

LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:1-16

This morning I would like to share some thoughts on life in the Body of Christ based on Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:1-16, along with references to Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. We will look at 3 premises that we find in our text.

PREMISE # I: THE REALITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

When we are saved, or *born from above*, we are given new life and there is within us an altogether new spiritual awareness. Negatively, we became aware of the awfulness of sin, and, positively, we receive the Spirit of sonship and intimacy with God. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). And **as Christ the head is a reality, so also the church as the body of Christ becomes a reality to us.** Now what do I mean by this? Notice, Paul never writes, "**We are 'like' the body of Christ.**" No, he always says, "**We are the body of Christ.**" **Why is this so important?** Because if the body of Christ is just an analogy, or a picture, then it has no life in it. We can hear a sermon about it, or read about it, or even say, "*Amen*," and then label it Ecclesiology and put it back on our bookshelf along with other doctrinal subjects. BUT – if it is a reality – then everything is changed!! It means that you and I are organically united – we are branches to His Vine – and His life is flowing through each one of us who is part of the Body! We are, each one of us, a part of the living, breathing Body of Christ. And this is important because **this** structure is but a building. So the first thing we must bring with us, when we come into this building, is life, the life of Jesus Christ within us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

You and I are organically connected – and we must not come into the worship service as spectators but as participants in our corporate worship experience. We share the divine life within us! The Body of Christ is a reality, and we find this is in 1 Cor. 12:25, 26, ***“...there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it!”*** The fact that we are the Body of Christ is not just a teaching – it is a reality! And this means that when we leave the service, we don’t disconnect from the Body – we are the body of Christ as we go to our homes, or to the Crystal, or wherever else we go! We are vitally connected 24/7 as members of the Body of Christ! Beloved, do you believe this? Do you understand the reality of the Body of Christ?

PREMISE #2: WE, THE BODY OF CHRIST, ARE COMPLETELY RELIANT ON JESUS CHRIST, OUR HEAD

Ephesians 1:22-23 ***“And God placed all things under His [Christ’s] feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.”***

Now, beloved, you don’t have to be a neurologist to know that if the head is severed from the body, the body cannot survive! If the nerves from the head to the body are disconnected, you have paralysis – an inability of the body to function. **If we believe that we have been saved from above, and we can now function on our own, we will soon find ourselves with no life, no enervation, no direction, and no strength.** Jesus said, ***“Without Me, you can do nothing!”*** We must be totally submissive to and dependent on our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the second thing which we must bring into this building when we come to worship is a submissive and dependent spirit, awaiting His direction and His strength. And this leads us to a third series of truths.

PREMISE #3: WE ARE IN CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

I want to look at these relationships under two main headings: the Marks, or Characteristics of Members of the Body of Christ; and the Functions, or Roles, of Members of the Body. So, first, if we are truly the body of our Lord, what distinguishes us as such?

A. The Marks, or Characteristics, of Members of the Body of Christ

4 main marks distinguish us as members of Christ's Body:

1. "Behold how they love on another!"

Eph. 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Beloved, do you sense that love for other members of the Body? **1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren!"** As we recognize this vital organic oneness, we should be moved by God to a deep love for one another! Do you feel this love for others who are members of the Body of Christ? Paul mentions love 3 times in this text, vv. 2, 15, 16. The third thing we should bring into the building is a deep love for our fellow members of Christ's Body!

There is a second mark that distinguishes us as members of His Body...

