

Exchange

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Summer 1993

Unity in the Church: Regaining Our Focus

As we in Xenos reflect on the last year and a half, one word commonly comes to mind — *change*.

We have added a management team that oversees our efforts in five major areas of ministry: evangelism, equipping, pastoral care, service, and operations. In general, we have shifted the focus of our smaller group meetings from home churches to ministry teams, many of which emphasize task-based service to the church and the community. For spiritual growth and fellowship, we have added grounding groups and small groups, as well as transition groups and team fellowship groups.

As a result, many people have parted ways with their familiar roles. And in taking on new roles, often ones that are more consistent with their particular giftings and interests, the emphasis has tended to shift more toward specific min-

istries than the corporate ministry of the church itself.

In response, the recent Leaders' Retreat, held May 21-23, emphasized the biblical basis for church unity, though other issues were also addressed. Four of the elders' presentations focused on New Testament views of church unity. The leaders and elders spent much time discussing these views and the need to regain our focus as a Fellowship.

The first section of this *Exchange* includes summaries of the presentations from the retreat and one additional article. Then there is a review of Charles Colson's book, *The Body*. The next six articles have an evangelistic focus, addressing outreach and spiritual growth. The final two articles have a pastoral emphasis: new Xenos classes and short-term pastoral counseling. We hope you find all of these articles motivating and thought-provoking. Ω

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The Church as God's Building

The church is actually composed of believers in Christ. It isn't related to a physical structure at all.

Many of us grew up thinking that a "church" was a building where God was. We may have been surprised to find that the church is actually composed of believers in Christ. It isn't related to a physical structure at all. However, one repeated New Testament picture of the church is that of a building where God manifests himself — not a physical building, but a spiritual one. The "stones" of that building are not composed of minerals, but of the souls of Christian believers.

The metaphor of the church as a building where God dwells is presented in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, Ephesians 2:20-22, and 1 Peter 2:4-6. Christ is the foundation, the all-important cornerstone. Individual believers are built upon this foundation as "living stones." The result is a building where God is uniquely manifest, inhabiting that structure in an unparalleled manner — the way he used to manifest himself to the nation of Israel through the tent called the tabernacle that they carried with them in the wilderness.

There are several aspects of this metaphor that contribute to our understanding of the church. One area of understanding has to do with the relationship of the stones to one

another. There is a real difference between a brick wall and a pile of bricks. The point is that incorporation into close relationships is vital to a healthy church and to individual growth. If people aren't incorporated into close fellowship, they won't experience the stability and support designed into the church. We know that if visitors don't make friends and new Christians aren't incorporated into healthy fellowship groups, most of these people will be lost to the world or suffer a life of apathetic mediocrity.

The process and goals of incorporation have changed in our Fellowship in recent years. In

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— Jody Kear

the early 1980s, our ministry could be compared more easily to a union of brick layers than

to a guild of stone masons. There was a very high degree of uniformity in our ministry. The main goal of all home church leaders was to reproduce home church leaders and plant new home churches. It is a very straightforward task: Make all stones look like bricks! There was one model, and, to some extent, one method.

Under our new model, which has extensive diversity and mobility, it becomes much more important to emphasize the *value* of supporting others as well as being supported by others.

Stone masonry is much more interesting work than brick laying and, in one way, much easier, too. Once we accept the diverse shapes of stones, it becomes very rewarding to see how each stone was designed to fit into the wall. Borrowing from the body metaphor, we see that God has designed a specific role for each individual and gifted him or her to carry out that role (1 Corinthians 12:18). There is a place where each stone fits!

The process of chiseling down stones to look like bricks can be very frustrating. How much easier it is to realize that God is overseeing this building

project and that he has provided stones that fit. It may take some effort to find the spot, but it will be much more rewarding to see God's hand at work when that fit is finally achieved. We all need to be prepared to try filling a role or two that doesn't fit before we find a suitable one.

Another aspect of the metaphor of the church as God's building is that God will manifest himself through the whole more than he could through the accumulated individual parts. Although there are passages that also state that our bodies are individual temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), the New Testament emphasis is that believers corporately comprise God's building. Like the tabernacle in the wilderness, the completed building will be a place where God uniquely displays his attributes.

