

The Criteria of Livingness - Function and Energy

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Church is the Body of Christ, with a multiplicity of functions energized by the Holy Spirit, and every member has a special purpose and place.

Scripture: Romans 12:4

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Function in the Body of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of function and energy in the Church, likening it to the human body where each part has a unique role and purpose, energized by the Holy Spirit. He explains that just as the body comprises various specialized organs, the Church consists of diverse members, each contributing to the whole in a meaningful way. Sparks highlights that every believer, upon experiencing new life in Christ, is called to express this life through their unique gifts and functions. He warns against the confusion that arises when members attempt to fulfill roles they were not designed for, stressing the importance of divine order in the Body of Christ. Ultimately, the Church is a living organism, where the life of Christ flows through each member, enabling them to work together harmoniously.

Transcript

5. Function and Energy

In a living organism like the human body these two things are so evidently characteristic of life: namely, specific function and vital energy. Of course, we refer to a normal and healthy body. As we have before pointed out, that unique definition or designation of the Church as the Body of Christ is used to show that God's material creations are intended to set forth or symbolize His spiritual thoughts. Probably in no other creation or production of God is there a more perfect concentration of the Divine mind than in the human body or organism. There could hardly be a better example of inspiration than that which led the Apostle Paul to employ this metaphor for the Church. His alone it was to so designate the Church. It is itself a feature of the Anointing to see Divine, spiritual and heavenly meanings in commonplace things. So it was with the Lord in His parables. Perhaps the fact that a physician had been Paul's close companion for so long had meant that, on their long journeys, physical matters had occupied their conversation. It was not Luke, the Physician, who gave this enlightenment, although he had all the academic knowledge. It needed Paul's "open Heaven" concerning the Church to discern this revelation of eternal thoughts as wrapped up

in the physical organism.

And so we are brought to this so obvious (when eyes are opened) truth of the Church as the Body of Christ - that is, function and energy.

In the medical and surgical world there are many specialists. There are specialists for eyes, heart, ear, nose, throat, lungs, bones, nerves, brain, etc., thus indicating that the human body comprises many functions. Those just mentioned are but a very small number of the immense total of the functions in a single human unit. Our point is not merely that there are so many functions in the body, but that every one of the almost countless number is - in its way and place - a specialist itself. That is, it has a special purpose and special place in the body. No other faculty can fulfil just its function. Every one differs in a particular respect from the others, although so greatly dependent upon the others. There is no need for us to enlarge upon this; everybody knows that this is a fact, and no one ever tries to make one organ do the work of another; we do not usually walk on our hands.

There is a sound and true biological basis to Paul's words concerning the organs, functions and relations of the human body as representing the Body of Christ - the corporate life of true believers.

For instance: "We have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office... having gifts differing", etc. (Romans 12:4-8).

"Now there are diversities of gifts... there are diversities of ministrations... diversities of workings... the foot... the ear... the eye... the head..." (1 Corinthians 12).

The point being made is that in the body there is a multiplicity of functions and all these are energized by one life. So in the Body of Christ there are a great variety of faculties and functions, every one of which is energized by the Holy Spirit of life.

Faculty Demands Relatedness

The first thing that the Apostle would have believers know is that every member of Christ should express the life in some particular way. The Holy Spirit forms the Body, and just as God's vast and profound wisdom is concentrated in the physical body with its marvellous system of related faculties, so it is in a spiritual way with the Body of Christ, the true Church. No part, however small, is without meaning. It is to the Church's loss that this truth has been so much lost to sight. Every Christian who has had an experience of 'new birth', or really coming into 'newness of life', knows that such an experience is accompanied by a new sense of purpose; a consciousness of being alive with a meaning, a feeling of vocation; something has got to be done about it. The infinite wisdom of the Creator has included the smallest part of the body in purpose. Not one infinitesimal part is without meaning. Abnormalities or subnormalities, excesses or deficiencies, there may be, but this does not argue against the main truth. Included in the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 is the word "helps". The Apostle spoke of those that helped him, and he appealed to believers that they might be helpers together (with him) by their prayers. What a lot of things can be included in that title "helps"! And what an explanation of the millions of little corpuscles in the human body, all busy, all contributing, all 'helping' with a sense of purpose. If the Spirit of Life is really Lord in the Body, and every member is rightly adjusted, there will be a wonderful working according to purpose. It will be spontaneous, not artificial. We shall find that a certain 'bent', disposition, mindedness, constraint, or urge will work out in our knowing what our work or 'gift' is. We shall find that the Lord is with us along a certain line and that we are at rest in that.

There is a Holy Spirit sovereignty in this. The Scripture is "dividing to each one severally as he wills". There is nothing more profitable and blessed than this order of life in the body of Christ, just as there is nothing more unhappy and confusing when any member gets into a false place and tries to do what it was never meant to do. That is the difference between organization and organism. In organization people are chosen and appointed to position and work by the judgment and will of men. In an organism the function is manifest and obvious before appointment; indeed appointment has taken place before men act upon it. We - with all our doctrine of the Church - have still to learn the fundamental principles of the Divine organism. Neither by popular vote nor by human selection can it be formed and made to function. Choice of functioning members is never left to the discretion of men. We only come into the fellowship and functioning of this Body of Christ through the gift of spiritual life, and not into the gift of spiritual life through fellowship in the Body. A member and a faculty of the human body comes into being only through the life of the body. It is not given to any function or organ to have life in itself; it is the life of the whole body which gives it its meaning. Its life is not inherent but derived.

Nevertheless, the members themselves are meant to be each a life-centre. The Church - or a local church - is not a congregation, an assembly of individuals. It is the drawing together into vital union of those who have already received the grace and gifts of the new life, and the spontaneous expression of that grace in fellowship. Life must manifest itself! Vital function is the expression of vital force, the force of "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus".

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