

**Functional Structures**  
**Zechariah 4:1-14, Colossians 3:12-17**  
**Communion May 04, 2008**

It is natural and normal for all of us in our human nature, to have our individual selves as our greatest interest. I mean if we don't look after our own selves, who on earth will? It is so easy to say today, *life is about me*. It is so easy to come to church and chant the popular creed, *What do I get out of it?* But as we come to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ, we find that we do not have to take our own selves so very seriously. We free to take God more and more seriously, even to the point of thinking more of God than ourselves. Then as we think more highly of God, we realize that what God wants to have happen, no one of us can pull off all alone, and will need to join up with others. So as we are released from the gravitational pull of our own egos, and are enabled to orbit more around the living God, we care more about God and God's people doing what He wants done than what we want done individually. That means teaming with others in what is called the church. If we care about God in people, the church, we care that it is growing into what the Lord wants it to do. In our particular church we are considering 8 areas of church life that indicate that a church is healthy, vital, and growing.

I have listed those 8 in your bulletin and I would appreciate you looking at the list. They are empowering leadership, gift oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need oriented evangelism, and loving relationships as listed in your bulletin. We have taken a survey and that will soon show us how we are doing in each of these 8 areas. The one that is lowest will become an area of all out program emphasis. This is kind of like a barrel with one of the vertical curved boards or staves being shorter than the rest and the water or wine, cannot get any higher than the lowest stave. Now of those 8 items, which do you think will be our lowest?

Well, I bet no one picked functional structures. If Presbyterians have anything, boy, we have got structure. How many Presbyterian church members does it take to screw in a light bulb? We do not know. We do not think like that. Wrong question, right question, how many Presbyterian committees does it take to screw in a light bulb? If it doesn't take a committee, we cannot do it. We are structured alright. Talking to Presbyterian about the importance of structure is like talking to Jim Grier about fly fishing, or Bill Dalton about the importance of a good sense of humor, or Lou Smith about painting or Ryan Nielsen about the importance of youth ministry. But the topic is not structures, but FUNCTIONAL structures. Are our external structures functioning according to the spirit within, our reason for existence, or do our structures insulate us the Spirit of God and from our reason for existence, or somewhere in between? Well, given that question listen to our NT text for the morning.

<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

<sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I find it interesting that the developer of NCD Christian Schwartz says that **effective structures is the most controversial of the 8 topics**. NCD has found there are three groups in churches and they are the spiritualists, the technocrats, and the traditionalists. The spiritualists are skeptical of structures, thinking that they are unspiritual and worldly. The technocrats import business techniques into the church as if the church is no

more than a business not realizing that the presuppositions are radically different. The traditionalists think that what worked for grampa is good enough for us and the last thing you want do is mess with structure, especially the structure of the worship service. Why would functional structure be controversial? Well, maybe what is causing difference is not the outside form but the inside essence.

It is hard to find a text in the Bible that does not deal some way, some how with structure. But it is equally hard to find structure without the Spirit of God close by. Our OT scripture in Zechariah there is the line, “*What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain.* There is a structure, a mountain and it is flattened, but before that, there is the Spirit of God *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

There is the inside core and there is the outside structure. **The external structure is functional IF is expressing what is on the inside.** The mountain is leveled because of the power within called the Spirit. The structure only carries out what the spirit forms. The form is a product of the function, the plant comes from the root, and the root from the seed. The outside behavior is a result of an inside motive or attitude.

Last week Mark Roberts spoke to us about passionate spirituality. He emphasized the Spirit of God in **Spirit-uality.** We continue to talk this week about the Spirit of God when it comes to structure, functional structures. **There is spirit before there is structure.** There is heart and soul before there are bones and flesh. This is the case in our new and refurbished buildings. The Family Life Center and the new music building did not just start being built. There was a spirit, a life, a force operating within this church that had us putting up these great buildings. The community sees the exterior but inside the effort is what we can call the Spirit of God acting within certain people.

Last Sunday, Mark also reminded us that if you live by the Spirit you are guided by the Spirit. God wants to lead us by his spirit to do certain things and not others. What we end up doing takes form and substance, shape and size, texture and color. **God wants the structures we see, to accurately reflect what the Spirit of God that we cannot see- wants to produce through us.**

In our New Testament lesson from Colossians, we have the outward structure of the character of the child of God expressed in several ways: Inside there is holiness. This is internal, it relates to the Spirit of God acting from within, that being so, there is an external structure that is called clothing by Paul. How do you know that you are allowing the Spirit of the living God to act within you? Well there are certain materials shaping your outward being. The external form includes the personality structure of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love. If you were building some structure at your place, you would have a list of building materials. Are these materials shaping your life:compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love? If so, how?

Paul also says that if the Spirit is allowed to form our core being, there will be peace within and what is the external structure coming from that? Thankfulness. Can you picture this? Here is someone who living right with God and when that is the case deep inside where the spirit dwells, there is peace but that peace leads to a personality structure called being thankful. It also speaks of having wisdom within and that also has an outward shape and that is singing. Wisdom is about applied knowledge that works in such a way that a person rejoices and expresses that in singing. Or maybe whistling in my case. But in any case someone with the Spirit of God functioning within will have song of some kind, or dance, that will come out in an expression of praise to God that is infectious.