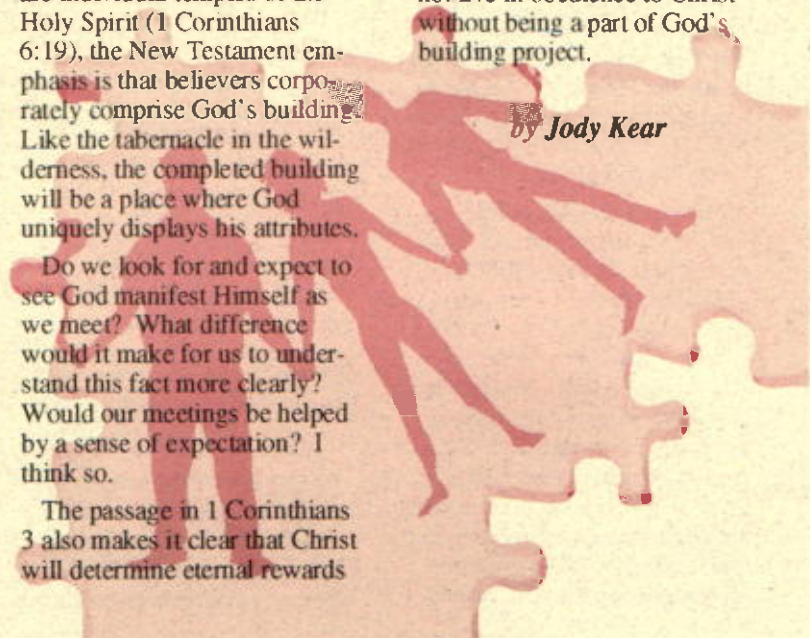
Do we look for and expect to see God manifest Himself as we meet? What difference would it make for us to understand this fact more clearly? Would our meetings be helped by a sense of expectation? I think so.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 3 also makes it clear that Christ will determine eternal rewards

based on the way we have built into the church. It's clear that Paul is addressing the plural "believers" in Corinth as "a temple." The quality of our work in building up this temple will determine, in great part, the level of our eternal state.

God isn't *primarily* interested in how we've improved our lives or how successfully we've turned away from sin or any other measure of progress apart from how we've built into the church. The New Testament makes it clear that God is working primarily through the church in this age, and we cannot live in obedience to Christ without being a part of God's building project.

by Jody Kear



Corporate Guilt in the Church: A Warning

At the recent Fellowship-wide Leaders' Retreat, held May 21-23, we discussed several areas of controversy currently attracting attention at Xenos. Leaders shared their perspectives on different areas, including critical views of current and past leadership and policies in the church. I think these kind of discussions are very good, and they contribute to the health of the church when handled in the right spirit.

One area came up several times which, in my opinion, requires the attention of the church. This is the area of corporate guilt, or speculations that God is disciplining our church for some reason. We have heard numerous suggestions along these lines, both at the retreat and in other conversations, and I am very troubled by them. Let me explain why.

If we suggest, for instance, that Xenos is not compassionate enough, and therefore God has closed doors for ministry, I believe we may be committing a sin by judging unrighteously. Are we certain this is what God is doing? Who is not compassionate? Every member in the church? I can't believe that. I know people in this church who are as compassionate as anyone could ever be. Others are not so compassionate. But how do

we know God would discipline the innocent along with the guilty just because some are not compassionate? It may be that if things got to a certain point, God might move against an entire group of people for general tendencies in that group. However, to say this has happened in Xenos is a very bold assertion which one could never know unless God told them in direct revelation.

Others suggest we might be under discipline because we will not give generously of our money. Some think we are un-

I would like to call on the church to forsake all such corporate guilt theories. All of these generalized theories are very problematic and prone to two deadly errors: self-righteous judgment and division.

— Dennis McCallum

der discipline because we are too soft on sin or that we are embarrassed by imperatives. Some have suggested that Xenos is experiencing reduced

growth because we have left our first love. I would like to call on the church to forsake all such corporate guilt theories. All of these generalized theories are very problematic and prone to two deadly errors: self-righteous judgment and division.

Let's take the suggestion that God is displeased with our lack of giving. This may well be true in the case of many people, and it must be true in the case of some. But there are some exceptionally generous people in Xenos as well. In the area of financial giving, we have an objective, measurable problem. But when we put forward totally subjective areas like not loving God enough or not loving others enough, the problem becomes neither objective nor measurable. We are claiming to know things we don't know, and this will harm people.

Let me use my colleague Gary DeLashmutt as an example. Do you think you know how much Gary loves the Lord? How would you know? I couldn't make a judgment like that even though he's my best friend! I know his testimony is that he loves the Lord, and his actions don't contradict that testimony, and I am satisfied with that. I have no business trying

to tell whether there is some lacking in Gary's love for God, and he is under no obligation to demonstrate to me how much he does. This is a judgment I should leave to God. Any claim on my part to know the real truth here would be arrogant and self-righteous on my part. God has not equipped me to make this sort of judgment.

The same goes for whether he is compassionate enough. If he loves and serves his family and friends (and he does), I don't know how I would justify charging that his compassion is inadequate. Still less would I be able to say what the Lord is doing in his life, let alone what God is doing to the rest of us because Gary is not considered by some to be compassionate enough!

