

Know Christ – by Knowing His Body, Part 1

Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields

Abstract: we recently talked about our highest quest in life – to *really* know God and Jesus. This message explains an often forgotten part of that picture: how Jesus takes so personally how we treat His Body. We pray this message will help you see other believers like you never have before – especially those NOT part of your congregation.

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Short announcement first: For those of you who have received tapes of these messages, **I now can send cd's of these messages to you instead, if you prefer.** Please let me know which you prefer.

I recently laid the groundwork for this topic in a sermon on Paul's statement, even after *almost 30 years after he had met Christ and been taught personally by Him*, that his lifelong quest was *still* to come to *know* God – “...that I may **KNOW Him..**” he said (**Philippians 3:10**). Paul saw it as a lifelong quest! **You** and I have *also* been given an opportunity to come to know God now! What a high calling that is! Seize it, and add a big “thank you” to God.

Most sermons and articles I've seen about “knowing God” have to do with how we can know *Christ*, the Head of His Body, the church. They say next to nothing about **my question today: HOW can we possibly claim to know the Head of the Body – Christ Himself – unless we understand how important it is to also love, accept, forgive, recognize, serve, protect – and therefore come “to know” – HIS BODY as well as His Head of that Body?**

Let me ask it another way: can we really *ever* love and *know* anyone – while mistreating, rejecting, attacking, or hurting that person's body? So that's where we're going today.

How important is this topic today? Jesus said we can't have eternal life unless we know the Father and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). I will show you today how JESUS Himself said it's going to be impossible to know HIM, the Head of His Body, unless we also love, honor and love all the parts of His Body that come with Him, the Head. That's today's message.

This sermon is a “stand alone” sermon, but it also builds on the last one we had on Knowing Christ, titled “That I may KNOW Him”. You should probably listen to that one first. In this sermon, we are not saying that what we're covering here is the only way or even most important means by which we can come to know Jesus – but it IS a much neglected means.

Of course, when we talk about coming to know Jesus, I hope you all realize by now that the real Jesus of the Bible was a real man, not a long haired hippy-looking wimp. Jesus was a carpenter, home builder by trade – and as such was used to hoisting beams and rock. At age 30, He was in His prime. Jesus, the Word, inspired Paul to say it is a shame for a man to have long hair. The very earliest drawing of Jesus that I know of comes from the catacombs – and I've been there, in Rome – and it depicts Jesus with short hair. He probably had a beard and moustache. The Bible says he was not particularly good looking (**Isaiah 53:2**). So forget the paintings. They're guessing – and they've guessed wrong. Our Jesus is a not a long haired weakling, but the King of Kings. He was from Nazareth – but that had nothing to do with being a Nazarite, the men who took vows and never cut their hair. Jesus was not a Nazarite, but a Nazarene.

Also, as introduction, knowing God and Jesus also means knowing Jesus in all His forms as He's revealed in the Bible. You can make it a year-long Bible study to learn as much as you can about Jesus – for example – as our Shepherd, Redeemer, Master, Servant, Mighty God, Provider, Healer, High Priest, and so on and on. As you study this, you'll realize that Paul was right in talking about Jesus' "unsearchable riches" (**Ephesians 3:8**). We'll never know all there is to know about Jesus.

But since we're His Bride – we better get to know Him really well.

Remember also that getting to know God starts with GOD re-opening the way back to the Garden, so to speak. Jesus made it clear to the disciples: "I have chosen you, you have not chosen me" (**John 15:16, 19**). God wants us to know Him, but HE is the One who starts the process by calling us, then Jesus leads us to our Father, and by the Holy Spirit we become one with God. Paul says "the goodness of God leads us to repentance" (**Romans 2:4**). He comes into us, and we are said to be also "in Christ" – a picture of intense intimacy, just like a husband and wife. Paul himself said the model for the perfect husband and wife should be Christ and the Church (**Ephesians 5:33**).

YOUR OWN one-on-ONE Encounter with God

Many of you would probably say you would love to have one-on-one time with God – just the two of you. Just you and Jesus. I want you to grasp today, that *many* had personal time with Jesus – but didn't recognize Him for what He was. I submit to you today, that by the end of this and the next sermon, you will come to see more fully that you and I indeed have numerous one-on-ones with God, but many times *we miss Him!* There are times we don't realize it's happening, while it was happening.

