



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Understanding the Church, Part 5**

### **Broken and Spilled Out**

According to the Bible we must do more than simply allude to Scripture.

Mark 14:9, “Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

What is it that this woman did that must be spoken about?

Christ was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper<sup>1</sup> a week prior to the crucifixion, when during a conversation, Mary took a very costly perfume of pure nard, broke it, anointed Christ’s head and feet, and then wiped the excess off with her hair.<sup>2</sup>

What Mary did obviously was controversial. The disciples, led by Judas, practically revolted<sup>3</sup> because it was not only very expensive perfume but the feet were also synonymous with sin! The fact that Mary seemingly wasted such a valuable possession on something so dirty was considered a crime!

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Mark 14:3

<sup>2</sup> Compare Mark 14:3 and John 12:3

<sup>3</sup> Compare John 12:4-5 and Mark 14:4-5

And yet, Mary's act was a foretaste of a greater "crime" about to be committed, the time when God took His most valuable possession, Jesus Christ, broke Him and spilled out His blood for the sake of the sinner and "wasted" Him on something far worse than our feet! Indeed! We are called to speak of Mary's offering not only to honor this sister, BUT because her act was the epitome of what the Kingdom of God is all about: God pouring His Son out for the sinner and Christ sacrificing Himself for you and me.

And we are to do the same. John wrote these words:

1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Truly according to Romans 14:17 the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking; i.e., it is not about our

- Pleasure.
- Wants.
- Needs.
- Fun.
- Fulfillment.
- Ambitions.

The Kingdom of God is about living according to the righteous standard of God. It is living according to a standard which demands love on the part of the body of Christ for one another! To do this is to know "peace and joy!"

That is why the first step toward apostasy that any child of God could take is closing their heart when it comes to caring for the body of Christ!

1 John 3:17, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

From this we conclude that the Last Judgment will not revolve around

- How many quiet times you had in life.
- How moved you were when you worshipped.
- The number of sins you committed or didn't commit in life.
- If you were "right" when it came to your eschatological view.
- How much money you placed in the offering.
- How your children turned out.
- The quality of your marriage.

BUT your care of the poor, weak, and helpless in the body.

Matthew 25:34-40, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto

me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Quite frankly this is rather surprising. How is it that THE measure of our piety as believers is our care for the brethren?

It is on account of everything we’ve seen thus far in this study. Indeed, the church is a distinct people to whom God has bound Himself for His glory and their good. As such we hold a special place in the heart of God. He has done and will do anything to protect and preserve us in Christ. The church transcends the ages such that when we consider the people of God we speak of them in terms of

- My people.
- Israel.
- Church.
- Temple.
- Vine.
- Bride.

All are one in the same.

As the special people of God, the church factors into the climax of world history. The day is coming when Christ shall return for the purpose of consummating His relationship with His bride, the church. On that day, time and eternity will stop as we participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb! Until then we are to have the same love for the body as does Christ! Truly to grow cold here is to grow cold in our love for the Lord!

And yet practically what does all of this mean? How do we embody the principles we have learned thus far?

We began to answer that question as we considered a series of passages all addressing the *so what* of our study. As we approach this topic, don’t be surprised if you find that you fall way short of the Biblical calling. That’s inevitable; we’re sinners. Accordingly, don’t let the following points condemn you. Rather let it encourage you and inspire you as to where you and I want to be in the coming weeks, months, and years. This is the living inspired by grace.<sup>4</sup>

## **A Redefined Understanding of Family**

The knowledge of the Covenant Community ought to redefine our understanding of our family.

Matthew 12:49-50, “And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Titus 2:11-12

When Christ said that His immediate family now included any who did His will, He extended the definition of “family” to include the body of Christ. And so just as it would be unthinkable to neglect an immediate family member; in fact Paul said this:

1 Timothy 5:8, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

The thought of forsaking any in the body is unthinkable. We are a family. Just as you

- Put up with your family members.
- Extend them unconditional love and acceptance.
- Are not willing to live alienated from them, but rather labor and hope for their good

Nothing less is expected of you when it comes to this body. We are the forever family of God!

