

The Body Of Christ

How do we define the Body of Christ? There is no earthly institution that corresponds to the whole body of Christ. The Kingdom of God is Spiritual, not earthly, so we need to be one in the Spirit, not just sit in the same building at the same time once a week. People have produced an organisation called 'church' to try to bind themselves together, to achieve some kind of unity. Of course this does not produce the unity which God intends for His body. We can have any number of organisations or denominations, each with their own relationships, rules and regulations, but that is not the Body of Jesus Christ.

God has shown us that He cannot be represented by any kind of portrait, picture, carving or image. The attempt to make any image of God or any idol is strictly forbidden (Exodus 20:4). In the same way, the Body of Christ cannot be represented institutionally as an organisation of the kind that we are familiar with in secular life, because it is a spiritual Body. Again and again, Christians try to make something visible out of that which is Spiritual. They try to produce an organisation or a union which will replace the unity and the relationship of the Body of Christ and of course it has failed. Within a church, there is strong organisational unity, structure or a 'pecking order' but that is not spiritual unity. Sometimes we can see what denomination people belong to by their clothing; an outward sign of so-called 'unity' yet there are times when two people from the very same church are at loggerheads with each other. Their 'unity' is superficial and they may be in complete opposition.

It is possible that two people attending the same church are not even walking in the same spiritual sphere; one may be born-again and fully committed to God, while another may be attending solely for the free lunch after the service. That is not unity. The outward union has nothing to do with the inward spiritual relationship that exists in the Body. We must not accept the outward appearance of unity for what should be the inward. It is true that we are meant to fellowship together (Hebrews 10:25) and these assemblies are where the spiritual gifts are exercised to build up the Body (1 Corinthians 14:12), but even that is no substitute for unity in the Spirit.

Mankind has divided the Body of Christ into segments. People may not even be aware that they are themselves, substituting the outward for the inward. God did not divide His Body into religious organisational groups – man did that. Sadly, each denomination believes theirs is the 'true' church and all others are failures. That is not true. Catholics are not better Christians than Anglicans; Anglicans are not better than the Salvation Army; Pentecostals are not better than Baptists; Presbyterians are not better than Catholics. To refuse to acknowledge that true Christians can attend a church other than our own, is having a wrong relationship with a fellow believer, and many Christians are not conscious of having a wrong attitude. We all have to learn that we are not in competition with each other – we are all part of one whole 'Body', one Kingdom.

The deception has crept in by allowing the outward appearance of unity, to substitute the inward or spiritual harmony. If you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour and are a born-again believer, you are part of the Body of Christ; part of the Kingdom of God and you are equal with all other born-again believers, no matter what church organisation you choose to attend. Real unity can be seen when people from several denominational organisations can fellowship together in harmony, worship God together, sup together, pray together and love each other as Jesus said we should, because by this love, shall all men know we are His disciples (John 13:35).

There are many parts to the natural body, just as there is in the Spiritual Body. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:1 to 31 about the various gifts given to us by the Lord. Verse 4: There are distinctive varieties of gifts. Verse 5: There are distinctive varieties of service but we serve the same Lord. Verse 6: There are distinctive varieties of operations but the same God Who inspires. Verse 11: All gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. Verse 12: Just as the body (of flesh) is a unity yet has many parts, so it is with Christ's Body. Verse 13: We are all baptised into one Body [not into a particular denomination]. Verse 15: One cannot say because he is not the hand, he is not part of the body. In spiritual terms, that would be like saying that because we don't attend an Evangelical church, we are not part of the Body of Christ. That thought is wrong. Verse 18: God has placed or arranged the parts of the body as He saw fit. In spiritual terms, God has placed us, as individuals, in the place (church) that is best for us. Verse 21 & 22: We all need one another no matter which building we go to for teaching and fellowship. The stronger Christians need to aide the weaker. Verse 24: God has harmonised the whole body. Verse 25: So that there should be no division or discord of the parts of the body, but the members all alike, should have a mutual interest for one another. Verse 27: We are collectively Christ's Body and individually, members of it. See also Romans 12:4 to 10.

