

DAY 5

AS I FUNCTION IN
RELATIONSHIP TO
THE CHURCH, I
DEPEND ON OTHERS
IN THE CHURCH TO
HELP ME UNDER-
STAND GOD'S WILL.

Ephesians 4:15-16

"Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

God Speaks Through the Church

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through God's people, the local church. Later in this course we will devote a whole unit to ways a church hears and understands God's will. Today we will look at some ways you can understand God's will through the church.

1 Let's review for a moment. Answer the following questions.

- How did God speak in the Old Testament? _____

- How did God speak in the Gospels? _____

- How does God speak from Acts to the present? _____

- What are four ways the Holy Spirit speaks? _____

The Body of Christ

One problem many churches face today is they have so emphasized the doctrine of the priesthood of believers they have lost their sense of corporate identity. What does that mean in simple words? Christians think their walk with God is independent of anyone else and they are not accountable to the church. It is true Christians have direct access to God through Christ. However, God created the church as His redemptive agent in the world. He has a purpose for the church. God places every member in a church to accomplish His redemptive purposes through that congregation.

A church is a body—the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus Christ is the Head of every local church (see Eph. 4:15), and God places every member in the body as it pleases Him (see 1 Cor. 12:18). The Holy Spirit manifests Himself to every person for the common good (see 1 Cor. 12:7). The Father fits together the whole body (see Eph. 5:16), and the Holy Spirit enables and equips members to function where the Father has placed them in the body. The body builds itself up until every member experiences the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13). God made us mutually interdependent. We need one another. What one lacks, others in the body can supply.

What God is doing in and through the body is essential to my knowing how to respond to Him. When I see Him working in my church, I immediately adjust and put my life in that place too. In the church I let God use me in any way He chooses to complete His work in other members. This was Paul's goal when he said, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28). Paul constantly asked believers to become vitally involved with his life and ministry. The effectiveness of Paul's ministry rested on them (see Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1-2).

2 Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-31 and answer the following questions.

- a. Paul addressed the Christians of a local church in the city of Corinth. What is a local church (v. 27)? _____
- b. Circle the picture in the margin that best illustrates a church (v. 12).
- c. What does verse 25 say should be true of the church? Does this describe your church? _____

- d. Based on verses 14-24, mark the following statements *T* (true) or *F* (false). Rewrite the false statements on the lines to state them correctly.
- ___ (1) The body consists of one part. _____
- ___ (2) The foot is still a part of the body even though it is not a hand. _____
- ___ (3) The ear is not part of the body because it is not an eye. _____
- ___ (4) Members of the body decide how they should be arranged. _____
- ___ (5) All members need every other member of the body. _____

A local church is the *body of Christ* (2-a). All believers worldwide are united in the kingdom of God under the rule of the King! But the local church is to function like a body. It is not *part* of a body. It *is* a body. In 2-b the picture on the top may better represent the way some churches function. However, God has always intended for the church to function as a unit, not as individual parts. (2-c) A church should not be divided. If your church is fragmented, it is unhealthy. The Great Physician, Christ Himself, can heal the body if your church will let Him. In 2-d statements 1, 3, and 4 are false. The others are true.

Apart from the body you cannot fully know God's will for relating to God's people. Without the eye the hand does not know where to touch. Without the ear the rest of the body may not know when or how to respond. Every member needs to listen to what the other members say. If the members are not talking about what they sense God is doing in their midst, the whole body will be disoriented to God.

Allow God to Speak Through the Church

As I function in relationship to the church, I depend on others in the congregation to help me understand God's will. Let me illustrate this for you. Then in unit 10 we will spend more time studying the way members function as part of a body.


While I was in seminary, I was involved in a local church. The first year I taught teenage boys, and I did so with a willing heart. The next year I was asked to be the music and education director. I had never done either job in my life. I had sung in a choir, but I had never led congregational music. I knew nothing about directing the educational program of a church. Here is the way I approached this decision.

The people of God at this church needed a leader. As they prayed, they sensed God had purposely put me there to meet that need. I also saw the need and realized God wanted to use me to meet it. As a servant of Jesus Christ, I did not have the option to say no. I believed the Head—Jesus Christ—could speak through the rest of the body to guide me to know how I should function in their midst. I said I would do my best.



Apart from
the body you
cannot fully
know God's
will for relating
to God's people.

For two years I served as the music and education director. Then the church voted to call me to be their pastor. I hadn't preached three sermons in my life. I had not gone to seminary because I felt called to be a pastor, but I had gone because I felt called by God into a relationship with Him for whatever He had in mind. I sensed I needed theological training so I would have tools for God to work with. I didn't say, "I am going into foreign missions or home missions." I didn't confine myself to music or education or preaching. I said, "Lord, whatever You direct me to do in relation to Your body, that is what I will do. I am Your servant for Your purposes." I agreed to be the church's pastor.

 In the church a need does not constitute the call. A need, however, is not to be ignored. Don't be afraid to let the body of believers assist you in knowing God's will. Also keep in mind that one individual is not the church. In the final analysis you must take all the counsel of people and go to God for clear direction. You will find that a number of things will begin to line up. When what you hear from the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church says the same thing, you can proceed with confidence.

You may say, "Henry, you don't know my church. I can't depend on them to help me know God's will." Be careful. When you say that, you have said more about what you believe about God than what you believe about your church. You are saying, "Henry, not even God can work through these people. He is not powerful enough." I don't think you believe that in your mind, but what you do says more about what you believe about God than what you say. This is the point where we need to focus on the crisis of belief. When God speaks, you have to decide what you really believe about God and act on it.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

A church is a body—the body of Christ!

Jesus Christ is the Head of a local church.

God places every member in the body as it pleases Him.


God made us mutually interdependent. We need one another.

Apart from the body I cannot fully know God's will for my relationship to the body.

Every member needs to listen to what the other members say.

As I function in relationship to the church, I depend on others in the church to help me understand God's will.

3 Write your Scripture-memory verse (John 5:19) on the following lines.



4 Review your other Scripture-memory verses and be prepared to recite them to a partner in your small-group session this week.

5 If you have not completed your list of spiritual markers (day 4), try to finish it before your group session this week. Bring the paper or notebook with you to the session.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

