

The Body of Christ

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

Code: 1309

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the church as the body of Christ is perhaps the greatest subject there is in understanding Christian relationships. We don't know where we belong or who we really are without understanding the concept of the body of Christ. But once we understand it, we understand not only our obligation to God and our relationship to Him through Christ, but we also understand our obligation and relationship to every other believer in the world.

In Christianity today, there is so much organization and structure at the true church is often lost in the fog. Many major denominations are nothing but great groups of people who want to rally around some point other than Jesus Christ. They exist purely as a organizational structure, without any life or any proper function in relation to Jesus Christ. At the other extreme, are those groups who have rebelled against denominationalism and the organized church and gone to a completely non-structured type of format. What is the church? What does it mean that we are the body of Christ?

As we begin this study, I want to look at three characteristics of the body of Christ as detailed in 1 Corinthians 12: Unity, Diversity, and harmony. These are key things for you to understand. The reason the church is so crippled is because people aren't functioning as a body!

I. UNITY (1 Cor. 12:12,13)

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

A. The Portrayal of our unity

In verse 12, Paul takes the physical body and uses it to illustrate the characteristic of unity.

1. ITS EXISTENCE AND FUNCTION

a. *Physically* - Paul shows that the human body is not a pile of disconnected pieces. It is a unit, made up of many functioning members. Without this unity the physical body doesn't function, or even exist. I cannot say, "My hand is so gifted that I'm going to cut it off and send it over there to do a job." My hand would no longer be gifted - once it is cut off, it will die.

b. *Spiritually* - The essence of a physical body is unity; so also is the spiritual body of Christ. We are the members on that body and Christ is the head. If we detach from the body we are dead, without existence, with no ability to function. From Christ, the head of the body, comes all the instruction, all the brain power, all the energy, and all the resources which make every part of the

body function. Physically, the head is the source of the life--you can cut off the hand or the arm or other parts of the body and the body will still have life. But not so with the head; if you cut off the head, the life is one. Spiritually, the same thing is true in the body of Christ. Christ is our head and the source of our life (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).

B. The Point of our unity

Salvation is the initial point of our unity. We all came by one Spirit into one body, through the one way - Jesus Christ. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, and all have the one same Spirit dwelling within us.

1. THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - People often ask, "What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" The baptism of the Holy Spirit is defined right here in verse 13. It is God's Spirit placing a believer into the body of Christ. You entered into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation by being placed there by the energy of the Spirit.
2. THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - Not only were you placed into the body by the Holy Spirit, but this same Spirit also indwells you. Verse 13 says, "*and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*" The phrase "*to drink*" just means "to assimilate" or "to appropriate." Now, you say, "Does every Christian have the Holy Spirit indwelling him?" You'd better believe it! Romans 8:9 says, "*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*" There's no such thing as a believer who doesn't have the Holy Spirit! If you turn this verse around you will see that if you belong to Him, you have the Holy Spirit.

Our unity is all wrapped up in the Holy Spirit. He is the point of our unity. This is why Paul says, in Ephesians 4:3, that we have "*the unity of the Spirit.*" It is the same Spirit who regenerates us, baptizes us into the body, and indwells us.

C. The Prevention of our unity

In the body of Christ we all start out with basic unity; but it interesting to note how fast we all scatter. We all came in the same way, experienced the same Spirit, and have the same indwelling Spirit. Yet, a great deal of time is spent trying to get the body back together again to realize their unity

1. SUPER SAINTS - "Super saints" do not exist in the unity of the body of Christ. One minister said, "The church is so cold and the body is so dead, that when somebody arrives with a 98.6 temperature, we think the guy is sick" with a fever--when actually he's normal. Our temperatures are so cold, when someone comes in who is normal, we think he's "super spiritual." But to be totally committed to Jesus Christ and totally absorbed in the Spirit's ministry is not to be "super"; it's to be normal! There are no "great" people in the body of Christ. We all came the same way--by grace. If someone could stand up and say, "I came by doing this thing and 49 of those and 74 of those," it would be works, not grace. And if we came by works, we'd all be boasting, wouldn't we? We are all trophies of grace brought into the body the same way. We have nothing to glory in, nothing to boast in and nothing to lord over anyone else.
2. CLERGY-LAITY DICHOTOMY - The whole clergy laity dichotomy is unbiblical. I am not above you, and you are not above or below somebody else--we are all one! There's no hierarchy in the New Testament. There are varying gifts, but no hierarchy. If you want an organizational chart of Christianity--Christ is at the head, and the rest is a big circle. The message of the body of Christ is a message of unity. We are one in Christ and there is no room for an upper or lower class.

3. ISOLATION - There is no such thing as an isolated believer--a believer who is not a part of the body and is all by himself. Every believer, at salvation, is placed into the body of Christ. **It is impossible to be a Christian and to be outside of the body of Christ.**

4. DIVISION - The Corinthian church is a perfect example of a divided, fractioned church. Some were saying they were following Paul; some were following Apollos; some were following Cephas; while others said they followed Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul replied to this attitude of division in 1:13, *"Is Christ divided?"* In other words, "What kind of stupidity is this? What are you fractioning up the body for? You're not a follower of this person or that person. Is Christ divided?" Then in 3:21-23 Paul said, *"Therefore, let no man glory in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."* In other words, "Stop this division and return to oneness."

