

Joy Equipping

“As each part does its work.”
Ephesians 4:16-18



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Is the Body of Christ Handicapped?

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Stephen Hawking is a man who has challenged existing scientific beliefs, postulated numerous new theories, and been compared to Albert Einstein.

But for most of his adult life, Hawking's body has been out of reach of his mind. He has Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease), a disease which destroys the nerves of the spinal cord. Although his mind remains fully active, the connections from mind to limbs have been slowly eaten away until now he is no longer able to do anything for himself. Even to speak, he must use a state-of-the-art machine that allows him to make words by indicating letters. A mechanical voice then speaks. One reply may take him as long as eight minutes.

I can only imagine the frustration this man must feel—trapped, as it were, in a body which is totally alien to him. Through no fault of his own, he is completely dependent on others to care for him—forced to lead a slow-motion life which, to someone with his whip-like understanding, must drive him to anguish and anger.

Bad enough, but as I watched a documentary on Stephen Hawking one day, I suddenly saw Christ sitting in a wheelchair, immobile.

The Bible tells us that Christ is the head (mind) of a body composed of all who are Christians, (Ephesians 1:22-23) and that each member of the body has an important function (Romans 12). In other words, I am a part of the visible body of Christ on earth.



Usually, when we think of the church in terms of a body, we think of a healthy body where each organ, limb, muscle, and so on is functioning perfectly. We think of how each member has a specific function, and uses his or her gifts to perform that function. And we assume that everything is in order.

Yet the truth is that Christ's body frequently acts more like Stephen Hawking's body! Far too often, the body of Christ is uncooperative and unresponsive; having, as it were, a mind of its own rather than allowing the mind of Christ to control it.

Christ may see someone who is genuinely hurting. His Holy Spirit may try to prod my sensibilities. But I may be so out of touch that I won't hear his quiet voice, or I may choose to ignore the need he shows me.

Just imagine the frustration Christ must feel as he watches me trying to cope with problems and difficulties without following his directions. Or, when I have only partially understood him, my reaction may be jerky and may only achieve part of the desired results.

Some believers seem to have such close contact with God that they often feel a pressing need to pray for a specific person, or to perform some specific action. I have myself experienced these promptings that I believed to be from God.

Yet how many times have I failed to respond to a need even though I sensed it was there? How many people have

suffered because I was not paying attention to Christ's leading that day or because I was too busy or too selfish to take the time to deal with the need? Maybe I didn't want to get involved, or maybe I was just plain lazy.

No healthy body deliberately tries to hurt itself; yet Christ's body does it all the time. Think, for example, of the two church committee members who won't speak to each other because they have allowed their personal pride to get in the way? Or the person who tries to block every new idea that comes into the church because he doesn't like change? Or the one who's insensitive to the feelings of others and does what she wants regardless of opposition or the distress she may cause?

Stephen Hawking has no choice. His condition came through no desire or fault of his own.

But Christ had a choice. He chose to accomplish his work through people like me, regardless of the personal anguish it would bring him. Why? Because he wants me to have the joy that comes from serving him.



How can the body start functioning the way it should? Each member must be sensitive to directions from the Head. It takes each member—praying, working, loving—to carry out Christ's will.

The moment I accepted Christ, I became part of his Body. But I must continually check to make sure I am a properly functioning part. And I must find other members of the body whom I can ask to hold me accountable, and with whom I can share both the joys and the frustrations of living in the body.

When I am in tune with the mind of Christ, I must go about his business, performing the bodily function he has given me. He may be calling me to go out as his mouth to speak to nations, or he may be asking me to stay in my room as his heart and pray. It matters not what part I have—only that I do that part willingly.

It's amazing that after 2,000 years the body of Christ still exists. But imagine what Christ could do if all local bodies of believers carried out their roles perfectly in tune with his will? Perhaps the world could once again be turned upside down.