

Encountering God

by Bob Young

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Perhaps no greater challenge exists in the contemporary church than understanding that the message we share must be a message of God-encounter. The biblical message (the gospel) grows out of our own encounter with God and empowers others to find God.

Our society has mostly lost any sense of sacredness. Too often, the church has followed not far behind. In the recovery of a sense of encounter with God, a helpful figure of speech from Scripture is that of the church as the body of Christ. In our connection with and identity as the body of Christ, we find hints of the encounter God intends for his people.

We are baptized into one body by one Spirit and made to drink of that one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13). While one can encounter God in Scripture and prayer, whether a part of the body of Christ or not, Scripture describes baptism as a God encounter. (I will explore the God-encounter aspect of baptism more fully in a future article.)

That same text uses the body of Christ image to describe the shared experience of the church. Often overlooked is that we encounter God in one another. The people of God, gathered as assembly (church), encounter God even when God has not been visible in our experience during the week. We thrill to hear that God is at work in our world, that he has been visible in the lives of brothers and sisters. We share our hearts and lives, we gather in a unique sense as community in communion and fellowship, and in that experience we see God anew. (See my recent article, *Valuing Sundays*, at www.bobyongresources.com/articles/valuing-sundays.pdf.)

One chapter earlier (1 Cor. 11:23-29), Paul uses the body of Christ image to describe the table experience in the early church. Remembering Christ's upper room example and instructions, Paul reminds that the communion experience is a body of Christ experience. In the Supper, we must remember the body of Christ. This is likely two-pronged: remembering Christ's sacrifice (physical body), but also affirming that we are the body of Christ (spiritual body). Thus in the Supper, we encounter God afresh.

While individual Christians may find and see God in worship throughout the week, the Christian God-encounter experience cannot be far removed from the corporate body of Christ images Paul employs to remind that Christ died that encounter with God might be possible. May God help us correctly value these life-changing encounters.