It has very much to do with knowing the Body of Christ.

PAUL: We know Paul certainly had 3 years with Jesus in Arabia – perhaps on Mt. Sinai. (**Gal. 1:150-17**). **JOB** had HIS one-on-One also. In that encounter he was reduced to a pile of boil-covered skin and bones and rags. He also lost everything first. Job's words become ours – if we have eyes to see: "I heard of you, by the hearing of the ear, but *now* my eye *sees* you". What's he saying? "I thought I knew you, ...but I had no clue! Now, finally, I get it. Now, finally I'm beginning *to know* you." And what did HE say: "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (**Job 42:5-6**).

Jacob had HIS one-on-One when he wrestled all *night* (**Gen. 32:24-25**) with God – and at the daybreak, God put his hips out of joint! He considered himself fortunate that his life was still preserved after seeing God. **Isaiah**, when he had *his* one-on-One vision in **Isaiah 6:5**, says, "I've come undone!" – He said he was falling apart, coming unglued!

Maybe God is trying to get our attention too –but maybe, we're not paying attention! So understand that if you're praying to come to see, come to know, and come to experience God – you *may* be in for the *shock* of your *life*!

But when we catch a glimpse of the glories of God, our priorities change. We'll want more of Him, and more and more. It becomes a hunger to know Him more. If we're not hungry, we're either dead or in a coma – or too full of junk food. When we're alive spiritually, we also get hungry spiritually and we yearn to eat and drink of Him fully. He is bread, He is food indeed. Drinking in His *life* is the water He spoke of to the lady at the well (**John 4:13-14; John 6:35**) – and his food and water satisfy!

I'm sure many of us *can* refer to specific times in their lives when God *did* pull us up short and have a form of "One-on-one" with us. When that happens it usually leads to a time of a sense of ***incredible brokenness***, of personal weakness, of *deep repentance* and acknowledgement of how far we fall short of the glory of God, and of the high calling we've been offered.

WHAT IS "THE BODY OF CHRIST"?

Since we're going to talk about the body of Christ and how that lets us get to know Jesus better, let's ***be sure to clearly define right now***, by scripture, ***what "body of Christ" means.***

There is only ONE body of Christ. A church group here isn't "the body" and then another church group is another body – no!

ONE body:

Ephesians 4:4 "there is *one* body...."

Rom 12:5 "so we, being many, **are one body** in Christ, and individually members of one another"

Col. 3:15 says we have been called into one body.

What is the body?

Colossians 1:24 "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, ***for the sake of His body, which IS the church..***"

Ephesians 5:30 "For ***we*** are members of ***His body***, of His flesh and of His bones." Do we see now why Jesus says the *way we treat people, especially members of the body of Christ (including the way we treat our spouse & children, by the way), is taken personally by Jesus?*

How many heads does the Body of Christ have? Just one.

Colossians 1:18 "And ***He*** is ***the*** head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things ***He*** may have the preeminence."

Not the "senior Head", or "one of many heads", or "co-head" – just *the* head.

Eph. 5:23 – Christ is ***the head*** of the church... (also **Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16**).

The men who lead the various churches and denominations are not the head – not if they want to be considered part of the body of Christ. The position of "head of the body" is taken. You know this, but then why do we even sometimes hear people use the expression "Mr. So-and-so is the human head of the church"?

How does one become a part of Jesus' body?

If that were a test question, how would you answer it? You might say we are baptized into Christ by water baptism. But brethren, water baptism is but a physical illustration of what is happening SPIRITUALLY. The water baptism can become a mere ceremony if we're not careful, we can miss its point! I wonder how many of the people nowadays being baptized, at baptism, could explain the spiritual meaning of going underwater? If they're properly counseled, they should be able to.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 “For as **the body is one** and has many members, but all the members of that **one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ**. 13 **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body** -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.”

It is those who have, and are led by, God's spirit who are HIS, who are a part of the body of Christ.

Rom 8:9 We are his only if we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us.