So, Paul emphasizes our oneness. The church is an assembly of redeemed people who owe their distinct existence, and their life together, to the fact that they were, by one Spirit, put into one body and indwelt by the one same Spirit. We are not separated believers, we are one.

D. The Position of our unity

The New Testament word for church is ekklesia which is from the Greek verb meaning "to call out" (ek-kaleo). We are God's called out ones, called apart from the world to exist as a separate entity -- His body. And we are to lead a life worthy of His calling, so that we may become, in character and conduct, what we are in status--called apart, saints, separated unto Him His body. The church, then, is God's people who are called out of the world and separated to exist for Him--one in holiness, in mission, in suffering, and in glory.

1. EPHESIANS 2:12-16, 18 -- *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who once were far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity... to make in Himself of two, one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross... For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."* There is neither Jew, Gentile, Greek, slave, free, male, or female--we are one (Gal. 3:28). In terms of our position in the blessings of Christ, there are no distinctions in the church. The church is *"one new man"* in Christ, a new body, a brand new thing; it never existed before. Christ has abolished all barriers of nationality, race, class, and sex to make *"one new man."*

2. ROMANS 10:12-13 - *"For there is difference between the Jew, and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* All the barriers are gone in Christ. We are *"one new man"*; and as a result, all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, uncouth, barbarian or educated Greek, we're all fellow citizens, fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers.

* *Are you crippling the body of Christ?*

As Christians we are to function together. Don't isolate yourself. You need to get into the mainstream of the life of the body. There are many Christians who go to church on Sundays and sit down and think, "God, I know You're really blessed by my being here." They have no concept of what it means to operate in the mainstream of the body life. So, as nonfunctioning members, they are crippling and maiming the body of Christ; while the rest of us are limping along, trying to compensate for their disabilities. You need to be in the mainstream of the life of the body.

E. The Prayer for our unity

Jesus wanted all believers to experience unity. So desperately did He want it that He prayed to His Father *"Neither pray for these alone (the disciples), but for them also who shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me"* (John 17:20, 21).

F. The Purpose of our unity

Do you know what will convince the world who Jesus is? When we're one. John 17:22 says, *"And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them, that they may be one even as We are one."* Jesus put His glory in us that we might be one - His glory being the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 4:14). And the presence of the Holy Spirit is our point of unity. Verse 23 continues, *"I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me."* Do you know when we're really going to turn this world upside down and shatter its complacency? When we are one!

G. The Practice of our unity

How does Christian unity work in a practical way? Well, I'll show you. There are two keys to our practical unity:

1. HUMILITY

a. *The exhortation* (Phil. 2:2-4) - In verses 2-4 Paul says to the Philippians, *"Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*

b. *The example* (Phil. 2:5-8) - In verse 5 Paul says, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."* What "mind" are you to have? The mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? Verses 6-8 give us the answer: *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God (in other words, something to hold on to), but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross."* The mind of Christ is the mind of condescending humility. Our unity comes when we have the mind of Christ, the mind of humility, and care more about others than ourselves. No wounded egos, no stepped-on toes, no "I'm not speaking to Mrs. So-and-so anymore," no "That is the last time I'll ever do that." That's not humility—that's ego. Christ never tried to maintain His ego. When He was spit upon, He just stood there. When they nailed Him to a cross, He just hung there. He didn't say, "You can't do this to Me, I

won't tolerate it!" The mind of humility says, "If this means your salvation, your benefit, and your blessing, I'll suffer because I only care about you." Unfortunately, this attitude is foreign to contemporary Christianity, but this is what the body concept is all about! It's all about caring for someone else and not yourself.

c. *The ego* - In Romans 12:3-4 Paul says, "*For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, ...For as we have many members in one body...*" We're all in the body of Christ, but practically, how do we get our unity? By thinking about others instead of ourselves. Don't worry about your own ego and your own problems. Don't be so self-directed in all of your thoughts. Start reaching out and touching somebody else's life and forget about yourself.

d. *The extent* - You say, "How far does this humility go? One could get trampled." So get trampled! Don't you think God can restore you? Of course He can! In 1 Corinthians 6: 7-8 Paul condemns a Christian who sues another Christian, goes to court, and publicly hassles with him. In verse 7 he says, "*Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong?*" Paul says, "Just take it!" Someone might say, "You don't know how much it was." Just take it! Verse 8 continues, "*Why do ye not rather allow yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.*" Paul says Christians should care so much for each other that they could care less what happens to themselves.

