

Bodily Presence

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This pandemic is bringing to light many ideas that perhaps we would not have thought of without it. One of the most important ones that I have heard yet is from a course I am taking from Austin Graduate School.

It is possible that an emergency provision may become the norm at the expense of truth.

Example: Baptism by sprinkling was an emergency provision that led to a new norm for baptism which ignored what Jesus actually said.

On an eventful day circa 253 A.D., a man named Novatian lay in illness, apparently upon his death-bed. Believing in the necessity of immersion for salvation, but unable to leave his bed, he was permitted by a local "bishop" to substitute the pouring of water all about him in its place. This episode, reported by the famous church historian, Eusebius (Church History VI. xliii. 14, 17), constituted the first known historical substitution of another action in the place of immersion. Another author, Cyprian, writing close to the time of the Novatian incident, suggested that the substitution was appropriate in the case of "emergencies" clearly stating, however, that this was an "accommodation" and that "everything else must be in order" (Epistle 75:12). Since pouring was administered to those bed-fast with infirmities, the practice came to be known as "clinical baptism" after the creek word for bed, kline. In reference to these exceptional substitutions and others which begin to appear infrequently following this period, we observe that to these writers, "baptism" still meant immersion and to describe another action (such as pouring or sprinkling) another word was used. Clearly, the origin of a substitute for immersion occurred in the context of extraordinary situations, (either the lack of sufficient depth of water or the circumstances of the candidate for baptism). (Truth Magazine: Immersion, Pouring and Sprinkling A History, by Bruce Edwards, Jr., St. James, Missouri)

What to consider regarding physical presence as opposed to spiritual presence or virtual presence:

- God in Jesus
 - Incarnation.
 - John 1:14, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."
 - 1 Tim.3:16, 16 "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory."

- Heb.2:14, “14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,...”
 - 1 John 4:2, “2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;...”
 - Col.2:9, “9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,...”
 - With Jesus
 - Mark 3:14, “He appointed twelve that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach.”
 - Acts 4:13, “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”
 - Bodily Atonement
 - 1 Peter 2:24, “24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”
 - 1 Peter 3:18, “18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;...”
 - 1 Peter 4:1, “1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,...”
 - Bodily Resurrection
 - Mark 15:43, “43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.”
 - In the discussion in 1 Cor.15 about Jesus’ resurrection Paul writes, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;...” 1 Cor.15:42
- God in Us, His Body
 - We are the body of Christ: “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.”
 - 1 Cor.12 makes clear we are members within the body, hands, feet, eyes, ears, et... and that each one has a part to play.
 - Just as Jesus was incarnational, not virtual, so are we.
 - Matthew 25:31-46-relate-describes feeding, hydrating, clothing, visiting the sick and those in prison, and taking strangers in. None of these can be done without someone doing something personally.

- Assembling together is personal. The very word church means “the called out ones.” Heb.10:25-do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Acts 2 & 4, the church was together. Meeting daily in the temple courts and from house to house.
- The longing to be together: 1 Thess.2:17-18, “But we, brethren, having been more bereft of you for a short while-in person, not in spirit-were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we want to come to you-I, Paul, more than once-and yet Satan thwarted us.” Read 1 Thess.3:1-10

Just as we understand that virtual marriage, virtual parenting, virtual business can serve temporarily we know that it is not permanently good for us. When I was dating Brenda I spent a summer in Holland, away from her. I could not get her off my mind. I wrote every day. I missed her. I could not wait to see her again. Traveling home I missed a connecting flight in NY, finally got to Nashville, and from there to New Orleans, where I met her in the airport, and we traveled together to Costa Rica. It is not good for man to be alone. From time to time we need:

- A holy kiss, hug and handshake
- Our feet washed
- The laying on of hands
- The anointing the sick with oil
- Hands held in prayer
- A look into one’s eye
- Songs lifted up in harmony
- Prayers heard in person
- The Lord’s Supper as a true communion
- A baptism in water

For now we must but for later we must not.

There is a scene in Acts 20 that is heart-warming. It is Paul meeting with the Ephesian elders in Miletus. He was on the way to Jerusalem. He spoke to them about the church and his care for them while in Ephesus for three years. He warned them about savage wolves that would come into the flock. He reminded them of the work he had done among them to support himself. At end it says, “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.” (Acts 20:36-38)

For what do we long now. Psa.27:4, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire of Him in His temple.”