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Discipleship and the Body Dynamic

by Dan Trygg

What is meant by “the body dynamic”? How does it work? Why is it important?

In a nutshell, **when we speak of the body dynamic, we are referring to the interrelatedness of individuals in the church of Jesus Christ**, and the impact that this interdependency has on all the people involved.

It is important to understand that *this is an objective reality*. In other words, it is a fact, something that exists whether we feel it, believe it, or not. I Cor. 12:12-31 is the most in-depth exposition of this truth. Paul describes how when we were converted, we were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ (vs. 13).

**This spiritual body consists of many individual members, or parts, which,
although they are all different from each other,
are interrelated,
interdependent,
and
together comprise the entire body.**

Understanding this concept can bring us great personal freedom, as well as showing us the great personal responsibility we have for ourselves and for each other.

It is important to recognize that **this body dynamic is at work all of the time**, whether we are passively oblivious to it, ...or whether we are actively putting it to work. I believe that throughout church history, from the third century until the present time, most Western Christians have been of the former mindset, ...or shall we say “lack of mindset”..., regarding the body concept. **God meant for the body to be a very active ministering community, ...a place where members are choosing to be responsible to help each other grow** (Heb. 3:12,13; 10:24,25; 12:15,16), ...a family where every member is valued, loved, protected, nurtured, and encouraged to mature and become a responsible contributor both to the family and to the larger society (Eph. 2:19). In contrast, however, most of us in the United States have been raised in a culture that esteems individualism, privacy, self-determination, personal rights and independence. It is hard for us to see that **we can no longer completely cling to such individualistic values if we are to participate actively in the kingdom of God**. Paul said that we are not our own, we have been bought with a price (I Cor. 6:19,20). *We are not* masters of our own destiny any more, ...at least, not if we are following Jesus. **We belong to Christ, ...and He has made us into a new humanity** (Eph. 2:11-16), **members one of another** (Rom. 12:5). What you do affects me; and what I do (or don't do) affects you (I Cor. 12:26; cf. I Cor. 5:1-6). We are in this thing together. We are bound together (Rom. 12:5; Col. 2:19). Therefore, out of love for you, and love for Christ's body, and even out of a healthy self-love, I long for you to be established in Christ. I long for you to be healthy. In fact, **if I am to be at maximum, you must be healthy**.

One of the greatest needs of our time is for men and women to take seriously this interrelationship of life in the body of Christ, and begin to hold

one another accountable, ...to become “holy meddlers” and “agitators of the brethren”..., so that the body at large might be healthy and strong (cf. Heb 10:24,25; 12:15,16; I Thess. 5:14,15).

This is an active, volitional approach. This is aggressively applying, in practical terms, what Jesus and Paul said the community was all about.

The fact that we are members of a spiritual organism has *significant* implications for discipleship.

First of all, we are *not* to be producing “Christian clones” in the discipling process. *We are made to be unique* (Rom. 12:4-6; I Pet. 4:10).

To obscure, or fail to understand and develop, our personal distinctiveness in the body of Christ is to condemn us to perpetual frustration, and to rob the body of our true spirit-led, God-ordained contribution.

As disciplers, we are to be *constantly* watching for and encouraging the individual strengths and giftedness of those we work with. Their abilities will probably be different than our own, so we must continually seek to understand and appreciate all the roles and functions in the body of Christ in order to help direct our disciples toward their own fulfillment. We must steer away from teachings that define the mature Christian too narrowly. We must be prepared to convey the vision of the delightfulness of knowing Jesus, teach the general biblical parameters that are involved in the pursuit of Him, and share from our own experiences in order to encourage and assist our disciples in their own walk with God. It is essential, however, that we resist imposing narrow particulars of lifestyle or ministry that may conflict with God’s call upon this loved one entrusted to our care.

Secondly, it is *impossible* to escape the fact of our interrelatedness. Any discipleship program that does not take this objective reality into account will inevitably fall short in its training. *We are made to be in relationship with one another* (Eph. 2:22; 4:6). It is what we are designed for.

Our destiny is to be found somehow in relationship to the body at large (cf. I Cor. 12:15,16,20,21; Eph. 4:16).

To overlook this, or to ignore it as “not my responsibility”, is to steer people away from their God-intended place in Christ’s body. It is also to rob them of one of the most effective tools that God has given us to facilitate growth and maturity, the dynamic of the other members of the body impacting their lives (Eph. 4:11-16).

The “Lone Ranger Christian” is a contradiction in terms! The isolated pilgrimage was never God’s intention. Certainly, there are legitimate “seasons” where we may be called apart by the Lord to walk in solitude. It is vital, however, to see these as temporary. **Ultimately, God desires us to be in a giving and receiving relationship with others in Christ. How else could it be possible for the world to see that we love one another, unless we interact with each**

other (Jn. 13:34,35)?