Then Paul says that the word of God is to dwell within as a function of God living within, and then that forms something external, structural, and it is called, *whatever you do.* *Whatever you do* is a response to something else and it takes a certain shape. This creates the question, what about my activity is derived from scripture that

is taking root within me? What is going on inside of me and what form is that taking? What is going on inside our church and what form is that taking?

Churches vary on structure given their theology. For example, our Roman Catholic friends have hierarchy for their structure. There is the pope, archbishops, bishops and priests, and church members. Their structure emphasizes ascendancy and rank.

For us, as reformed Christians, the best structure is that which allows for greater numbers of people to be engaged in ministry where no one person is higher or lower than another. We have a flat structure and the clergy are to act as a servant class beneath the people. One motto for the clergy that I like is to get under and push up.

The kind of structure we are talking about is putting things together in right order given the symmetry of the Spirit of God. What is God saying by his Spirit through his word that will take a new shape among us? Pray and think about that with me.

Why is structure important? It is important because what we have inside is not for us. The Christ who lives within us is to be shared with the world. Functional structure is evangelistic. We are the body of Christ. The point of the organizational scheme is to reveal Christ and we cannot do that alone. We have to be rightly related to one another to do that. AND, in order to be rightly related, we need to have our hearts in order. If we do not have our heart in order, we will not have a desire to reveal Christ with others in how we are socially structured.

Our social structure in the church will include different sort of people totally dedicated to revealing Jesus Christ in their relationship and church structure. The more different we are from one another in our humanity, and the more alike we are in our radical devotion to Christ as our structure, the more Christ can be seen in and through us. We become more differentiated socially, economically, culturally, racially, and the more committed to Jesus Christ as one people, more and more with time.

An example of this would short term mission trip teams, mix it up because the people in the mission field will not be able to account for those disparate parts being together. Black, Hispanic, Asian, female, male, youth, senior, all together in one group acts as an incentive to ask, how did you come together?

Our lives are to prompt the question for which Christ is the answer! That does not lie within any of us; therefore, we need God's presence and power having free reign in us to pull it off. What are we organizing and how does what we organize reveal the living God?

We take our clue for this from creation. (the ineffable synthesis of Teilhard de Chardin) Creation includes many bewilderingly diverse elements; but taken together, it all calls for a creator. Nature is revelatory. It points beyond itself. Nature is God's Braille to a blind world. It is like a bouquet that a florist crafts for a someone special but has no card with it. The question the recipient asks, is who did this for me? What are they saying these flowers? The harmony, the order, the coordination, the synchronization in creation is to happen in the church and in our personal lives. This symmetry of nature is to find parallels in our church and each of our lives through the symmetry of the Spirit among us. . The whole arrangement reveals something beyond itself.. The

way our church is arranged, the way people work together is to remind people of God. This doesn't happen because they try to work harmoniously together, it happens because they are all seeking Christ.

They are not seeking their own glory and upstaging one another, they point beyond themselves to him and do not worry about status, station, or self. The bouquet includes all kinds of flowers, but we can't all be gladiolas.

It impresses me immensely when people in this church who are or have been in high places, who have had 1000's under their commands, will help fold up tables and put away chairs when the rest have gone home after a meeting.

It says in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that God makes his appeal to others through us, that we are ambassadors for Christ. This also happens through our structure functioning to reveal our God. This is a big deal. We are to so live that others who observe us will somehow, some way, be drawn to Christ through us and how we are put together.

Paul says to the church several times in the New Testament that you are the body of Christ. You may remember that Paul was writing to people in Greece. You have seen statues of Greek bodies. They are very attractive bodies. They are magnificent bodies. Imagine a person with a perfect body; perfect hair, eyes, teeth, face, chest, legs, even the feet are perfect. What makes the person attractive is not just one part of them but ALL of it taken together, the whole. You cannot take your eyes off that person, you would like to meet that person, you heart races when you see that person. Ok, now come back to the sermon. If Christ made a perfect body, he who is the creator of the universe, how attractive would that body be? Would it be a ten? Yes. We are to be attractive to people in the way we are arrayed together. Our church as a people is to attract people to God because of each part perfectly fitted to the others. Each of us is to be seeking to be vitally connected to Christ and to one another no matter what. You have been given a supernatural ability to minister to the people of this congregation. You can help make it beautiful by using what God has given you to help the rest of us.

Are our external structures functioning according to the spirit within, our reason for existence, or do our structures insulate us the Spirit of God and from our reason for existence, or somewhere in between?

Church processes and structures are spiritually important, maybe even crucial, and the people need to understand that. All structure MUST be subject to change as the one constant, the Spirit of God leads us. All those who belong to God are led by the Spirit of God, we heard last week, and we continue to hear today from scripture. **This means making the Spirit of God leading us the constant and the structure to variable.** We do not defend structure and keep the Spirit at a safe distance. This church structure that reveals God in us will come from the symmetry of the Spirit of God giving us wisdom, so outwardly, we can sing with our lives the line of that hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind; *Take from our souls the strain and stress, And let our ordered lives confess The beauty of Thy peace.*

**THIS SERMON WAS WRITTEN FOR ORAL PRESENTATION AND THEREFORE CONTAINS GRAMMATICAL FORMS THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH**