

Spiritual Palsy

By Nathan Warner

“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.”

(Acts 9:32-34 KJV)

Palsy - “Complete or partial muscle paralysis, often accompanied by loss of sensation and uncontrollable body movements or tremors.” (Free Online Dictionary)

Palsy is a broad medical term for conditions that prevent signals from the brain from being correctly interpreted by the members of the body. A person suffering from Palsy may, for example, desire to stand up, walk to the window, or pick up a cup, but their limbs cannot obey their will – they jerk and spaz in random directions. This physical condition illustrates when the body “rebels” against the will of the head and will not carry out its instructions. It is not whole or one in its desires and actions.

When the members of the body are in harmony, every command of the will is flawlessly carried out. We see this illustrated in the grace of a dancer, the poise of an acrobat, or the skill of an athlete. When there is perfect harmony in a body, it commands the attention of those around it. When there is disharmony or disunity in a body, we call it a disease or impairment, because it impairs the natural order that is designed to keep the members working together to carry out the head’s desire.

Spastic Members of a Body

So often, believers may feel they don’t have unity with one another. We may feel we have so little in common that it’s almost impossible to spend time with each other unless it is in small-talk once a week at Church. Many times, in the awkward spaces when conversation is attempted, it may become obvious that we have little in common, and we may stick to our little circles of “like-minded” people. We may wonder how it is possible that so many different people should come together under one roof.

Our differences can sometimes create confusion and disorder. They can distract our coordination, our focus, and our surety. This in turn threatens the coordination and unity of the Body’s members, for *“the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:14-20).

For example, if the feet command that all members should touch the ground as they do, the eyes, ears, hands may be dismayed. If the whole body tried to obey the feet, then it would be contorted on the ground in painful spasms. If the feet in turn are told by the hands that they

should comb the hair or make coffee or change a light bulb, things might get kind of awkward.

This is what happens when members of the body are more focused on getting other members to follow them or be like them than accepting that God made the members for different tasks. In turn, the members may also be listening to influences outside the body. What if the heart is listening to someone else's head tell it to take a break just as its body is preparing for a marathon? What if the feet want to go to the beach, but the ankles want to go to the chiropractor; and the calves want to get pumping on a racetrack, but the knees want to find an arm chair? The body would suffer palsy, with every member seeking its own will, completely and totally uncoordinated.

When this happens in a body or group of people, the members are being influenced by their fleshly natures. For example, when a pastor puts the Word of God aside in order to draw a larger following at his church, he glories in himself at the Body's expense. It happens when members do not help other members, when needs are not met, when wealthy members refuse to associate with poor members, or when members only talk about cars, dresses, Monday mornings at work, and lampshades rather than the Word of God. When the flesh is the focus, everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6b), and the body becomes sick.

Unity in the Flesh?

But as we see in the world, a form of unity can exist in the fleshly nature. Unity in the world is often created by appealing to as many different selfish bents as possible. "What are you going to do for me?" is always the cry, or "How is this going to benefit me?" By promoting the flesh, compromising and tolerating sin, wicked men try to create cohesive units of people mired in their own desires but animated for a common goal that will deliver them their fleshly desires. It works by directing their energies against the things that stand in the way of the fleshly desires being fulfilled. The world has always operated this way, but we have certainly seen how effective this is in the last few years, when appealing to the flesh draws all men to political parties, causes, organizations, and beliefs. We see that it is easy to gain supporters if you promise sinful men all the desires of their sinful hearts. "You want other people to pay for your lifestyle? Sure, we can give you that. You want free abortions? Vote for us, and we'll force the people standing against you to back down. You want to be able to extort legally? We can find a way to help you do that." By appealing to the lusts of the flesh, mankind draws all men under his banner, welcoming people onto the foundation of sin, not realizing that "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23a). Any unity that exists apart from God leads to death.

Unity in the Church

As we shall see, unity in the true Church is never created by unifying around the flesh, but the flesh still animates the members at times. This is often the case, because the flesh defines so much of our existence here. Perhaps it's personas, legacies, personalities, or careers. We all have tastes and preferences where our physical natures interact with the physical world. We have different experiences in our lives that shape our views about "how things work" out there in the world and in God's Kingdom. Our interests and work are vastly different. Some of us are practical and some dreamers. Sometimes we get caught up defining ourselves as the world defines and sees us: scientists, craftsmen, musicians, writers, doctors, etc. Sometimes we can be trapped in how the Church sees us: missionaries, pastors, organists, and seat-warmers. We get so

caught up in our alter-egos that we lose sight of how God sees us.

We may have different backgrounds when it comes to how we view prophecy, free-will, predestination, baptism, and statements of faith. We may even show allegiance to certain teachings. All of these things can cause disunity and contention if stood upon, *“for it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ’”* (1 Corinthians 1:11-12). How can we have unity if we have such different inspirations? How do we live as one body if we are living separate lives – lives defined by the world and the flesh? What happens when we are so focused on these other signals that we are numb to the signals coming from the Head? Are we suffering spiritual palsy?

The Head of the Body

“We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

(Ephesians 4:15b-16)

The truth is, the things we allow to control us have so little to do with God. These worldly and fleshly affairs matter little from the perspective of an eternal, spiritual God. As such, they should not matter to us. He does not measure our worth by the Earthly things that we do – our success and accomplishments, our divergent interests, our disagreeing tastes, or our intellectual endeavors that so often consume our eyes. His gaze is on the motives of our heart and the deeds it carries out in the body. God values the things we often spend so little time sharing with one another. If this is what matters to Him, should it not be what matters to us too? God weighs what is eternal inside of us – what will last beyond the grave for all time. The sum of that weight leads either to Heaven or to Hell.

Whether we believe it or not, our eternal weight is bound up entirely in one thing and one thing only – Jesus Christ. He alone is Life. Anything other than Him leads to death. He tips the scale to Life for each of us who puts our faith in Him and obeys Him as Lord. In His eyes, we are not defined by the needs of the Body or the necessities we seek from the world – we are defined by the spirit that motivates us. Is it Jesus or the *“prince of this world”* (John 12:31)? If we are Believers, we are defined by Christ Jesus – who He is, His nature, what He did for us, and what He has promised He will do.

Our foundation is nothing other than the Word of God, which tells us He was born of a virgin, was crucified, was dead and buried, was resurrected, and now sits on the right hand of the Father being given all glory and power in Heaven and on Earth, and He will return for all those that trust in Him and rule the Earth. This is our identity, our foundation. Jesus is what we need to be tuned to – to sense the signals when they come commanding us to action that will glorify and serve our Heavenly Father – action that leads to Life.

If we agree with the Scriptures as our authority, then there is no room for division where Jesus is concerned. *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1 Corinthians 1:13) Paul chose to focus on the one thing that could not be disagreed over – the one thing that was worth standing on and the only sure foundation: Jesus Christ: *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and*

my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The foundation here is Jesus Christ by the power of God. This alone is the foundation that defines who we are. Only in Christ can we have unity, by being in the Word and in prayer, by seeking the conviction of His Holy Spirit in our lives, by repenting of our sins and putting to death our fleshly nature.

When we spend our time and our energy in life on the things of the world and the flesh, the harmony of God’s Life in our lives is interrupted, because we are not living in the Spirit. The result is spastic, convulsive lives with each member busily activating themselves for their own desires. These desires, if not God’s desires, lead only to death. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other”* (Galatians 5:17). When we are focused on the workings of the world and the needs of the flesh, we are unstable in our ways and easily *“tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes”* (Ephesians 4:14b)... *“for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Romans 8:13). Here we see that it is not by appealing to the flesh that Unity exists in the Body of Christ. It is not through tolerance and acceptance that the Body grows. *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4b).

Paul reminds us though that *“from now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer”* (2 Corinthians 5:16). In order to have unity in the Body, we must not regard anyone in a fleshly way. We must put aside the things that are not Christ. Any other allegiances or impulses in the members threaten to interrupt the grace, poise, and skill of the Body’s work. We should take care to examine ourselves and our motives if we are creating controversy, debate, or disagreement, which can unsettle and distract the other members of the Body from listening to the Head. We must ask the Holy Spirit to search the intents of our heart and convict us if we have stepped off our foundation in Jesus. There will always be differences between us on any number of things, and we can share these differences with one another if they are shared in love and not added to our Head. The only sure and eternal Foundation that will endure the quakes and storms of life, is Christ and Christ alone.

To have unity, one with another, we must lay *“aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:1-2).