



# SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

*SERIES: SPIRITUALITY OF DAILY LIFE*

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This fall marks the 50th anniversary of Peninsula Bible Church. In 1948, five businessmen, Gus Gustafson, Ed Stirm, Bob Smith, Cecil Kettle, and Harry Smith, began meeting together to talk about ministry on the peninsula. They formed a fellowship which began meeting at the Palo Alto Community Center for Sunday worship. Some time later, three letters were delivered to a post office box for Peninsula Bible Fellowship. These were written by three different men, without prior knowledge, and independent of each other, recommending a young man who was graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary to pastor the fledgling ministry. His name was Ray Stedman. Ray and his wife Elaine came to Palo Alto in 1950 to take on a work of the Lord, one that has had far reaching impact in the world. PBC grew under the teaching of Ray and other godly men. Many of us have our roots in that work in which Ray and others laid a foundation for life and ministry that has helped shape and mold us.

Now we move to 1984. That year, we learned at a PBC all-day staff meeting that there was a church building for sale in Cupertino. We were not actively seeking to plant another church, although at times we had looked for a different location to alleviate the crowded conditions on Middlefield Road in Palo Alto. At lunch time we decided to look over this property we had just heard about. When we returned to resume our meeting, the Spirit moved us to pursue the purchase of the site. By God's grace and leading we were able to do that without incurring any debt. Following renovation work, we opened the doors of PBC/Cupertino on March 10th, 1985. Peninsula Bible Church continued as one church for several years but gradually, we became two separate churches.

We have a marvelous heritage here at PBC. I am humbled when I think I have been able to be a part of it.

In our preaching schedule this fall we are spending some time on spiritual basics, refocusing our lives and centering on Jesus, seeking to bring the different aspects of daily living into a spiritual dimension. One of the most important of these is church, the place where we gather to worship. That is what I want to talk about this morning.

I have titled the message "Spiritual Community," but it really is a "state of the union" message. I follow this practice every year with our singles ministry. I talk about the ministry, my vision for it, and share a little of who I am. I thought it might be helpful to do this for the

entire church, for two reasons. First, our church year begins in the fall. Fall is when school starts and most of our church programs get under way. As a pastor, for me fall is like spring is to the farmer. This is the time to plow the soil, sow seed and cultivate, and see what God grows.

The second reason why it is helpful to have a "state of the union" message is that there are many people among us who don't know a lot about Peninsula Bible Church. There is no definitive "owner's manual" for this church. It will be helpful to learn who we are and what is our philosophy of ministry. So I want to spend some time talking, first, about the universal church, and second, our church here in Cupertino.

The New Testament has several passages describing the church. I will briefly mention five references, all by the apostle Paul, which we find there.

## *A. The church is the body of Christ.*

Writing in Ephesians, Paul makes the following statement:

**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23, NASB).**

"Body" is the word the apostle uses to describe the nature of the church. Christ is the head, says Paul, and the church is his body. In other words, believers in Jesus Christ are the ears, eyes, arms and legs of the risen Lord. We are connected to one another and to our head. The church is not an institution, it is not an organization. The church is a living organism. It has an organic rather than a static nature. This is why we seek to lead through relationships, not through organized programs, detailed structures or organizational charts. We are a living body, and relationships define the church.

## *B. The head of the church is Jesus.*

**He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything (Col. 1:18).**

**we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ (Eph 4.15).**

The Commander-in-chief responsible for leading and guiding this living organism is Jesus Christ. He is the head, the brains of this operation. He has risen from the dead and is actively directing the affairs of his church.

We have one Lord and we are all brothers and sisters.

One implication of this principle for PBC is that we don't have a senior pastor, one person who is in charge. Another implication is that we are governed by a board of elders who are committed to unanimity in decision making. The elders believe that Jesus is Lord of this church. We are convinced that if God wants to move us in a certain direction, then he will bring each elder to a common mind, free from influence by perhaps more dominant board members. This means that matters take longer to accomplish at times, but in the end, we have confidence that Jesus has guided and directed.

### *C. The church is the dwelling place of God.*

**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).**

In the Bible, the church is referred to as the body of Christ, but it is also referred to as a building, and more specifically, a household, a home, a temple, the place where God dwells. The temple of the Old Testament has been replaced with the church in the NT. When Paul refers to the "house of God," he is not speaking of the physical structure, the walls and windows, etc., but the people. People are the walls and windows. Believers in Christ are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The church is the place where God dwells, because his people are the church.

What an amazing truth this is! God has called people from all walks of life, preaching peace to people far and near, rich and poor, male and female, slaves and free, brilliant and ordinary, successful and broken. He brings this conglomeration of people together and declares that this is where he is going to live. God is not to be found in a building; he dwells in our hearts. The world sees God in the lives of believers who are indwelt with his Spirit.

And not only the world, but the heavens are watching as this unfolds. Listen to these words of the apostle:

**so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10).**

The church is God's display case for all the heavens to watch. What a high calling this is!