2. LOVE

The second key to experiencing Christian unity, which overlaps humility, is love.

a. *The commandment* - In John 13:34 Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.*" This is a love that is uncircumstantial; it doesn't matter what others do. Love doesn't pick and choose, it's just there; and whoever gets in the way gets loved. This is not an option either; Jesus said this is a new commandment!

b. *The capacity* - You may say, "How could Christ command us to love like this if we don't have the capacity?" Humanly speaking, we don't, but Romans 5:5 says that "*The love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.*"

c. *The conclusion* - John 13:35 says, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" Do you know how to convince the world that Jesus is for real? Just start loving one another. The greatest evangelistic method in the world is not in having a big revival; it is having so much love that the world can't figure it out. The mark of our unity is our love.

Paul prayed, "*And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another*" (1 Thess. 3:12). John said, "*For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 Jn. 3:11). Do you really love like Christ loved, or are you so protective of your ego that every time something goes wrong, you retaliate, react, and get bitter? Christ's love is the kind of love that goes to a brother and says, "Brother, I have had a bitterness against you. I want to ask you to forgive me, and I want to begin to love you." This is also the kind of love which says, "I forgive you," and, "I'm sorry." Christ's love doesn't criticize others to build itself up; it's the kind of love that loves no matter what it costs-- money, prestige, or position--it doesn't matter. Our unity and oneness will rise or fall on our humility and love. If you have anything but love for any believer, before the body of Christ is ever going to be healthy, you're going to have to repent and confess it to God, and then go to that believer and make it right.

II. DIVERSITY (1 Cor. 12:4-14)

If the first characteristic of the body of Christ is unity, the second characteristic is diversity – we're one yet we're many. Verse 14 says, "*For the body is not one member, but many.*" Unity is our base,

diversity is our operation. The body is one, yet there are arms, fingers, ears, eyes, and all the other various members of the body, each with a unique function, operating distinctly.

A. The Delineation of the Gifts

Before we look at the list of spiritual gifts here in 1 Cor. 12, let me just say that these gifts are not talents or innate abilities; they are Spirit-given gifts that you receive when you become a Christian. Starting in verse 8 we find these gifts delineated: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Also, there are other gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. Some of these gifts are temporary, some are permanent, some are for unbelievers, and some are for the edification of the body. We will examine all of these in great detail later on. The point is that there is a diversity of gifts.

B. The Design of the Gifts

Verse 11 of 1 Cor. 12 says, *"But all these worketh that one and the very same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will."* The Spirit has divided up the gifts in a beautiful balance so that we can all minister to each other and complement each other. This is important, because if you're not using your gift, someone is getting cheated. Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us that the diversity of gifts brings unity: *"He gave some, apostles; some prophets; some evangelists; and some pastor-teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ."* Diversity brings unity. How? As we all minister to each other, in perfect exchange of our gifts, we are all maturing; and the full compliment of gifts is being bestowed upon every member. So we're all together growing into one, perfect, mature body.

C. The Duty of the Gifts

Our spiritual gifts are sovereign, God-given blessings and we must operate them. You say, "There aren't any openings." Yes there are! If you have the gift of helps, go help somebody. If you have the gift of teaching, go find a class and teach it, or find someone that needs to be taught and teach him. If you have the gift of evangelism, go find somebody that doesn't know Jesus Christ and evangelize him. You don't need the church organization to minister your spiritual gifts! So many people just sit around without ministering their spiritual gifts while the body of Christ is craving for someone to minister to them. Don't wait for the organization to fit you into a slot--go find somebody and minister your gift. The Spirit didn't give it to you to put on a shelf!

** How can you know your spiritual gift?*

First, read the list of gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Then, pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's leading. He will confirm what you like to do and what you do with a measure of success and joy. For example, you know you don't have the gift of pastor-teacher if you're a woman. And you know you don't have the gift of evangelism if you hate to get up in front of a large group of people and speak. However, if you love to work with people, maybe you have the gift of helps. If you're a great organizer, maybe you have the gift of administration or ruling. Whatever your spiritual gift is, if you're honest and want to know, the Holy Spirit will show you.

III. HARMONY (1 Cor. 12:15-27)

The last characteristic that the body must have is harmony or mutuality. We're all ministering our gifts, and yet it has to be a harmonious blend. The physical body can't function if there's no harmony. This is Paul's message in 1 Cor. 12:25-27. He shows that every part of the body is significant, each with a vital function. Verse 17 says, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" There has to be diversity. There's no place for envy or jealousy because each gift is absolutely 100% critical to the life of the body. Sometimes people think that the more public gifts are the most important, but Paul says that the gifts operating in the background may really be the necessity (v. 22,23); and the parts of the body that look the best may be the least functional (v. 24). The internal organs are ugly, but they are the essence of life.

Then in verses 25-27 Paul says, *"There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*

We need to be a healthy body. We don't need more structural unity or more organization, we need more body unity and body ministry. This is what Jesus prayed for. Let's answer His prayer. Our unity is the unity of the Spirit, not the unity of the denomination, the church, or the organization. And we will have true spiritual unity only when we humble ourselves; when we look every man on the things of others; when we love with a love that could care less what happens to ourselves; and when we begin to minister, in harmony, our spiritual gifts to each other.

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