Rom 8:14 “For as many as **are led by** the Spirit of God, ***these*** are sons of God.”

THE INCORPORATED ORGANIZATIONS ARE NOT, IS NOT, THE BODY OF CHRIST.

The body of Christ is the group of ***believers who are being led by His spirit, and those believers are undoubtedly scattered within many groups*** that have become incorporated for tax purposes and other reasons.

We used to think that an organized incorporated church was “THE” church of God. I no longer think that is possible. God is not boxed into organizations of men. Within various organizations are true members here and there. But also within organizations professing Christianity, many no doubt are *not* true believers or part of the body of Christ – yet.

But we can't know just yet who will end up in the body of Christ and who won't. Don't forget there is to be an “innumerable multitude” who will come to God out of the Great Tribulation. So don't write anyone off yet.

And neither – as we'll see – does a particular person have to have everything perfectly down pat right now for God to be working with them already, through His spirit.

For example: Apollos, a mighty evangelist, was used effectively by God but Apollos did not understand much about the Holy Spirit until Aquila and Priscilla explained it to him more perfectly. Yes, a man as well as a woman *taught a man of God* in this example. But God didn't wait to bless Apollos until He had taught him such a vital, basic truth. (**Acts 18:24-28**). Thank God for Aquila and Priscilla.

Another example: The whole body of believers for many years refused full discipleship to Gentiles unless they were circumcised. For years. God still blessed them. They were still God's people.

So on essential matters that have to do with *salvational* issues, we should be firm – but on anything else, we can agree to disagree and work together in the Lord. And even on salvational issues, let's at least be willing to discuss things before writing someone off. What if Aquila and Priscilla had deemed the Holy Spirit a matter so important that if Apollos didn't “get it”, he couldn't be of God? Then what? No, they discussed it. And because Apollos was of God, he did see it.

So the body of Christ is the individual members who have His spirit. Next time, we'll review lessons from Rev. 2-3, the churches of GOD – and see how they still were called His churches, in spite of the problems. Sure, they will have to overcome – but we'll study that next time in further reviewing who and what is the Body of Christ.

Don't forget: Jesus even said in **John 10:16** “And ***other*** sheep I have which *are not of this fold*; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and *there will be one flock* and one shepherd.”. WE

are so quick to be exclusivist and try to make everyone come to know Christ the way we know Him, and Jesus is too big for that! Jesus said if they're not against us, they're for us. Expand your view - a LOT! Jesus' "body" I believe is bigger than most of us realize.

Now if you "get" one thing from this sermon, get this: just as you would react intensely to someone inflicting pain on your arm, or leg, or chest – because they're doing it to YOU – let's realize today, more deeply than we have ever in our lives, that *the way we inflict pain on parts of God's body, the members of His church, is something God takes personally as well. The way we treat people – Jesus takes as something being done to Him directly. That applies either for good things or bad things.*

How would anyone inflict pain on a body part, a member? Publicly saying bad things about them, often by name. Not forgiving. Gossiping. Spreading hurtful rumors of events long past and repented of. Direct persecution. Not allowing fellowship and interaction with other members of other groups. Saying your religious fellowship is better than someone else's. Saying you follow this man or that man, because.... for whatever reason: better speaker, truer to God's word, more loving and caring than your pastor...etc. etc.

Is all this and more not going on? You bet it is.

I even see ministers marking and disfellowshipping other ministers. I'm watching ministers and their organization suing other ministers over publishing rights, over salary....

I see repentant brethren not being allowed to attend, meet, worship with other believers – for they've been forbidden to attend and worship by the ministry of those groups. How can this be?

And we say we're the body of Christ?

This is why Paul is going to spend so much time in 1 Corinthians talking about the way the brethren were treating one another, right from the get go! But if there's an encouraging lining in all of this, it's this: those Corinthians weren't just written off! They are still called "the church of God at Corinth". But even so, Paul then right from the get go addresses one problem after another of the way they were treating one another, and of sins they were openly allowing, and then concludes at the end of 1 Corinthians 11, that that was why so many of them were sick!

Have you noticed any parallels today? How many dramatic healings are going on today? I know of a few. But lots of dramatic ones? NO way.