### **Self-Sacrifice is Normal**

In the Covenant Community self-sacrifice for the good of others is normal.

Romans 9:3, “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:”

When we considered this shocking statement of Paul, as impossible as this is, (if you are in Christ you never could be separated from Him or accursed) we noticed that he uses an imperfect middle to express a wish that if possible he personally would long for.

In fact such a sacrifice Moses not only was willing to make, he actually prayed for it! Following the incident of the Golden Calf this was Moses prayer:

Exodus 32:32, “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.”

In other words, Moses is saying, “let me be accursed!”

How is it that Moses and Paul “could wish themselves accursed” for someone else? How is it that they both were willing, if it were possible, to be condemned?

It was possible because Paul and Moses were not talking about foreigners, but family members.

Romans 9:3, “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

I argued last time that such love and compassion for the non-believer is hard to fathom as sinners. But for a family member; that’s a different story!

Let me ask you if it were possible, would you be willing to be damned if it meant the salvation of your children? How about your mom and dad?

Do you know what we conclude about Paul here?

This verse tells us more about how Paul viewed his Jewish brethren than Paul's commitment to the Lord (which I'm certainly not questioning). Truly, the idea of perishing for a loved one, near and dear to our heart is not unthinkable. That Paul was willing to so suffer indicates that he took seriously the claim that the body of Christ is a family. Leon Morris wrote, that "the expression brings out Paul's deep concern for his fellow-Jews."<sup>5</sup> Dr. John Murray said this:

"The intensity of the apostle's love for his own people is hereby disclosed. It is love patterned after the love of the Saviour who was made a curse and sin for the redemption of men (cf. Galatians 3:13; II Corinthians 5:21)."<sup>6</sup>

John Calvin added this:

"It was, therefore, proof of the most fervent love that Paul did not hesitate to call on himself the condemnation which he saw hanging over the Jews, in order that he might deliver them."<sup>7</sup>

And so the Biblical standard when it comes to the church and its love for one another is nothing less than a selfless, self-sacrificing love for the body. Of Paul, Moses and Christ were willing to be accursed for the sake of their brethren ought not you to be willing at least to

- Give up one day in seven and use it to honor God and build up the body?
- Come to a gathering of the church and NOT measure its success based on how much you got out of it?
- Take your focus off your needs and wants and place them on the needs and wants of those in our midst?

Such sacrifice for the sake of the body in other generations used to be normal and it must be again!

## **Not Neglecting or Forsaking**

The Covenant Community ought not to be neglected or forsaken.

1 Timothy 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

I just referenced this passage in connection with our first point. Failure to care for this body-, failure to

- Regard the weak and hurting in our midst.
- Come here with the longing and desire to worship God AND bless the body.
- Give yourself away to another here this morning.

is an indication of an unhealthy soul.

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (March 1988), ISBN-10: 0802836364, page 347

<sup>7</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (February 1997), ISBN-10: 0802843417, page 4

Think of it! Gentiles — pagans — take care of their own. To neglect any in the body of Christ is to evidence a heart more cold than an unbeliever. Truly if we are a healthy body, the thought of forsaking it is an anathema!

## **Encourage to Grow in Grace**

The Covenant Community places a high value on encouraging the body unto its growth in grace.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Galatians 6:1-2, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

The words used in these passages all speak of the obligation, calling, and so the path of blessing for each and every one of us. To stimulate one another to love and good deeds carries the idea of prodding, poking, imploring, encouraging, and challenging one another to love and serve the Lord in the various and sundry contexts of life. Bearing one another’s burdens speaks not of tolerating another person’s weakness, but helping them carry the burdens of their life. Visiting the orphans and widows carries the idea of caring for others, exercising oversight on their behalf, and of helping them in whatever way is needed.<sup>8</sup> In fact the root term is used of the work of pastoral care in which a shepherd draws near to an individual in order to help, strengthen, and encourage them.<sup>9</sup>

From these exhortations it is obvious that the “work of service” which “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16) is the work of

- Drawing near to an individual.
- Discovering their needs.
- And then helping out in whatever way is beneficial to another’s faith.