Corporate guilt theories always end up being unfair. They are also usually self-righteous. Who suggests the church is being blocked because of lack of compassion? Someone who feels he or she is not compassionate? Or is it someone who feels that *others* are not compassionate? I find that people usually theorize God is against those who have a sin problem different than their own sin problem. This is self-righteous judgment.

We need to stop spreading these theories. This is not quelling dissent or criticism. God himself says, "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way" (Romans 14:10-13).

We should give account for ourselves. If we want to theorize about what God is disciplining, we should each consider our situations and ask of ourselves, "What might God be disciplining me for?" This is the attitude that each of us needs to take at this time.

Another problem arises when we indulge in this sort of speculation. Those who believe one theory begin to take sides against those with the other theory. Those who feel they are being unfairly judged feel angry. Further, God will be unhappy with any claim that he is doing something when he really isn't. We need to distinguish between judging subjective attitudes and judging concrete actions or poli-

cies. If Gary were having an affair with a woman, which he is not, we would be obligated to judge his actions and discipline him accordingly. But when we begin to draw conclusions about his motives or inner attitudes, we are exceeding our proper authority.

Many, including myself, believe we are not under any special discipline of God, but simply struggling through difficult times with his help. Our most serious problems today are not the result of God's discipline at all, but directly attributable to human frailty or wrong doing.

We cannot blame God for our failure to gather together enough money for a facility. We cannot blame God for our fighting with each other. Even our low morale is not God's fault. God is not withholding anything from us, but he is calling on us for full commitment to his agenda for the church, before granting final victory.

Please join me in coming together to complete the work on our present projects while leaving subjective issues in the hands of God.

by Dennis McCallum

The Church as God's Field

By pointing to a cultivated field, Paul was able to call our attention primarily to two things: the limitations of human workers and the need for unity and cooperation.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field . . ." (I Corinthians 3:6-9).

The main area of teaching involved in this "picture" has to do with Christian ministry. Paul is discussing the attitude he and Apollos had, compared to the competitive and fleshly perspective then dominating the Corinthian church. By pointing to a cultivated field, Paul was able to call our attention primarily to two things: the limitations of human workers and the need for unity and cooperation.

Human Limitations

Paul said that neither he nor Apollos were able to cause growth. They were only able to do a ministry (planting or watering) and let God's power bring about spiritual results at the proper time. Farmers know that no amount of fretting and fussing will shorten the growing season. Results are important, and the harvest is the ultimate goal

of both Paul's and Apollos' work. However, our results may not be immediate, and they may not be "ours" either. Perhaps the seed I planted will be harvested by another, and this should be fine with me.

The realization that we do not have control over the time or amount of harvest should cause us to feel comforted. Nothing is worse than feeling responsible for something we can't control. If we are faithful, no doubt we (or someone) will see results eventually, as promised in Galatians 6:9.

This passage shows the attitude we should adopt. First, Paul says, "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." This statement uses hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration) to make its point. Actually the workers are *something*, but compared to God, they are like nothing. After all, he also calls himself "God's fellow worker" later in the same passage. But God is not trying to draw our attention to our importance in this passage. He is calling our attention to our limitations and corresponding attitudes.

Only the minister who has deeply embraced the truth of

1 Corinthians 3:7 possesses the full humility seen in Paul here. This passage provides a basis for describing boundaries in ministry. We need only do our part, whether planting or watering. We can entrust God with the final outcome in ministry, which means we are free from the distracting burden of anxiety over how our results are reflecting on our ego.

Unity and Cooperation

Paul also said, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one." Such a lack of competition is only to be expected from one who has understood his limitations and has accepted fully the need for the function of the other workers in the field. Farming is usually a team project, and it is not important at all that the one who planted also be the one who har-

Farming is usually a team project, and it is not important at all that the one who planted also be the one who harvests. The important thing is that the harvest is reaped.

vests. The important thing is that the harvest is reaped. Unity and cooperation are the hallmark of the mature Christian worker who has understood the larger picture. Jealousy and strife are the outcome when workers focus only on their own part of the whole task.

Questions to Consider

Farmers are supposed to be patient, hard-working, and consistent. With respect to this metaphor, how would you rate your own progress in each of these areas? Which of the three is your weakest area? How would God probably work with you on improving that area?