When the church started, and the disciples were "of one accord" and sharing everything, and love was evident, even Peter's shadow would heal a sick person (**Acts 5:15**). Not just Peter. All the apostles (**Acts 5:12**) and even others were doing mighty signs and wonders, and God was backing them up (**Acts 8:4-6; 14:3**).

Are WE seeing mighty signs and wonders now? No.

But what do I hear? I hear ministers explaining why we're not *supposed* to see mighty signs and wonders today. I hear them using the passage about signs being for a wicked generation. Go tell Peter that, and Paul that – as each of them even raised people from the dead!

So asking for a sign shouldn't be necessary for us believers – but when we are close to God and close to His body therefore (for we are his body), **God confirms His delight with mighty signs** and wonders (**Mark 16:20; Acts 5:12**). You'll notice in **Acts 4:29-31** that the early believers even prayed that God would confirm their ministry with signs and wonders, and the place in which they were gathered immediately shook as God's confirmation that He heard and agreed! Agreed with what? The Fact they had all come together as ONE, and were acting as one (**verse 24**).

So forget this idea that it's wrong to expect God to back up those He is behind with miraculous signs and wonders. That's God's choice. *It is also true that John the Baptist worked no miracle.* I know that. But don't overuse that one example to downplay what God did, and could be doing again if He so chooses. I believe one BIG reason God isn't – could be because men may be seeking those signs for their own glory, and not for the glory of Christ and our Father. Just a thought.

So this is a very important topic: the infighting has to stop. Pastors putting down other pastors and other groups *by name*, has to stop. The wrong treatment of one another has to stop – or we will all also incur the wrath of God!

True: not all ministers are “men of God”. But don't be like some and suddenly believe none of them are men of God either! There IS a place for ordained ministers in the Body of Christ.

Now Paul, John and Peter and others – all roundly condemned false ministers several times, but that's not what I'm talking about here.

Peter chastised Simon the sorcerer (**Acts 8:20-24**). John warned about Diotrephes (**3 John 9-10**). Paul mentions several false ministers and refers to false apostles several times. But those are outsiders. Those *are* false prophets. All God's prophets, for that matter, roundly condemn the *false* prophets (**Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 10:21**), and Jesus condemned false shepherds and hirelings (**John 10:1-2, 12-13**). But that's not what I'm talking about, although I'm sure there *are* many ordained preachers who *are* hirelings.

I'm talking about what it would be like to read of Peter marking Paul, or Jeremiah condemning Isaiah, or Zechariah condemning Zerubbabel or Malachi. Or Barnabas *suing* Paul in a court of law. We don't see it -- even though Barnabas and Paul agreed to disagree on a matter and to go separate ways, they remained brothers!

If brothers verbally smite or hurt other brothers – we are smiting the body of Jesus, and HE takes it personally. Many of us *have* done that very thing from time to time, if you're honest with yourself. We need to deeply repent – and I preach to myself – of the hurts and wrongs and sins we have committed against God's people, God's ministers, *God's body*. I have done my share of all that in the past as well, and I confess that today, and publicly repent of that today.

No wonder Jesus says if we give just a cup of water to a little child in His name, He takes it personally – “did it unto me” (**Mark 9:37**). If we offend or hurt a little one in Christ - - HE feels like putting a mill stone around our neck (**Mark 9:42**). Have I given water to little ones. Yes. Have I offended and hurt little ones in Christ? Yes. And probably so have you, if you're as honest. But together, we can ask forgiveness, and ask the weight of our sin be taken by Jesus Christ our savior – and move on. **

Now if a brother won't forgive you for your offense or sin – and you've repented – then Jesus takes *that* personally too. He died for you and for me because we needed His sacrifice, and if we don't

forgive others, He feels like we're not forgiving *Him*, since those ex-sinners are now parts of His body, redeemed, purified, sanctified, and forgiven by HIM. No wonder He says our sins remain if we don't forgive one another. There are just scads and scads of verses on that topic.

Let me add from experience: *it's a whole lot easier to forgive yourself, when you see in the eyes of your brother or sister that THEY have forgiven you.* They represent Christ Himself at that moment, as parts of His body. And it's a lot harder to move on, when brothers and sisters in Christ don't *let* you move on, with them. It's even easier to accept GOD'S forgiveness, when you see God's forgiveness through the eyes of His body - - through your brother and sister in Christ.

VITAL Lessons from Corinth, Greece

Now let's review the Corinthian church for *many* lessons for us today. Be turning to 1 Cor. 1 please.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
 2 To **the church OF GOD** which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called **saints**, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:
 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 4 **I thank my God always concerning you** for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 **so that you come short in no gift**, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 **who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** 9 **God is faithful**, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Several things here of note:

- as bad as the Corinthians were, **they were still the "church of God"**. I dare say many today – if we could visit them in their church services – would decree they couldn't be "God's church".

Also note that it is not the church of Calvin, church of Luther, or Armstrong, or any other man. They were not first called "Lutherans" or "Wesleyans" or "Calvinists" or "Armstrongites" or any such thing in Antioch – but CHRISTians. Followers of Christ – not Paul, not Luther, not any man! I hear way too much the name *of a man* being bandied about to HIS glory – and not to God's glory.

- they were still sanctified (verse 2)
- Paul was so thankful even for them (v. 4)
- God still backed them up with gifts and wonders (v. 7)
- Paul assures them God will finish the job He had started in them (v.8-9)

So what's the point? Don't be so quick to make the decision if someone is in Christ or not. Let Christ decide that if there's any question at all.

As we read through the book of 1 Corinthians, we see problem after problem. Let's continue:

“I am of Paul” and “I am of Apollos”

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **all speak the same thing**, and that there **be no divisions among you**, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are **contentions** among you.

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, **"I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos,"** or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." **13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"**

Aren't we today hearing a ton of this?

“I go to this group, I like this pastor better – because he's more loving, more interesting, a more dynamic speaker, he's closer to the truth of God's word”. Sure, it's fine to think that of your pastor, but let's not belittle a pastor who is also a true pastor in another group! IF he's a true pastor.

1 Corinthians 3:1-7

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?"

Don't be too hard on the Corinthians. Paul says HE himself is still carnal at times (Rom 7:14). Paul continues:

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but **ministers (servants)** through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

1 Cor 4:6-7 TLB: “I have used Apollos and myself as examples to illustrate what I have been saying: **that you must not have favorites. You must not be proud of one of God's teachers more than another.** 7 What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?”

And he goes on from there to discuss open immorality, going to court against each other, doctrinal disagreements, and drunkenness at the Passover, Husband-wife issues, on and on. How does it all conclude: He says they are not discerning the LORD'S BODY.

What is the Lords Body? Not just His actual body as a man on earth – though it includes that! Paul means the church brethren!

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body.** 30 **For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.** 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be

judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

Sure that includes understanding the day Christ died, and what He personally went through for us – but it’s also, in context of his whole epistle so far – about recognizing Christ through the brethren. It’s about discerning Christ through the way we treat one another. It’s about honoring Christ by the way we honor one another. It’s about loving Christ *by* loving one another, for we cannot claim to know God and abuse a brother! Can’t happen. Because by mistreating a brother or sister, we’re abusing *God*.

Brethren, when people of the world – or people of the church – meet you and me, they should be meeting Jesus Christ! Do you want to meet Christ? Look at the person sitting next to you in church – a good chance you’re sitting next to Christ, or part of Christ’s body, anyway.

Christ – Easy to Miss Right now

Having said that, listen carefully: *Jesus manifests Himself and comes to us in ways, which make it easy for us to reject Him – through the very people He is calling.* They rub us the wrong way, perhaps. But those people are still members, parts of, the body of Christ. *Be careful about rejecting people for whom the Lord died.* If we do, we’re rejecting Jesus and not discerning His Body.

It’s clear that at the 2nd coming, “every eye shall see Him” and it won’t be done in a corner.

But don’t forget, the *first time Jesus came to live as a man it was easy to miss Him*. He was royalty hidden in a feeding trough, in a manger. He seemed to come from podunk Nazareth instead of the expected Bethlehem. Some missed that! They thought the Messiah would come as a conquering king – not as a humble servant riding a donkey. They thought Messiah would be powerful – not a condemned man crucified on a tree.