One must see that this is NOT the work of the godly or the pastor alone. RATHER, this is expected to be the work of ALL in Christ. To do anything less, as we have seen, is to take the first step down the road to apostasy.

## **Vulnerability of the Hurting and Needy**

The Covenant Community requires vulnerability on the part of the hurting and needy.

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<sup>8</sup> The word visit comes from the same root word that is rendered overseer or bishop. επισκεπτομαι episkeptomai is from the root επισκοπος episkopos Compare also Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7; and 1 Peter 2:25

<sup>9</sup> Compare Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 15:14; Hebrews 2:6

Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.”

Philippians 4:14, “Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.”

Philippians 4:17, “Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

This verse reflects an understanding on the part of Paul as to how his need related to the kingdom of God. Accordingly, let me ask you a question: When it came to Christ's Kingdom work, what was the cause of Paul's rejoicing here?

It wasn't the Philippians' gift! Rather, it was when the "concern" of the Philippians matured or came to fruition.

Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished<sup>10</sup> again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.”

The word *flourish* is a botanical metaphor used in reference to the unfolding of a flower or the leafing out of a tree after winter. In essence, Paul says that ON ACCOUNT OF HIS NEED the Philippians had blossomed in their concern for him and thus their maturation in Christ had advanced. And it was this that caused Paul to rejoice greatly in the Lord.

From this we see an important aspect of church life: allowing our needs to be known that the body of Christ might be prompted unto love and good deeds!

As the purpose of every spiritual gift is the edification of the body<sup>11</sup> so also is God's will for the one lacking as our needs are made known to the body, the people of God are forced to make a decision:

- Will they be a shopper and so ignore one of their own?
- Will they live as a sheep and so share the love of Christ?

As the latter is the only option for a genuine body of Christ, we see that "need" in any form in the body is a catalyst unto that body's growth in grace. It should be obvious, but we're talking here about “The Ministry of Need!”

Truly, most want the showy gifts and ministries. Others are happy to settle for the less showy. But very few would want a ministry which places them in a position of need. Yet if we are a family, whom God has willed to mature in the faith, then you must see that any and all needs that you may have (your burdens) have partly been given to you that the rest of the body might help you bear them.

It therefore behooves us as a family to share our needs, relying upon the sufficiency of Christ. It behooves us to expose our underside that others might be prompted to love and good deeds. And the “strong” (which is somewhat a relative term since we all have weaknesses) must not look down upon another on account of their weakness. Rather they must view a “weaker brother” as a God-given opportunity to be a brother or sister to another.

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<sup>10</sup> ἀναθαλλῶ anathallo

<sup>11</sup> Compare 1Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10

## Elderly and Mature Minister to Young and Immature

The Covenant Community expects the elderly and mature to minister to the young and immature.

Luke 12:48, “But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.**”

We understand this verse when it comes to our gifts and talents. If I have a gift of service, I need to use that gift to the glory of God. If I have a gift of liberality, I need to use that gift to the glory of God. If I have been given the gift of teaching, helps, administration, etc, one must use all of these unto the glory of God because to whom much is given, much is required.

But what if your “gift” — and I’m not talking about spiritual gifts here, but that which would be included in Luke 12 — what if your “gift” were that of age, experience, wisdom? What is expected of me then?

One possible answer commonly given and lived out today is this:

- Hey you’ve done your time.
- You’ve paid the price.
- No longer ought you to serve the body (unless of course you want to) but as a retired individual
  - Play.
  - Enjoy the golden years.
  - Do what you want.
  - Play golf... go to the beach... whatever.
- As an older woman who has raised her kids
  - It’s your turn.
  - Now you can pursue that career.
  - Now you can go back to college and get that degree.
  - Now you can do that which most fulfills you.