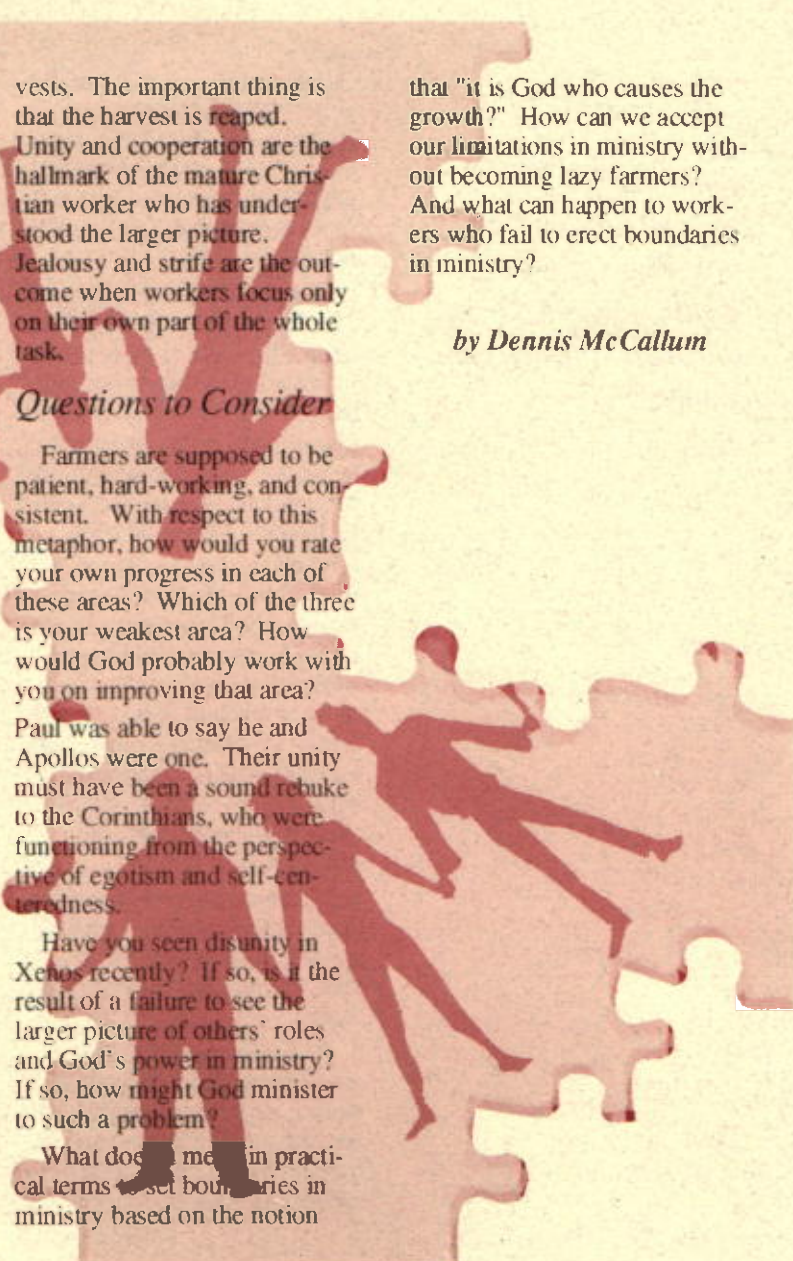
Paul was able to say he and Apollos were one. Their unity must have been a sound rebuke to the Corinthians, who were functioning from the perspective of egotism and self-centeredness.

Have you seen disunity in Xenos recently? If so, is it the result of a failure to see the larger picture of others' roles and God's power in ministry? If so, how might God minister to such a problem?

What does **unity** mean in practical terms to set boundaries in ministry based on the notion

that "it is God who causes the growth?" How can we accept our limitations in ministry without becoming lazy farmers? And what can happen to workers who fail to erect boundaries in ministry?

by Dennis McCallum



The Church as the "Body of Christ"

Paul uses the image of the body to portray orderliness and role distinctions in a structured and organized group.

The metaphor of the church as the "Body of Christ" is used several times in the New Testament. There are many implications of this metaphor, but my focus here is on organization and unity.

Metaphors are teaching tools. They are used to illustrate something unfamiliar or theoretical by referring to something common. It is always important to discern what point the author is trying to communicate with the metaphor and not to stretch the metaphor beyond that point.

There are some misconceptions, for example, that stem from the body metaphor. Specifically, many people see the notion of naturalness or spontaneity as inherent in this description of the church. Some even conclude that organization, planning and structure are at odds with the image of the church as a body.

However, the body metaphor is never used to teach against organization, planning, or structure. In fact, just the opposite is true.

In several passages, Paul uses the image of the body to portray orderliness and role distinctions in a structured and organized group. For example, in Ephesians 4:11-16, one of the

more extended passages on the body, Paul begins by saying "God has placed in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers." This is a typical description of how people can have different roles in the church. Verse 16 concludes with a description of each member, "every joint and ligament," supplying its part. This implies a high degree of efficiency and orderliness.

When the Bible says, "God placed people" or "God appoints people," we should not always look to the abnormal or

We need each other because of our differences, just as a body needs all of its different organs.

– Scot (Buck) McCallum

irregular, as if God only works in supernatural and miraculous ways. For example, we know that Paul had very regular and objective criteria for selecting elders (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Yet of the Ephesian elders he wrote, "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (see Acts 20:28).