Now as Jesus comes to us, it’s still easy to miss HIM: this time He comes to us through the brethren He is bringing into His body. Some of those brethren are poor, uneducated, and backward. But that’s also a test to see how you would treat Jesus – if He appeared to you that way. *He is* appearing to you that way. *Pass* the test!

We’re doing what Jesus would have done, *proving* we’re His body! I’ll talk much more about recognizing Christ – and show how we manifest Christ so much more – *through* His body, and how we can be missing Jesus through His body as well.

No wonder Jesus says in Matthew 5, the end of it, that *when* we love one another – especially our enemies and those who hate us – that we identify ourselves as children of the true God, our Father in heaven! (**Matthew 5:43-45**)

In the next message, I’ll show how Jesus manifests himself more completely through the gifts He gives each one – and expects each one to USE in His service. We’ll also see how that is often being squelched in today’s churches, by and large. That’s for next time. For now, please be turning to Acts 9.

BIG LESSONS FROM PAUL'S CONVERSION

Now let's **apply** all this and see if we would have reacted the same way as our forefathers did. We're going to go into more depth than we did last time into Paul's conversion and how the way the brethren treated him was such a lesson for us! He was known earlier as "Saul" – so when we read of Saul, it means Paul. By the time we come to Acts 13, he is referred to more as Paul.

Acts 9:1-5 "Then Saul, still breathing threats **and murder** against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?**"

5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.** It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

There is no record of Paul (Saul) ever directly, personally hurting or persecuting Jesus when He was on the earth. So what is our Lord saying here? Jesus is saying that He's taking very personally Paul's persecution, torture, jailing and even murder of His body, His people. Jesus is saying, "Saul, when you persecute my brothers and sisters, you're persecuting ME!".

Acts 9:10-19 "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

13 **Then Ananias answered**, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." [It's like Ananias couldn't believe what he was hearing from God! He wanted to bring Jesus up to date on how BAD this man was...]

15 But the Lord said to him, "**Go**, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Be honest. How eager would you and I have been to have had a dangerous and violent man like Saul start attending your happy little congregation? How openly and quickly would you have accepted a modern day Saul – persecutor, trouble-maker for Christians? Be honest. You know there are people we hope will keep attending “over there” instead of with our little group – wherever yours is. I’ve had to realize my own biases in this way. We struggle just with people we deem obnoxious, or perhaps some of you still struggle with letting people of another race or color or tribe attend with you. So what’s Ananias going to do?

17 **And Ananias went** his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "**Brother Saul**,

[BROTHER! WOW! Ananias' first words to this brutal persecutor: "brother".]

Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 **Immediately there fell from his**

eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.
19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened.

[I want you to notice some things here: Paul remained blind until a brother was willing to risk his life, forgive his brother and extend the right hand of fellowship *as* a brother – and as a part of the body of Christ. Christ is not blind. Nor is His body. The first thing Paul, the newest brother, sees -- is ... another brother. Another “body part of Christ”. He sees Christ.]

[The next sentence is so amazing:] *Then Saul spent some days with the disciples [whom he had gone to arrest] at Damascus.*”

Do you know how much forgiveness went into verses 17 and 19? True Christianity is putting off the outer garments of façade, as Jesus did when He washed feet. The Damascus disciples had to practice the meaning of footwashing with Paul – forgiving him, remembering Master had to forgive us, and Master has already washed all of our feet. So now they had to – spiritually speaking – wash Saul’s feet as well. And Paul had to forgive himself and had to humble himself to accept the love of God’s people in spite of his horrific sins and violence against them.

Letting Saul (Paul) in was a cross to carry. They carried that cross so well. We have to first be part of, see, and observe the Passover and all its meaning, then and only then can we truly be part of Pentecost and all its meaning. We’ve just been through Passover. What happens on a cross? You die. Like Paul himself said, “I am crucified with Him...” The Damascus brethren had to let their natural desires for revenge die – and they had to forgive, to be forgiven. They passed this test.

How are we doing? Is there a hurting “Saul” (Paul) out there we’re not allowing in?