That is the true Body of Christ as defined by scripture. A building, no matter how grand, can never house the spiritual Body of Christ – it can only house the spiritual temples, which are the people. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). So what is it that really keeps the Body of Christ together? Where is the true nature and Source of our unity? There are two parallel scriptures. Ephesians 4:16; 'For because of Him, the whole body is closely joined and firmly knit together, through the joints and bands (ligaments) with which it is supplied, and when each part is working properly, grows to full maturity'.

Colossians 2:19; 'Holding fast to the Head, from Whom the entire body, supplied and knit together by means of its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God'.

There are two things which Paul says unite the Body; they are joints and bands (ligaments). The same applies to the physical body. What are the joints and ligaments? To make it simple, the joints represent the relationships with one another in the Body. The ligaments, which are broader and wider, represent the attitude that prevails amongst us. In the natural we have bones, but the effective function of our bones, depends on the joints. Our bones are not flexible and they don't bend. We bend at the joints. We could have strong healthy bones, but if our joints don't bend, we can't function properly. We need all the parts of our bodies to function correctly and in harmony, for our bodies to be healthy. We also need healthy, nourishing food and water to keep us that way.

The same applies to the Body of Christ. We need to have harmony with one another to keep the Body healthy, and we need the correct spiritual food and drink to keep us that way. What is our food and drink? The pure Word of God, prayer, a good strong, healthy relationship with God the Father through His Son and our Saviour Jesus. We are related to all others within the Body of Christ, regardless of their religious affiliation. We are joined together; that is the joint. Our relationships with one another have to be right; that is we need to accept that someone from another Christian church denomination, is equally as important to God and we serve the same Lord, and we need to love them as much as we love people from our own church. So that is the 'joint'.

The ligament is a 'band' that holds the bone ends together at the joint. Joints are bound by several ligaments and when a ligament is damaged, the joint is affected. In spiritual terms,

if we have a wrong attitude to a fellow believer, the Body does not function properly. We cannot be an effectual witness to the Gospel if we dislike another Christian; especially if a non-Christian sees that animosity. In Ephesians 4:3 Paul talks about the 'binding power of peace'. The words bind, bond and band mean the same thing; they hold together that which needs to be held together. In Colossians 3:14 Paul tells us to put on love with the 'bond of perfectness' [which binds everything together completely in ideal harmony]. There is only one thing that can keep the Body together; it's the love of Christ. The other bond is peace. Wherever possible, we are to live at peace with one another (Romans 12:18).

We all stand as individual members in the Body and we are kept together as a whole by peace and love. Where peace and love are non-existent, then the function of the Body is broken down. That is when we see religious warfare; Catholics against Protestants; fighting and killing each other. If they would put their differences of opinion aside, and look to the love of Jesus, there would be peace. We cannot enjoy the harmony of fellowship with others; we cannot enjoy the blessing others can bring to our lives, if we shut ourselves off from the completeness of the Lord's Body. This denominational segregation is typical of churches. Millions of church-goers have the wrong attitude to other church-goers, rejecting them on the basis of their denomination. Sometimes two people in the same congregation choose not to get along. There was recently a Pentecostal church where one half of the congregation, who sat on the left, had not spoken to the other half, who sat on the right, for several years. They would even cross the street to avoid speaking to one another. Is that the love we are to have for one another? Until harmony is restored in that church, the Lord will not move in their lives.

We are to love one another as Jesus told us to, not just people in our own denomination, but we are to love every member of the Body of Christ. That was the new commandment given to us by our Lord Himself (John 13:34 & 35; 15:12 & 17). For more on this subject, see 'Is there an elite church?' on this website.

You, the person reading this sermon, if you are born-again, are a member of the Body of Christ, just as much as we are, yet obviously we attend different churches. It is the love Jesus has for His body, that empowers us to reach out to try to save the lost, and to teach the saved. Although we may never meet each other on this earth, one day we will be able to rejoice together, in unity, in heaven, in the presence of the One Who saved us, and brought about the unity in the Spirit.

Amen and God bless you.

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