

The Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12: 13-31

We come now to one of the most significant passages of scripture in the Bible dealing with the great theme of the Christian church. It speaks to us about the character of the church, which is its form; the purpose of the church, which is its function; and the relationship of the church, which is its fellowship.

The sad plight of the church today is obvious evidence that the true character of the church is misunderstood, or some of us would not behave as we do. We would treasure it instead of tearing it apart; we would love all men with the love of Christ, and our testimony would ring with a new note of passionate concern. If we are ever to see the answer to our prayers for heaven-set revival, the dead church must begin to live, the wounded church must be made whole, and the indifferent church must be rekindled with the flame of Calvary-love.

This means, first of all, recognition of our real unity. Paul says this in verse 27, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Paul uses the human body as an illustration of our mutual relationship, as seen in verse 12, "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." Paul is pointing out here some obvious lessons: the fact of our unity, our fellowship in diversity, and the fallacy of expecting everyone to be the same.

To understand the significance of these things we need to go beneath the surface. What is Paul saying when he uses the term "The body of Christ"? We must look first of all at the physical truth. **He is referring to the human, physical body in which Jesus Christ lived, walked, talked, worked, and died, in which there was the incarnate expression of the whole purpose of God in saving mankind from sin.** His physical body was an essential preparation for the fact and function of the spiritual body which is His church. The fact is, the church would never have existed if it had not been redeemed first of all through the sacrifice of the physical body of our Lord Jesus.

When God came down, to this earth in human form, miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He came to reveal to us the whole principle upon which we should live our lives. The physical body of Jesus

Christ expressed perfectly what God intends to continue through the spiritual body of Christ, the church of which you and I are part.

That physical body involved Jesus Christ in three things. **First of all, there was Christ's complete identification with humanity.** This was seen in His delight to do the Father's will, His submission to the limitations of His human form, His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. It was seen also in His oneness with us, as seen in Hebrews 2:14 where we have been told that "the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," and Hebrews 4:15 says it was because He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

In the second place, there was Christ's desire for humanity's identification with Him. He prayed for our identification with Him, as seen in John 17:21, "...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."

Thirdly, there was total penetration to the point that Christ was willing to give His life that we might be victorious over sin, death and the grave. In other words, His coming was an attack on all fronts; it was total war-fare, a full-scale invasion from heaven upon every aspect and expression of sin. It penetrated every level of life: social, political, religious, moral. He healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed the leper, restored the sinner, comforted the sorrowing and the weak, scorned the Pharisees, and scorched the hypocrites. Crucified in weakness, He was raised by the power of God, and He left behind Him in this poor, prodigal world an indelible impact. There was no part of human life that escaped the penetration of the redemptive purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

But total penetration of this sinful world did not mean His involvement of sin itself. He was so close to us, but He was so separate from us. None came so close, but none was ever so different. Holy, harmless, undefiled, yet separate from sinners; touching sin at every point, yet never being contaminated. Healing, blessing, restoring, and comforting. Touching sin at every point, yet never catching the infection. As He moved in every circle of life, He never became involved with the sin, but imparted to everything He touched the very breath of heaven, the very life of eternity itself.

One day His physical body was laid in a tomb. The world crucified Him, rejecting the whole principle of life for which He stood. Their rebellious cry was, "We will not have this man to reign over us." **They were not willing to have**

this complete identification - they would not stand for total penetration with no involvement. This kind of thing was too costly for them. But God raised Him from the dead, and He ascended into heaven; by His own blood and His outpoured love, He won for all of us the right of access to God's throne.

At Pentecost, the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus in heaven was united, as the Head, to the spiritual body being formed on earth, in order that the principles that involved Him might involve us, and what He had begun in His physical body might continue in us until He comes again to complete our redemption. I know that we can never add a word, nor a thought, nor a deed, to the finished work of Calvary. That which purchased our redemption was indeed a *finished work*, but the Lord Jesus in that human body was not ending something, He was beginning a great campaign which He Himself, in the limitations of a human body, could never complete, the task of world redemption.

