

The Body of Christ

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In scripture we see the apostle Paul describe the church as the Body of Christ. To understand his meaning, we must first define the word “church”. The biblical definition of church is not the building or a legally recognized entity or even a group of “churchgoers” that meet together regularly. A local church is a group of believers who have been led of God to come together as a spiritual family and live out their faith together. Ones who have turned from their sin and believed in Jesus Christ.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Christ now lives in us. We are now brought together because we now have the same heavenly Father, we have the same Savior, and we have the same Spirit of God living inside of us. The New Testament refers to true followers of Jesus Christ as “the Body of Christ”.

In scripture one of the best places to learn about the “Body of Christ” is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12).

In the church in Corinth there were divisions and infighting. It was shown by the selfish way that they observed the Lord’s Supper, hoarding the food or getting drunk at the table (1 Corinthians 11). Others had chosen allegiances to the different teachers in the church to the point that factions had been created and loyalty to Christ was being set aside (1 Corinthians 3). There was pride and jealousy in regard to spiritual gifts and people’s roles in the church. To make things even more complicated the church was made up of both Jews and Greeks, slaves and free.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul is seeking to bring about unity in a divided church by turning their attention back to the one thing that they had in common. They all belonged to Jesus Christ.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Yes, people had different spiritual gifts, they served in different ways, and they were involved in different activities, but in the midst of all the differences they could not lose sight of the fact that they were partakers of the same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God who made all of this possible. Differences did not have to result in division.

The Spirit then led Paul to use an analogy, the body, to express the balance of differences of role with unity in purpose.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

We each were dead in our sins and now have been made spiritually alive through the Spirit living in us. Regardless of our ethnic background or socio-economic status, as followers of Christ we all have in common the Spirit's working in our lives. We are all members of the same body. In a healthy body every part plays its function for the good of the whole. Every part is different but necessary if the body is going to function as God intended. So, it is with the church, the Body of Christ.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

If we are to say, "Oh, I don't have an important role in the church, so I don't really belong", that does not make it true. The fact of the matter is that God grows the church and God gives spiritual gifts to every believer for the sake of the good of the church. Because of this, we each should be encouraged that God, through His grace, has drawn us to Himself and added us to the church. He, alone, has brought us into the body of Christ and given us a role to play. To say anything different is to not believe the Word of God. ***"God has arranged the members in the body and each one of them, as He chose."*** Be encouraged. We can stand in confidence on these words, regardless of our role amongst the believers.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,²⁵ that there may be no division

in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

(Hebrews 13:3 – ***“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”***)

In the previous verses Paul was addressing those who were claiming not to be part of the body because in their eyes their role was not significant enough. In these verses Paul is now talking to those who felt that they were important, but others, with lesser roles, were not. Paul argued that just like in our physical bodies, those parts with less honorable roles are bestowed with more honor from God’s perspective. God has created the Body of Christ in a way that gives greater honor to those who lack it.

As Jesus says in Luke 14:11, ***“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** Proverbs 29:23 says, ***“One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.”*** James 4:6 tells us that ***“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*** James 4:10 reads, ***“Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*** Be encouraged, even in the most mundane of roles, trusting that the significance is not so much in what the task is, but who it is for. Humble yourself trusting that God will lift you up.

In the human body, when one part is hurt or unhealthy it affects the rest of the body in one way or another. It could be like a sickness that spreads, or a muscle that hurts because it is making up for the weakness of another, or it could be one who is working in the wrong way, straining and burning out, or a part of the body that is playing a role that it was never intended to play.

Would it not be great to find a church that lived out the truth taught in verse 26? ***“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”***

Our culture today often teaches us to live for ourselves, to be very individualistic. We have even brought this into the church, focusing on our own spiritual maturity while neglecting the spiritual health or needs of those around us. But this is not God’s view of the church. The church is the body of Christ, where we each are an essential part of the whole and are called to be our brother’s keeper. Scripture calls us to love one another. Through Christ we receive the heart to do this for the health of the Body of Christ and the growth of His kingdom. This is even a sign of those who belong to Christ, that we love our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Members of the Body of Christ are joined to Christ in salvation (Ephesians 4:15-16). ***“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”***

Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:15-20). As we, the parts of the body of Christ, walk in step with the Spirit, that will place us in step with each other, confessing our sin, rejoicing in our forgiveness, and loving our neighbor as we ought. It is only as we abide in Christ

that we will be given the heart necessary to be the members of the Body of Christ that submits to Christ as the head.

Christ is the head of His body, the church. He is the central, essential part of the church. We can do without bulletins, buildings, instruments, men's prayer breakfast, finance team, coffee after the service, and still be the church, but without a close connection to Christ all is lost. For example, some of you know of the head injury that I sustained years ago. God was gracious and brought about a full recovery, but the initial side effects of the accident were a great example of how important the head is to the body. From the neck down I was fine, but because of my head injury, I experienced loss of memory, double vision, loss of sense of balance, loss of muscle control in parts of my face, decreased motor skills, and loss of the ability to keep track of time. The head was and is the guiding part of our body.

Christ is the head of the church. Yes, there are leaders of the local church, but in a biblical, God-honoring church, the leaders are submitted to Christ as they lead the congregation. Through His Word and His Spirit, Christ is the One who leads and empowers the church. As church leaders are obedient to God's methods and sensitive to the Spirit's leading they will be faithful stewards of the people of Christ. Church members are to follow Christ first and church leaders second as they live and lead in agreement to God's Word.

Church leaders are under-shepherds. They should be able to say the same as the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."* And Peter in 1 Peter 5:2-4, *"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."*

In scripture we see that God has appointed that there will be leaders in the church: Pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, evangelists, and others. But all of them are members of the body of Christ. There is no hierarchy or more important one than another. It is merely a different role in the body of Christ. In some ways it would be similar to a "bell sheep". Sheep are well known for their flocking or herding instinct. They stay together for the sake of protection. When one sheep begins to move, the others often follow, blindly. This flocking, following instinct is so strong that it caused the death of 400 sheep in 2006 in eastern Turkey. The sheep plunged to their death after one of the sheep tried to cross a 15-meter deep ravine, and the rest of the flock followed.¹ The shepherd often took advantage of this instinct and would put a bell around the neck of the sheep that best followed him. When the shepherd would move, the bell sheep would move and so would the flock. And if some of the sheep became too separated, they could still hear the bell over the next hill and be able to find the bell sheep and thus the shepherd.

In the church that is the role of church leaders, and in the home that is the role of parents. That we would be a people who walk rightly with God in such a way that others could follow our lead and find their way back to Jesus Christ, our good shepherd.

¹ <http://www.sheep101.info/201/behavior.html>

Every church has leaders, but Christ is the Head of the Church. In Matthew 16:18 Christ declares, ***“I will build my church.”*** It is His church, and ultimately He alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can spiritually grow the church. We are not talking about attendance caused by worldly means, but growth that can only be attributed to the work of the Spirit as lives are changed and the gospel spreads.

Christ is no longer here on earth. Because of this we are His Body. We are His hands that serve. We are His hearts that love. We are His mouth that speaks. We are His feet that go. If He wants a child taught, He calls one to teach them. If He wants a homeless man fed, He calls to a person to give. If He wants the gospel shared, he calls someone to speak it. That is our glorious privilege, to be the hands, feet and heart of Christ in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods.

Body of Christ has one other use, the literal body of Christ that was laid down on our behalf. Christ took on the sins of the world upon His shoulders and died to pay for our sin. We remember this as we observe the Lord’s Supper.

As followers of Christ, He asks us to do the same. In Romans 12:1-2 it says, ***“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”***

We are the body of Christ. As we each play our part and appreciate the parts of others, the Spirit will bring us together in love and unity. Together we will accomplish much for His kingdom.