

# ***What does it mean to be the Body of Christ IN the world, FOR the world, FOR the glory of God?***

By Paul Richard

## ***What does it mean to be the body of Christ...***

The body of Christ is the Church, the visible expression of the kingdom of God on earth, living and proclaiming the message of the incarnate Son of God. As he was in the world, so are we, the church, to be in the world. These are first of all, those who claim the salvific death of Christ for themselves and subsequently are followers of Christ. These people are on the journey of moving from selfish, individualistic living to loving God, loving one another and loving their neighbors. The Body of Christ seeks to manifest the life of Christ as the community of those who believe in Christ.

## ***...IN the world, FOR the world?***

Incarnational ministry. The Church, the body of Christ, must be a visible, tangible, relational presence in the community in which it lives. In order to really understand this, it is necessary to reflect on the biblical theme of Emmanuel – God with us. This is not a passing fancy of God's nor is it some mere theological concept. It is at the center of who God is and the passion of his heart. God wants to be with us and wants us to be with him. Throughout the scriptures this theme is revealed. Indeed, it is with this lens that the scriptures must be understood. For without understanding this aspect of God's character – that he wants to be with us and wants us to be with him – we misunderstand the message of the scriptures, the incarnation and the gospel.

Even as early as in the Garden of Eden when God goes seeking after his straying creation, this is his motive. Throughout the history of Israel, God desired to dwell among his people. And with the birth of Jesus, "God became flesh and dwelt among us." In Jesus' prayer in John 17, he asks the father that those that have been given to him would be with him to see his glory. In John 14 he goes to prepare a place for us, so that when he comes again he will take us to be with him so that we can be where he is. And in Revelation 21 this comes to a beautiful climax:

See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them,  
They will be his peoples  
And God himself will be with them.

Incarnational ministry will have this same character to it. As God wants to be with us, so we want to be with those God leads us to, because he wants to be with them through us. Incarnational ministry is about dwelling among the people. Our

sinfulness leads us to places where we feel safe and among people who will not threaten us or who are different from us. But as God transforms us, we allow God to lead us to unfamiliar places and people. God begins to put the Emmanuel principle in us and we want to be with others.

Incarnational ministry is not just a concept or a performance of ministry to people outside of God's grace. These, who were once so far from us, now become people who are our friends whom we desire to be with, as God desires to be with them.

**...FOR the glory of God?**

For me the best definition of the glory of God comes from Exodus 34. Moses asks for God to reveal his glory to him, and God does! And the revelation of God's glory is not a vision of the splendor of God in light unimaginable. Rather the glory of God is his character. And this is the glory of God:

The Lord, the Lord,  
the compassionate and gracious God,  
slow to anger;  
abounding in steadfast love  
and faithfulness.

What does it mean to be the body of Christ for the glory of God? It means to do the work that we have been called to in a way that is consistent with the glory of God. More and more I am coming to realize that *what* I do vocationally or recreationally or whatever, is far less important than *how* I do it. I think this is equally the case for the body of Christ. God will lead us to the activities on which we should focus our energies. *How* we do this work to which we have been called must be a primary consideration because it is in the *how* that we reveal that glory of God.

We cannot just do "Christian" things; this will not necessarily reveal the glory of God. Whatever we do must be done in uniquely Christian ways. The apostle Paul's "whatever" theology is helpful here:

So, whether you eat or drink, or **whatever** you do, do everything for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

And **whatever** you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. **Whatever** your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:22-24)

One of the most important aspects for the Church to reveal the glory of God is its unity. Jesus prayed for us to live as one as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. If there is no unity, though we do Christian things, our effectiveness is significantly diminished and what we do is no longer done in the glory of God.

Those who claim Jesus for their own, who recognize that it is He alone who has delivered them from a life of self-destruction from the Church, the body of Christ. This body does not separate itself from the world, but continues to live in and among the world revealing the glory of God in all they do.