Brothers and sisters, the divine commentary on this kind of living is that that is a wasted life! If God has given you wisdom and time, you have been entrusted with much and so are expected to give much.

Titus 2:1-4, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children.”

What for? So that they can golf better? NO! SO THAT THEY CAN SERVE THE BODY OF CHRIST!

It used to be that when an elderly person reached a certain age, they moved into one of the homes of their children NOT to die, BUT to bless the next generation! Now when a parent gets too old, they go to the retirement home.

In light of this, the Biblical norm when it comes to the elderly is going to seem like a manual from an alien race. By virtue of your age and walk, you have much to offer the body of Christ, and you have the



time to do it. As a result, God expects you NOT to shrink back and let the younger generation serve BUT to come along side the young, hurting, weak, and

- Serve them!
- Help them!
- Teach them!
- Bless them!

Indeed! To give yourself to “wanton pleasure,” no matter your age, is to be “dead even while you live” (1 Timothy 5:6). Because we are a family (and not an amusement park, business, or club), nothing less is to be expected!

## **Do Not Play with the Covenant Community**

The Covenant Community ought not to be “Played With.”

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

The arrogance of our age is seen today in the games that are being played with Christ’s church, whether it be in its

- Worship.
- Pulpit.
- Body life.
- Ministry.

One of the things that disturbs me most in conversations about how the church ought to function in order to meet the needs of the culture in which we live is the attitude and mentality which says, “The church belongs to our generation and we can do whatever we want with it!”

Family of God as we’ve seen that Christ is the head of the church! It is HIS bride! We do not own it! And therefore we are not free to do what we want with it in the name of ministry or relevance. From this study it should be obvious that God feels very strongly about what the church is and how it ought to function- it is His holy bride. Now this is not to say that the church ought to be a monolithic culture and so look exactly the same no matter where you go. No, there is freedom within the confines of what we are. But whatever we may think when it comes to the church, we must never forget that we are God’s family to whom Christ has bound Himself for His glory and our good.

To mess with this and so hurt the church and neglect the body is to invoke the disciplining hand of God.

## **Have You In My Heart**

So the above is what a healthy church does! Yet how will this list become more and more a part of this fellowship?

We must get each other in our hearts! One of the most personal epistles Paul wrote was his letter to the

Philippians. Of all the churches to which he ministered, he enjoyed perhaps the closest relationship with this one. We see it in Paul's statement about the Philippians security in Christ in Philippians .

Truly Paul and the Philippians enjoyed a deep and abiding love relationship with one another such that they epitomized all that we have seen this morning. Yet, how did this relationship develop? How did Paul come to be so close with this body?

Philippians 1:7, "Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace."

How did Paul and the Philippians forge the kind of church relationship exhorted in the various texts we've seen throughout this study?

They participated in and so enjoyed Christ's grace together! That means that their relationship revolved around Christ and the working of His grace in their lives, the encouraging each other in the Lord, forgiving each other as Christ had forgiven them, and sacrificing as Christ sacrificed for them.

What they had in common as believers was NOT their

- Life stage.
- Same-aged children.
- Jobs.
- Race.
- Socio-economic status.

BUT their common salvation and their longing to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. The fact that they both were sinners saved by grace! Their laboring was as a "Band of Brothers," fighting the good fight to see God's cause go forth!

So how do we live out this series on the church?

First let us know and become convinced of Christ's grace toward us. Then let us understand that each and every one here are sinners whom God is in the process of perfecting. Furthermore let us become convinced that we are family members who will spend the rest of eternity together.

Finally, let us understand that the pastoral care of this body rests NOT only with the elders, BUT with each and every one of us. So long as it is not well with someone here, we must see that it is not well with our soul!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 17, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church