These principles He made clear as He lived them out, and He gave them back, together with the Holy Spirit power to fulfill them, to a little group of disciples, that they themselves might live in complete identification with God, in total penetration of the world, but with no involvement of sin.

Therefore, as Paul says, we are the body of Christ, and, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. As the body of Christ on earth, we are here to fulfill in our lives and through our testimony that which Christ, in His physical life, began! We are here that in and through our bodies, by the power of His indwelling life, the redemption He purchased might be brought to complete maturity and total victory. All this lies behind the surface truth here, and throws a flood of light on Paul's teaching concerning the great function and character of the Christian church.

In the light of that background, let us consider the fact of our unity, as seen in verse 13, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

Here is the mystery, the glory of the church of Jesus Christ. If we have been saved by God's grace, washed in the blood of Christ, at that moment we were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of the Lord Jesus and, therefore, we drink of the same fountain of life, are sustained by the same power, comforted by the same Shepherd, directed by the same Commander-in-chief, kept by the mighty hand of the same wonderful God. That is *complete identification*.

No matter how great the differences may be between Christian people: race, gifts, talents, ability, whether a man be a prince on a throne or a beggar in the streets if anyone is alive in Christ he has been made one by the same quickening Spirit and he is a partaker of the same divine nature! Therefore, we are identified with Jesus Christ.

There is in this body not only complete identification, but there is fellowship in diversity. Look at verse 26, "When one member suffers, all the members suffer with him. When one member is honored, all the members rejoice."

The body of Jesus Christ was for total penetration at every point, into every aspect of life, for the glory of God and for the redemption of men. That is His purpose for His spiritual body, the church, in every relationship of life: religious, political, social, and moral, there should be felt the impact of a group of people who are so absolutely one that their witness is irresistible. If this is to be accomplished, there must be a recognition of our absolute fellowship in our diversity. Therefore, as Paul points out in verse 16, there is not one member of the body who can say of another, "Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body."

There is a vast difference, of course, between the various members of the body, and yet when one member suffers, all suffer. If you are walking in the yard and you step on a briar, what happens? Your nerves send out the signal and the whole body becomes active: your back bends and your hands reach out to remove the thorn; your eyes may begin to water and your voice begins to complain - the whole body has felt the impact of that wound.

Fellowship in diversity is caring for one another, illustrated in the covering and protection which we give to the weaker parts of our physical body in order that the life of the whole body may be preserved! When every member of the body is functioning happily and in its appointed place, caring for each other to preserve the life and health of the body as a whole, then the body is prepared for total penetration into every aspect of life.

But when the church of the living God is trying to operate while being divided, then we have a negative impact on the world around us. When we become jealous of the gifts of other people, and when we criticize, and judge, and condemn, young Christians become disillusioned, and the world begins to look at us and mock the name of Jesus.

Millions around us go to Christless graves while the church quarrels and bickers, while the body of Christ is torn apart and becomes totally ineffective. The church has forgotten the secret of her absolute fellowship in the midst of so much diversity.

There is also the fallacy of selfish pride. Look at verse 21, "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Verse 24 reminds us that "God hath tempered the body together." How foolish for the throat not to swallow because the stomach is get the most attention!

What does that have to do with me? I try to give each Staff person an opportunity to preach for me when I am out of the pulpit. But let's suppose I let Jack preach more than Jerry. And let's just suppose Jerry get his feelings hurt because he feels that Jack is getting some kind of "special treatment." And because he has gotten his feelings hurt, he will just quit doing anything at all!

Now Paul says, "That is not the way God intended for this thing to work." **Why?** Because it is not about you and me; it is all about Christ. It is not about us getting the attention; it is about Christ getting the glory.

Therefore, if the church is to function as a healthy body, every member must understand that we have been called by God, for God, and in the service of God! Find your place in the body, and start giving the glory to God for your calling!

If you are not saved, why not tonight?