been met with church resistance. Who encourages the congregation to explore their passion for Christ outside of Sunday?

It comes down to this. I also mentioned a pastor's wife who is utterly paranoid about money. As many pastorals are. She always says "give but make sure you give to the tithe first." That is church. Make sure you maintain church before you do anything else. The sheep are to maintain the shepherds first. Oddly enough we have strange and consistent history. Sheep always wander. Did you notice that? Congregations will leave looking for a good fit. Possibly, if the church started endorsing and empowering the body to exercise itself outside the church walls, it might maintain church inside those walls? Why didn't I think of that?