

It is an amazing thing how the body reacts to protect itself from injury. We all know how it is an instinctive thing to draw away from what hurts you, like when we touch something hot or sharp. Sometimes this is a natural reflex that we have little control over. At other times it is a function that is performed consciously, as when we limp to minimize the impact of a blister or a rock in our shoe. Even with this purposeful avoidance, a callus is eventually developed to act as a cushion or insulation. The body performs a similar function internally when it forms a cyst around a foreign body, like an oyster that forms a pearl around a grain of sand. This self-protection extends to mental problems as well as physical ones.

And there is a great deal of stress in life. One of the worst things that can happen to a boat in a severe storm is being tied up to a dock. The buffeting of the winds and the waves cause the boat to be beaten to smithereens against the solid structure that it is tied to. Because it can't get loose, it suffers great damage.

Sometimes in life we find ourselves in a similar situation, being damaged by the very structure that is supposed to give us shelter and stability. Unfortunately, the church (as implemented in the hands of men) can have this reversed function. The church is an institution ordained by God and if operated according to his pattern, it is indeed the body of Christ. The only thing that can go wrong with it stems from the failings of the sinners (you and me) who are a part of it.

If you have ever worked within its structure, you have most likely crashed into it at least once. You may have been a teacher that had your class taken away without cause, or worked on the bulletin and had it 'changed' to eliminate your job, or otherwise found yourself afoul of the system. Many find that, in order to achieve fulfillment, they have to work outside on their own self-directed activities.

It makes you wonder what the structure of the church should actually be. As was mentioned earlier, God ordained the structure but it is up to man to work it. How hard (solid) should that structure be? It reminds me of the time when Jesus talked about not putting new wine into old wineskins (Matthew 9:17). This refers to the basic problem of trying to put something that is alive into something that is inflexible. How much of the work of the church should stem from 'programs'? Can we not work out our own plan of service to the world? Are our leaders such that we should we have to check everything we do them?

What does man do in the structure that turns us from wanting to participate? Well, there always seems to be some kind of politics going on. There are many who put more work into buttering up the leadership than they do in actual service to humanity. And there is usually gossip and slander that seem to sneak their way around. All of this is allowed by a lack of real leadership. And whatever the cause of the problems in the church, we find that we have to keep going in spite of them. Neither slander nor schmoozing shall keep us from our appointed rounds.

In Judges 17:6 we read, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." There must be God directed leadership, filled with caring and love, for us all to be able to pull together in the church's structure. The failings of human leadership cause us to declare as Peter and the other apostles did in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!" Jesus is truly our Lord, and not any man or group of men. We do not have to execute the programs they dream up, either; we must simply, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

Why do you think that there was so much separation between the common people and the Pharisees? Remember that Paul left his mission efforts with the Jews (and their self-imposed structure) and went to the Gentiles. So some Christians have to do their own (authorized by God) thing. This reminds us of the time when Jesus was presented with some who were working outside of the structure (Mark 9:38-39):

*And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

Christians such as these use their talents as best they can. It is like they find their own camping spot in the face of rocks, creeks, swamp, poison ivy, and other treacherous features in the terrain. They don't struggle for the top, or try to do everything, but they blend into the background. They keep from drifting off by finding their own niche. They declare their independence from man, and become servants of God only.

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