### *D. The church is the pillar and support of the truth.*

**I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).**

"Pillar" here refers to the columns that hold up a

building; "support" refers to the bulwark, the mainstay. The church has been entrusted to maintain and proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus to a confused society. This is what sets people free from the power of sin and death. The church is not a collection of people who meet together and decide what they are going to believe; it is a collection of people who are given God's truth to understand and proclaim. The cornerstone is Christ; the foundation is the apostles and prophets who have spoken God's word and deposited it for us in the scriptures.

This is why we are committed to expository teaching here at PBC. We believe that God's word has the power to change hearts, so we are committed to systematically teaching through the books of the Bible, illuminating what God has to tell us.

### *E. The church is one, but the gifts are many.*

Reading again from the words of Paul:

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4.4-7, 11-12).**

**For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many (1 Cor. 12.12-14).**

So there is both unity and diversity in the church. It has a common Lord, a common Spirit, and common goals, but each person in the body functions differently. Every believer has spiritual gifts designed for the common good, for the maturing and building up of the body. Pastor/teachers are given to equip the saints and train them to use their gifts; and then the body does the work of the ministry. So it is imperative that each member functions as God has designed.

This then is the nature of the church as it is defined in the New Testament.

Now I want to talk about our vision for PBC and the things that we hold near and dear because of these truths.

### *A. Vision for maturity.*

When PBC was founded, many churches held to the evangelistic model, in which Sunday mornings were given to leading people to Christ. But the elders of PBC,

based upon the NT principles we have discussed, decided that their calling was to build up the body of Christ to maturity. Our goal is that our people be conformed to the image of Christ. Our calling is to train and equip believers. Thus we give high priority to teaching the word, discipleship, evening study classes, and an intern program which trains teachers and leaders for ministry.

Over the years, God continues to bring men and women to the Bay Area to be trained at PBC and then depart to other places to use their gifts and training. Actually, many of our staff have been trained here. Our goal isn't to increase in numbers, but to train the people who are already in our midst.

### *B. Commitment to community.*

More than ever before, the need for community is what people feel most acutely today. We live in a fragmented, fast-paced society. A sense of community is hard to find. People are looking for a place where they can connect with others.

The older I get, the more I see how important community is to our spiritual life. The church is made up of many members who are in the process of becoming one. When we connect in community we are more likely to connect to God. The goal is not for us to grow individually, but together. Spiritual growth occurs in community. It is hampered when people remain independent of each other. The important thing here, however, is that community be seen as "real." It is imperative that people's hearts become open and exposed. The risk is great, but the rewards are much greater.

At times I wish we could use our Sunday mornings to share with one another in small groups. This is what we long to see occur in our adult elective classes. And this is what we want for home fellowships—to have people become part of a small circle where they connect with others and with God.

There are no techniques that will bring this about. Community is a gift that is created by the Holy Spirit.

### *C. Importance of the ministry of the saints.*

A bedrock principle here at PBC is our commitment to the ministry of the saints. Each one of us has been given spiritual gifts for the work of the ministry. In fact, we cannot function as a church without this. The work of the church requires all the gifts of the body, not just those of the staff and elders.

Just think of all the ministries that have come about through this ministry of the saints: our children's and women's ministries, worship, music and sound ministries, our ushers, the Guatemala ministry, the ministry

to the Vietnamese refugees, Crisis Pregnancy Center, etc.

The most exciting ministries come from members of the body as people follow the Lord's leading. We find that when leaders come up with a vision and then try to get people to follow, the ministry diminishes after a while, because such ministries can easily become fleshly pursuits. But when God lays a vision on someone's heart and they act on that, it flourishes, because it is a ministry of the Spirit.

The elders are delighted when the saints do the work of the ministry. We do everything we can to encourage and support those efforts. Speaking for the staff and elders, we want to give you permission to use your gifts! Don't wait for someone to ask you to do something. If you see a need, God may be calling you to a ministry. And if you want to find a place to try some things out, read the insert in the bulletin today which lists all kinds of opportunities for ministry.

### *D. Importance of New Covenant lifestyle.*

Basically stated, this principle is, everything coming from God, nothing from us. God indwells and empowers his church through the Spirit. As the apostle has written, we are clay pots, ordinary vessels. We are not adequate in ourselves to consider anything coming from us; our adequacy is from God. His strength is perfected in human weakness. Our brokenness releases the life that is inside us. When we find that we are powerless, that is when God does his best work. No other way of living is adequate in the long run. The law kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Sadly, what we see more often than not in the church, however, is "old covenant" ministry, where everything depends on the power of the flesh. At best, this produces a slick facade, but there is always death on the inside. So we seek to be authentic. We don't worry about polished performances. We concentrate on trusting the Lord, not ourselves. It is his church and his ministry.

This is what PBC is about. We are not perfect. Far from it. We are always growing and learning. PBC is not the only church, nor is it the only good church model. There are wonderful churches that function differently according to how God has called them. Here at PBC, we have a clear vision of what God has called us to be. I feel privileged to be a part of it. As we begin this year, our prayer is that we will share this vision, and that as a body we will strive to build ourselves up in love, to a mature man, to the fullness of Christ.

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