Let me ask you: what would some so-called brethren say today given the same situation? They’d say, “I dunno. I think we need to see fruits of repentance first. Saul has a real issue with anger management. He could have a relapse. And what if he’s fooling all of us? What if he just wants to be an “insider” for a while to betray us all someday? Besides, we should first review all the written reports we have which show how awful his tortures were! In fact, my brother *died* from Saul’s torture! He’s left a lot of debris in his wake! We better wait a few years before we accept him, just to be sure. *Better safe than sorry.* We gotta protect the flock too, remember.”

But what actually happens?

Acts 9:19 gives it simply half a verse: “...then Paul spent some days with the disciples in Damascus.”

WOW!

After that, Paul gets into trouble and the other Jews wish to kill him now. The hunter – Paul – now becomes the hunted; a perfect time for the Damascus disciples to let him experience some of the pain he had inflicted on their numbers and to leave him alone. But no, they *risk* their own lives by letting this “basket case” – Paul – down in a basket outside the city walls! (**Acts 9:23-25**).

Next, I hope you’re following along with me with your own Bibles in **Acts 9:26** now -- Paul goes to Jerusalem – but finds the brethren there less receptive. We can understand, surely. I sure can! But then **Barnabas**, whose name means “son of Encouragement” takes Paul under his wing and escorts this new brother around, as part of the very body of Jesus. (**v.26-30**). After that, ALL the churches accept Paul – and, *I* think partly *because* they do, look what happens:

Acts 9:31 “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria *had peace and were edified*. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, *they were multiplied*.”

Now let's hear Jesus' voice again:

Matt 25:31-46 **Let's re-read this familiar passage and see how it looks NOW to us:**

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for *I* was hungry and you gave *Me* food; *I* was thirsty and you gave *Me* drink; *I* was a stranger and you took *Me* in; 36 *I* was naked and you clothed *Me*; I was sick and you visited *Me*; I was in prison and you came to *Me*.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 *And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

Then in **verses 41-16** – he shows the reverse: not helping one another = ignoring Christ.

To Jesus, there are no elite Christians. The “least of these my brethren” is as important to Jesus as the most prominent apostle. Why? Because the “least” is *as much a part of* His body as an apostle was.

This is a passage we've read over and over – but have missed a large part of the meaning! Jesus is clearly warning us that the way we treat, speak to, ignore, hurt, feed, help or hinder – *one another*, is something He takes very personally!

(**My brother Loren's story** – and dressing up as a bum needing help, outside of a church, and the church members' reaction to his plight. He eventually went into the church service. The audio version of this sermon gives the details of what happened.)

Now, since the church *members* comprise the body of Christ, I ask again: *can we really get to know the HEAD of the body, but be hurting his body? Can we love Jesus – but then kick Him in the shins (a brother or sister in Christ).*

Can we know Jesus, but not love, accept, forgive, be intimate with, work with, trust and honor all parts of His body?

The thesis of this sermon is – for you and me to really come to see, know and manifest the head of the Body, Christ, we *must* accept, love, forgive and work with – and come to respect all parts of His body as well!!!

We cannot know Christ and not know and love His body! We cannot know Christ while treating any part of His body with contempt, or be ignoring them, or refusing fellowship to parts of HIS body! But that is exactly what is happening in some so-called Christian groups, of all stripes!

That is why – once again – that Jesus asks Saul, and maybe asks you and me today: “why do you persecute ME, Saul!?”

Is there a brother or sister we are persecuting, ignoring, refusing fellowship with?
Then we are persecuting, ignoring, refusing fellowship with JESUS Himself!

Brethren, we’ve got to stand up for one another, love and accept one another, even die for one another, and *forgive* one another, as Jesus does for us, or we just plain won’t be there when it counts! Are we getting the point!?

If this website is helping you, pass the word to others. This is an important message. I hope the brethren in various groups will hear it and heed it. We must behave more as one body. And I urge you to check out the other messages on this website. I will move right into the next sermon that concludes this 2-part series on knowing the body of Christ as we seek the Head of that Body.

Brethren, until next time, this is Philip Shields asking you to please let Jesus shine in your lives and in your group – to the glory of God our Father, and Jesus Christ our beloved Husband-to-be.

---TO BE CONTINUED ---

