



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

GALATIANS 5—6

APRIL 2020

EXTENDED INCARNATION

God's purpose in creation is to rule through his human partners. Adam and Eve were designed to tend the garden with a view to tending the whole earth. They had everything they needed to do just that.

Their fall into sin left them afraid of the God who loved them, ashamed of the bodies he gave them, and dismayed at the task he assigned them. The story of redemption is the answer to each of these problems and provides the means for God to again have a community on earth that will display his image accurately and co-rule with him.

The first promise of redemption was given to Eve immediately after her sin and concerned her offspring's victory over the devil. Then there was God's promise to Noah to preserve the earth for such a time as he would fulfill his promise. Then Abram received a promise about a son who would come to reverse the curse of Eden. Moses

believed God's promise to save a large family of people who would be his representative community. David's promise of having a son always sitting on the throne was affirmed by promises to Israel in exile as the remnant looked forward to the day when restoration would be complete.

The day of the completion of these promises came when Jesus appeared. The incarnation of God through Jesus is the giant breakthrough in history. God became a man. Astounding! Since the beginning of time, men had tried to become God, but no one could consider the alternative: God himself making a way by becoming man. Why would any god, but especially the

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sovereign God over all creation, want to put on such limitations as humanity requires? Yet he made himself knowable, touchable, relatable, and present. Jesus was born of a woman like other humans. He lived in a human body, felt human emotions, and learned the dynamics of human society. He also demonstrated what humans are designed to be. He fulfilled the mission that the Father had given him. He came to create a family on earth who would display the true image of the Creator. He called ordinary humans to follow him and learn what living in his kingdom was like. Every day they could see a human acting the way humans were designed to act. Then he died to pay the sin-debt humans owed. All of sin's power was broken in his death. In his resurrection, he demonstrated the power of the new life that is given to his people.

He promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples just before his death, and he came just as promised to regenerate and empower the believers to continue the mission he had demonstrated while on earth. This new community was bound by the common bond of the Spirit who gave them life. He made Jesus real to them as he made clear what Jesus's work on earth accomplished. He gave each of them gifts

that fit together to do as a corporate body what Jesus had told them they would and could do. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, those in whom he dwelled were marked by love. They were joyfully awed by being loved by God the same way he loved the Son. Their humility was on display as they walked in full confidence of the Holy Spirit's power, while recognizing that their own willpower could never produce fruit. They knew that anything was possible with God, but nothing good would result from their acting apart from him. This new, eternal life was so dynamic that they needed each other to manage it. No one in the faith community was dispensable. They were a body, and a body needs every part to be healthy if it is to get anything done.

The apostle Paul discussed the dynamics of the body in several of his letters to various churches. To the Galatians (Galatians 5:25–6:10) he stressed five major aspects of body-life. **First, the fallen.** When one member is hurt or disabled, the priority of the body is to restore. I have noticed that when I miss the nail with my hammer and hit my thumb, my whole body responds. I drop the hammer and grasp the thumb with my right hand. I then stick it in my mouth. (I don't know why.) Then between my knees

it goes. All of this before I go inside and apply antiseptic and a band-aid. A healthy spiritual body responds similarly. It is a sick or numb body that discards the hurt or ignores someone who has been captured by deception. The instructions on how to best restore fallen members include identifying those qualified to help: "You who are spiritual." It does not say: "Church staff and elders only." Those who are themselves recipients of the Spirit and aware that there is a battle going on make the best restorers. They know they have a target on their backs as well. They know that only God can make judgmental decisions regarding such people. They want desperately for the person to be restored, not rejected. "Those who are spiritual" demonstrate the life of Jesus who embodies the shepherd looking for the lost sheep, the woman searching for the lost coin, and the father longing for the lost sons. We are all glad that the father in the parable of the prodigal son was more concerned for the restoration of his son than covering his own reputation. He cast his cultural honor aside to run and embrace his returning son.

Secondly, the burdened. When one of us is unusually weighed down by what life is presenting, we need others to come

alongside and help. It happens to everyone at some time. Some of us boast that we had rather be the server than the served. We find it uncomfortable to be recipients of help. But God seems to make sure we all get our turn at both. The parable of the good Samaritan reflects this aspect of eternal life. It is not usually convenient nor inexpensive to bear another's burden, but it is more important than our time and our resources. We do not want to find ourselves justifying our preoccupation with self like the lawyer did in the story. We can't excuse our complacency by claiming we don't know which one to help or exactly how to do it. If they are having trouble walking straight, they are the ones.

Third, the gifted. Each member of the body has been given gifts to edify the body and carry out the mission. When we exalt another's gifts and claim that our gifts are of lesser value, we criticize God and dismiss his wisdom. To prevent jealousy and comparing, we are to focus on what we are given and be diligent to hone it to more effectiveness. Instead of fantasizing about the gifts of prophecy or healing, we would do better to practice what the love inside us indicates is ours.

Fourth, the taught. Recognizing that each of us has something unique to offer, we are engaged in a giving and receiving cycle. Teachers are very important and will be strictly judged for their use of their gifts. We are to appreciate them for the vital role they play and make sure they are not ignored in matters of provision. They might be so focused on studying and teaching, they don't have the time and resources to provide for their families' needs. Like the Levites and priests of the Old Testament, the community should make sure they are cared for. They give something vital to the body. The body has something vital to give them. To ignore this cycle of giving and receiving is dangerous. It mocks God. He has designed life to work this way. The sowing and reaping dynamic cannot be eliminated. We can decide what we want to reap and sow accordingly.

Fifth, the society. We exist to reflect the image of God to the whole world. Our aim is to work for the best of everyone. This leads us to engage our civil and national responsibilities with as much vigor as possible. We should be the best and most well-informed citizens in our society. We should not only vote in elections, but work to combat injustice wherever we find it. We might

not be able to change the laws in some cases, but we can always serve those being forgotten by society and protect those being neglected by our culture. Notice, Paul says, "especially the family of faith." We know that the body of Christ is God's primary instrument of blessing the world. We must not become so global in our mentality that we forget that God works through those he has chosen to be his image bearers. That is the ecclesia (church). We are the incarnation of Jesus extended through his present body.

God's plan to have a people to rule and reign his creation was not thwarted by the sin in the Garden. The incarnation of Jesus and indwelling of the Holy Spirit means that He has a people. As his love is made real in us, the darkness of sin and death is pushed back, and his purposes are accomplished. Let us rejoice that we are invited into his work for eternity.



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