

The Idolatry of Comparison

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Whatever we are as God's called-out ones, and whatever differences there are among us, we must understand our identity relative to each of us being members in particular of the body of Christ. We are individual persons making up one corporate body with Christ as our Head and as the Life of His/our body (it is, you know, first Christ's body, but also our body, the body to which we belong).

Thus, we possess a commonality, that being, that we are all members. No one is not a member. We possess that identity in common. We are all member-type people and cannot be fully understood, identified or valued except in the relationship which we have with our Head and one another.

From our evangelical roots, having "a personal relationship with Christ" had become a matter of great importance to us. It was the way we described the difference between mere intellectual assent to Christian doctrine and becoming alive in Christ Jesus through God-imparted, vital faith in Him. But though our Lord certainly does relate to us in a precious personal way, He never does so in a way inconsistent with our member identity.

So, facing up to that most fundamental truth, and while acknowledging our commonality of body membership, we are confronted with the obvious differences among us. We are all members, but we are all different members. That's what makes a body a body. We have one common life, the life of the body, our true life, Christ Himself. But we are, as such, marvelously different, and I mean marvelously.

Saints, let's get hold of this truth: we're all different, very, very different. That's what makes the body of Christ what it is. Our differences do not in any way enhance or diminish our worth. Every member is equally precious to our beloved Head, and each is absolutely essential to the function of the body. So why this tendency to compare our selves one with another and why this tendency to devalue our uniqueness when we become aware of another

member's expertise? Why are we so prone to being intimidated by the grace with which another member serves the body and God's purpose through the body?

Those are more rhetorical questions than anything else, because my purpose in asking them is not really to expose why we are thus afflicted, but to simply exhort you to STOP IT. For God's sake, STOP IT.

Seek the Lord yourself to find out why you so easily slip down the slippery slope of idolatrous comparison. Become free of not being able to fully enjoy and be edified by the experience and service of another because you're too caught up in comparing yourself with him or her.

We hear of a brother or sister given to such vivid dreams and visions that the very thought of having such experiences blows our minds and we become distracted from the marvel of Christ at work in us and how He works in us. Could it be that the special way you have of smiling at others, and the delightfully genuine way you pass out hugs is every bit as edifying to the body as those more dramatic operations?

One of the dangers of our American brand of Christianity is our tendency to acculturate the gospel to fit our celebrity obsession, our fixation on stage performance. In Christian circles we, of course, call it "the platform." What's going on on the platform just seems to us to be where the kingdom action is. We're a stage-addicted society. And we're a platform-addicted pseudo-church. If it were not for how strongly I've come to believe in the absolute sovereignty of God down to every detail of our lives, one regret I would have is that I became a platform personality at age 16.

I have heard the Spirit apply in different ways to me those words that God spoke to Peter, "call thou not common or unclean, what I have cleansed." We are so prone to dismiss as inferior all those common elements of our everyday lives. By comparison with what seems to be obviously sacred, the common stuff seems so beneath the other as to appear even unclean. But God doesn't divide our lives into the sacred and secular. It's all sacred. It's all filled with His presence and yes, His dynamic, dramatic involvement.

I've shared with brethren on a number of occasions that the Lord, in respect to my life of public ministry, has dealt with me several times in a way that is downright hilarious, and thereby made some of His points very clear in so doing. The first time, after years of building an evangelistic ministry and becoming very sought after to conduct crusades, he ordered circumstances (nothing scandalous) and subjective conditions that took me off the platform and left me selling pots and pans, door to door, to make a living.

Another time (which continues to this day at least on a part-time basis), I went from being a beloved pastor and being considered the resident theological expert to being an expert in shoe laces. I have to explain that one. You see, our family, when I was growing up, had a small wholesale leather and shoe findings business, and all we kids spent time working in it. It was a business supplying shoe repair shops and shoe stores with everything needed for the repair and care of shoes including items to enhance their comfort plus the care and maintenance of leather goods in general.

So, I've joked that I was demoted from God-expert to shoe lace expert.

And I think that had I looked closely in the Lord's face during such times of ego-jarring transition, I would have seen a twinkle of amusement in His eyes as he arranged for me not to think more highly of myself than I ought. It was so easy for me to succumb to the lament that I had been reduced to advising my shoe repair customers about the best value for their money in sole leather and which types of shoe polish and shoe laces they should stock.

Dear ones, when the Word became flesh, when God assumed our humanity in Christ Jesus our Lord, He sanctified humanness, He sanctified every aspect of our human lives. I've heard the Lord's command to take the shoes from off my feet for the ground of my humanness, just as the ground around the burning bush that confronted Moses, is holy since Jesus passed this way.

I just have to end this with the observation that both in the case of public ministry and in the shoe findings business, I've been involved in saving soles/souls and repairing heels. Little joke there folks.

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