This need for a body interrelatedness is only common sense, practical wisdom that we already live by in other areas of our lives. We don't attempt to be experts in every area. We recognize others' gifts, skills, and abilities and employ them at times. The old adage that "a physician who attempts to treat himself has a fool for a patient" carries over to our spiritual lives. Just as there are times when it is physically impossible for a surgeon to operate on himself, I believe we must also recognize the need to receive ministry from others in the body. Even our best efforts will not yield the desired results.

Thirdly, we must come to grips with the fact that the discipling process must be happening with *all* who are members of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12,13).

Was not this Jesus' mandate (Matt. 28:19,20)? **We must take responsibility for every other member, as God gives us grace and opportunity** (Heb. 12:15,16). Obviously, I'm not saying we have to personally be formally meeting with every other Christian. That would be a physical impossibility!

What I'm concerned with is that there are some brothers and sisters who will be overlooked, or will remain unserved and hurting, unless we purposely decide to watch out for them.

There are some who are easy to disciple. They do certain prescribed tasks or disciplines well, or they are winsome in some way or another. We find it easy to encourage or teach them. There are others, however, who are needy of the inter-shepherding of the body, but are not obviously attractive, or don't have well honed relationship skills or learning abilities. In the flesh, these people are often ignored, and fall between the cracks. Their personal fulfillment and their potential ministry in the body will go untapped, unless we specifically and consistently reach out to them in the impartial, unlimited love of Jesus.

The Bible speaks of a judgment of the sheep (Ezk. 34) where God will rebuke the fat sheep for selfishly consuming the good things of the land, while disregarding and even pushing aside the weaker sheep. This is not the Spirit of Jesus; it is the flesh, pure and simple. **We are responsible to all the other sheep in the flock of God.** As sheep, we must make way for the weak and wounded to find nourishment, comfort, and security in the flock of the Good Shepherd. As Paul said, we must bear with the failings of the weak (Rom. 15:1) and, like Christ, consider the needs of others before our own (Phil. 2:3,4). **As disciplers, we must realize that it is especially these lost and wounded ones who need our special attention** (Cf. Matt. 9:10-12; Lk. 19:10).

How does the body dynamic play a part in the life of the disciple?

It has two basic functions: building and equipping (Eph. 4:11-13).

On the side of building, a healthy body becomes a network of disciplemakers who are continually offering teaching, admonishment, encouragement and positive vision to one another (Eph 4:15,16; 5:18-21; Col. 3:12-17). Through the support system of relationships in the

body (cf. Col. 2:19), the disciple is affirmed and ministered to by others who care about him and desire to help. He is surrounded by a peer group of others in pursuit of Jesus.

This body-life offers not only emotional support, but also becomes a rich resource as he or she begins to receive ministry from others who have experienced some of the same struggles that he or she has (II Cor. 1:3-7), ...or from those who can bring the ministry of the Holy Spirit to bear on his or her life through the operation of the spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:7; I Pet. 4:10).

Not only will the disciple *hear* the truth, but he will *see* it modeled by others who have fought some of the same faith battles (e.g., Heb. 13:7,8; II Cor. 1:3-7). Such a community offers security, affirmation, and accountability.

Furthermore, there are some situations that I believe can *only* be resolved, healed, or conquered as *the body* ministers to the individual. The problem, bondage, or circumstance is too large for the person to “slug it out” on his own. I realize that all things are possible with God, yet passages like Gal. 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens...”, and I Thess. 5:14, “... encourage the timid, help the weak...”, speak of the importance of tangible, practical support for those who are struggling. *We are God’s gift to each other, the means by which His grace can be ministered to us* (Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:6; I Pet. 4:10; I Cor. 12:4-7).

In the area of equipping, the healthy church body is the safest and best environment in which to learn to do ministry. Jesus’ words, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (Matt. 10:24,25 NASB), reflect a very real dynamic, i.e., *we tend to reproduce with others the same methodology and/or values as those who trained us*. If we are in a caring church which models healthy interrelationships, “truthing in love to one another” as Paul put it (Eph. 4:15), we will learn how to positively relate with our fellow brothers and sisters. In time, we will have learned how to confront or comfort, admonish or encourage, both by being the recipient, the observer, the co-participant, and finally, the initiator of such “network building” of the body. We will have received effective teaching in a variety of styles and settings, enabling us to learn, and also giving us familiar patterns of communication to follow in sharing with others (II Tim. 1:11-14; 2:2; 3:10-4:5). We will have observed a healthy model of ministry that involves the biblical use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 14:26). We will be encouraged to see ourselves as priests of God, vessels through which He desires to manifest His kingdom in our midst and out in the world (I Pet. 2:9). With sound biblical instruction, practical insight and feedback from others, and an overall atmosphere of love and acceptance, we will begin to tune in to what the Spirit is doing within us and express it outwardly in ministry to one another in the body.