

Pointers, Part 6
Our Devotion & Service to the Church
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How do our lives point to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord? We've looked together at how we raise and influence our children & youth, how that points to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We've looked at how we use our time and how we choose our friends, including our marriage partner, points to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We've look at how the words we choose to say and the words we choose not to say point to Jesus as our Savior and our Lord, and last week Gary preached about how we pray points to Jesus as our Savior and Lord – the one who holds the highest authority in our lives. I hope this series is helping us assess where we are in our discipleship. Are we still infants in the faith, undisciplined, always needing someone else to correct us and feed us? Or are we maturing, making choices about our lives based on what God's Word tells us is right and best? The goal for any truly devoted Bible-preaching, Christ-centered church is not more people in the pews but more people maturing in their faith as disciples of Jesus. Why? Because true disciples understand what we are going to think about today – that ultimately, we do not gather together as the church for our own sake, but for the sake of others, pointing to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord, yes, but also submitting to him as the Head of this body of which we are (miraculously) a part. Let's pray together:

Father God, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, help us to hear and understand, not just with our heads but with our hearts. Wake us up to the beauty you see in your church. Stir up a desire in us to be the church you want us to be. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Church is not like any other group of which we are a part. In its purest form, it is not led by human leaders and it is not sustained by human resources. In its purest form, it is led by Jesus Christ, as the Head, and sustained by the will of God the Father and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Once we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, we then become members of Christ's Body – not members of just another organization – according to Scripture we become members of Christ's earthly body. He is the Head and we make up the Body. I know most of us already know this, but I want you to just think about that for a moment. This is the sovereign and sacred design of the Church: Jesus Christ is the Head and true believers make up the Body – the fullness of the presence of Christ on earth. That's why the Church is not like any other group of which we are a part. No other group, no other ministry can compare with what God birthed when He brought the Church to life. What an honor we have to be part of it! Ephesians 5:29-30 declares, *"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."* The Church is not like any other group of which we are a part. It is not just one more thing to do. It is not a box to be checked off once we get back in the car while we pat ourselves on the back (Yep, we went to church today). The Church is not like any other group of which we are a part.

As the Church, we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves, something sacred, something that is not about us and what we want (which is why the Church is not like any other group of which we are a part). The Church is all about pouring our hearts out to God in worship, in singing, in prayer, and in service to those around us – considering others more important than ourselves.

As you were on your way here this morning, were you asking God how you could serve others today as the church gathered on this Lord's Day? Or were you hoping Meagan had a good sermon that didn't go overtime because you have things to do, and that we picked songs you like to sing, and you sure hope she'd stop harping on connecting with a small group because it makes you feel uncomfortable? All of which sort of sounds like you hope the Dollar Store or the Path Valley Market has the stuff you want for whatever you're doing so you don't have to

travel all the way to Shippensburg. In other words, did we come here this morning with the heart and mind of a customer, a consumer, or a servant? Are we sitting down at the table in a restaurant waiting for someone to take our order and serve us what we asked for or are we the servers – looking around seeing how we can use the gifts God has given us to strengthen the other parts of the Body?

What if we all came with that hope, that desire, that question in our hearts? “Oh Lord, show me how I can serve the Body today,” and then confidently look around for the opportunities! There would be a renewed unity. A renewed appreciation for one another. There would be a sense of expectation that God was going to manifest his presence in our midst – we don’t know how – but we know he will as the desires of his heart become our deepest desires. “Oh Lord, how can we love each other and serve each other today the way you taught us by your own sacrificial love and service?”

My role is to equip you to do this, primarily by the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. My role is not to coddle you. My role is to equip you – which means I am constantly correcting and encouraging you according to the Word of God, and constantly poking at you and prodding you and sometimes outright pushing you into places of service you may not feel “qualified” to serve. You’ve heard the phrase, “God doesn’t call the equipped, he equips the called.” And as part of this sacred Body of which Jesus Christ the Lord, the Savior is the Head, we are all the called. We are all the called. We are all called to serve to our fullest potential! And as one called to equip you, it doesn’t do the Body a bit of good if as your personal trainer I’m lifting the weights for you and running on the treadmill for you while you sit and say, “Wow, look at her go!” Remember that when a member of the nominating committee speaks with you about serving as an elder, a trustee, or a deacon – or when there are places to serve on Sunday mornings as greeters, acolytes, lay readers, and nursery caregivers. Remember that when opportunities to help with our youth and our children arise. Remember that when it’s time to do some work around the building. Remember that when you hear someone is in the hospital and needs a visit or needs a meal when they come home. Remember that when the person beside you just needs someone to sit and listen and pray for them instead of running out the door to the next thing...

I expect us all to be growing in our faith. I expect all of us to be dissatisfied with where we currently are in our maturity as disciples of Jesus. I expect all of us to be servants, not consumers. I expect a wondrous sense of awe as we all work together. Ephesians 4:16 tells us that “*When each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love!*” That knocks the whole 80/20 principal right out the window! You know what that is, right? The reality that 20% of the people do 80% of the work in the church. That should not be! “*When each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love!*” That means we come ready to serve not to be served! Because do you know what happens when love abounds in the church? People are changed. Households are changed. Communities are changed because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a transforming Word that manifests itself in love.

Most of you know that John and I were at the Penn State/Ohio State white out game last Saturday night. It’s so much fun! Everyone on the home team dressed in white shaking their white pom-poms, yelling cheers together, singing songs together in our common love for Penn State football. It’s really fun until you lose, by one point, on what 99.9% of the people in the world thought was a terrible 4th and 5th call. And then the love people have for the team and the coach and the assistant coaches, the unity of support is shattered because people didn’t get their need met – they didn’t win! And the mean things that people say then are hard to hear, or maybe you jump in and say them too.... These sorts of things happen with every other group of which we are a part, because they are based on human goals, human needs, human strategies, and human resources. It should not be so with the Church.

The Church is not of human making. It is different. It is the Body of Christ with Jesus himself as our Head. Our goals and strategies all come from His Word, the resources to sustain it

come from His hand, and all our needs are met by Him through one another as we seek not to be served, but to serve, pointing to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord.

I know this may not be what we experience when we are gathered together on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday evening. I know many have been disappointed because of the way they feel the Church, here or there, has let them down. I have heard the stories of corruption at every level in the Church. But brothers and sisters, let's start with ourselves, right here, right now on this World Communion Sunday asking, "Oh Lord, show me how I can serve my Savior and my Lord by serving the Body today." And let's just see what the Lord will do.

Philippians 2:1-8

*Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,
²then make my joy complete by being like-minded,
having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.
³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
⁴not looking to your own interests
but each of you to the interests of the others.
⁵In your relationships with one another,
have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
⁶Who, being in very nature^ᵇ God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^ᵇ of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us - and we remember
The promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King.

The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you - eat and remember
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life paid the price to make us one.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of love around the table of the King.

The blood that cleanses every stain of sin, shed for you - drink and remember
He drained death's cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of grace around the table of the King.

And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond, - and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ as His body here on earth.
As we share in his suffering, we proclaim Christ will come again!
And we'll join in the feast of heaven around the table of the King.

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