

Not Without Feeling

By Michael Clark

I once heard a story about a Christian doctor in India who had a medical clinic that treated lepers. The nature of leprosy is that it attacks the nervous system and the member of the body that is leprosy has no feelings. And as a result the whole body has no feelings for it. The doctor went on to tell a story of a young patient who came to him for help.

This young man was from a distant village and not accustomed to being away from his family. The treatment took weeks as the open sores were treated. He also had to be trained how to do hourly body checks to see if any of the leprosy members of his body had started to bleed or had been damaged without him knowing it because of the damaged nerves.

The last day of treatment finally arrived and as the young man slept that final night, his hand lay on the floor and the rats ate part of one of his diseased fingers, causing a new wound that would require more days of treatment before he could go back home.

His last day of treatment once again arrived and this time he was determined to stay awake and watch so that nothing could happen to him to delay his homeward journey this time. So he lit a coal oil lamp and put it by his bed and began to read. As he read he finally fell asleep and as he slept his arm fell off the bed and his hand lit on top of the lamp. Because he had no feeling in his hand, he woke up to find out to his terror that his hand was severely burned. Much to his dismay, the doctor told him that he would have to stay there at the clinic for a few more weeks until the new injury was healed.

I know many of you are thinking, "What a gruesome story. Why are you even telling this?" By telling you this story, I hope that you will be able to see an equally tragic form of leprosy that is very much more common in the western Church.

The doctor who wrote this story went on to tell of how this young man's body was a living parable of how much of the western Church reacts to one another's pain and suffering. When a member of the Body of Christ is wounded, damaged, or sick the rest of the body acts as if it didn't happen or even worse, casts them out. We all tend to go

on our merry way ignoring the plight of other hurting members. The apostle James warned of this tendency that was already threatening the early Church.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17, NKJV).

How many times have you shared your very real plight with another Christian and heard the phrase, "Well, brother (sister) I will be praying for you." And you knew that not only did they not help you from their abundance, but they probably did not pray for you either.

I have found that it is even worse with some so called shepherds of the flocks. When I have gone to the pastor to get help to pay a bill or even to borrow the money until my income caught up (there are often lean months in the year when you work in construction), I have been turned away with an attitude that the Church funds were not meant for that purpose. Isn't that what Jesus was castigating the Jewish leaders for when He criticized them in Mark?

He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"--' (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:9-13, NKJV).

The love of God was the adhesive that held the early Church together. These dear saints were in touch with the infirmities and needs of one another. They gave from their abundance, gladly. Their extra was laid at the apostles' feet and all that had need could take from the abundance of the others and have their needs met to the extent that no one was lacking. Theirs was a healthy body and not a leprous one.

Scientists tell us that the jerk response that takes place when we burn our hand is the fastest response that we have. The reason for this is that the nervous system in the arm sends its own command to withdraw from the fire before it can even reach the brain.



God has made us wonderfully and our bodies are a living parable of what the Body of Christ should be. When you see a fellow member suffer, you should not be waiting for the "head" to do something about the problem, but should respond with lightening speed to minimize the damage and then do all you can to speed up the recovery of the injured portion, even if it is nothing more than blowing on the burn and hopping around in a circle! After the initial

shock it is time for the head to do the right thing for the injury and make sure that the rest of the body gets that hurt member to a proper source of healing, doing whatever it takes to bring it back into wholeness. This is the job of a true shepherd. Of Jesus our "Good Shepherd" it is said in Hebrews,

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16, NKJV).

Jesus was not only "tempted as we are," but He is in touch with all our infirmities. He has given abundance to some members of the Body, so that those who lack can be cared for by them. Jesus told almost half of His parables about stewardship or the lack of good stewardship. God's problem has never been one of lack. He has provided enough resources on the earth for the welfare of all who live here. The problem has always been with the tight fisted and stingy stewards!

Jesus has always been in touch with our afflictions. I take great comfort from Isaiah's prophecy depicting Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God who bears our griefs.

Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked--But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:4-12, NKJV).

May Christ be worked in us all to the extent that we are no longer a leprous body that is out of touch with its members, but a healthy body who is always there and ready to do all that is in its power to help those who are in need. May God drive His great love deep into our hearts so that we put feet to our faith. I believe that the time is close at hand when we will see many of God's people in need and we who have will be tested and proven in the way we respond. Many of us have already failed the test. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church,

And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:23-26, NKJV).

Evidentially, the infant Church was so united in the love of Christ that it was in touch with one another's needs as we should be today. There was no one lacking. All needs were met in the body of Christ because of His love in its members. Paul in the above text equates one member lacking with schism! Division! No wonder the body of Christ is so divided!

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, NKJV).

May we who call ourselves Christians also be filled with Jesus' love to the point that people mean more to us than our possessions. Isn't that what the early apostles were demonstrating? All this wealth had just been laid at their feet for the needs of the whole church, yet they had none of the world's wealth themselves, but they were richly endowed with the wealth of the Spirit. The above narration continues:

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."

So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. (Acts 3:1-9, NKJV).

I believe that if the Church of today was as rich toward those in need as it is toward building up buildings and ministries, it would once again have this spiritual wealth that

that made the early Church so powerful. Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you..." Jesus always gave. He never took up an offering... interesting. "Freely you have received, freely give."

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9, NKJV).

And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise." (Luke 3:10-11, NASB).

Let us all "do likewise." May we truly learn what it means to need one another once again. (1 Corinthians 12:21)