2. Unity – **Eph. 4:3** *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* Just as love is natural to the Body of Christ, so division is unnatural! God calls us to maintain our unity, and that is in fact the major theme of Ephesians 4:1-16 – unity in the Church. Now, unity is not uniformity! Christ isn’t interested in stamping out a bunch of people who look and act alike! No, He is interested in our vital unity and Paul gives us the basis for this in **Eph. 4:4-6** – *“There is one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* As we realize our role in the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to move us from individualism to life in the Body!!! A maxim has long been: *“In things essential, unity; in things which are not essential, liberty; in all things, love.”* And a 3rd mark distinguishes us as members of His body:

3. Fellowship – the meaning of fellowship is *“having all things in common.”* And, of course, we are not talking about physical things here. Rather, it’s a that sense of commonality. And yet, I believe it is more than this. Real fellowship means realizing my own inadequacy in certain areas, and my desire to do things with others who are more disciplined in those areas – it may include fellowship in prayer, in difficulties, in seeking God’s will. In true fellowship, I am willing to acknowledge my insufficiency and my deep need of the Body to strengthen and help me in my areas of weakness. The 4th distinguishing mark is...

4. Service – here we learn to see our distinctive usefulness to the Body! We must be life-supplying members to the Body! I am part of the Body and I have a part in serving the Body of Christ. We supply the body with that which we have received from our Head. God is seeking people in whom He can deposit an abundant portion of the life of Christ so that they may supply others.

So, if those are the marks of the members of the body, and I'm sure many of you could add to this list, then what about...

B. The Functions, or Roles, of the Members of the Body

Several texts speak to the gifts, roles, and functions of the members of the body of Christ. **Romans 12** speaks of different members being given a message of wisdom, a message of knowledge, of faith, of gifts of healing, of miraculous powers, of prophecy, of distinguishing between spirits, of speaking in different kinds of tongues, of the interpretation of tongues; of prophesying with faith, of serving, of teaching, of encouraging, of giving generously, of leading with diligence, and of showing mercy cheerfully. **1 Corinthians 12** speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, of gifts of miracles, of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues and interpretations. All of this is in addition to what Paul writes in our text.

In looking at all these texts, I will finish with **10 observations** which I believe are scriptural truths:

1. Christ, and Christ alone is the Head of the Church! He alone deserves all the glory and honor.

2. The Church consists of many members, each having a function under the Head (**1 Cor. 12:12** *"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ."* **Eph. 4:7** *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."*) This grace, or gift, is given to every single member of the Body, enabling him or her to perform some practical function(s) which benefits the whole church. A particular function is given to each one of us and with it is also given the ability to exercise that particular function effectively.

3. Christ Himself gives each one of us our particular function(s)

(v. 7, 11) and we must discover what our function is in the Body. And because it is from Him, we must not compete or compare ourselves with other members.

4. This gift which the Lord gives to each one of us differs and varies from case to case.

He not only appointed that there should be offices and functions, but He also determined their nature and variety (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, *“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines...God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be...”*)

5. Some offices may seem more important than others, yet each one is essential.

All are essential to the harmonious working of the whole.

6. Because all are appointed by our Lord, we must not *“think of ourselves more highly (or more lowly) than we ought, but rather think of ourselves with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of us”* (paraphrase, Rom. 12:3).

7. Eph. 4:12-13 These gifts and graces which the Lord apportions to us are to *“equip us for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* What matters is that each of us should be mature in the gift(s) and or graces which we have been given. He is not complete without us, and His fulness is within us. But as each one of us fulfills our function, all are built up and become mature in unity and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

8. As we become mature in sharing out gifts with one another, we learn to be stable and able to avoid the snares of the enemy of our souls (4:14).

9. Eph. 4:15-16 *“...speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is Christ.* Spiritual growth occurs as each one of us holds fast to the truth of the gospel, but always do so in the spirit of love. Every part of the body ought to correspond to the Head! We’re all joined, or articulated, or fit together, in proportion! Every part should be so developed as to always function as the Head desires us so to do. We are all fitly joined together, knit together, and energized through bands of supply, by an endless superabundant supply that comes to us from Him! Every single part is absolutely full; it gets all it needs and no more. Each part is not identical – each one of us has particular capacity, and every one of us should be filled according to his capacity.

There are differences in administrations and diversities of gifts with the object that it all makes for the universal growth of the Body. The Church has been designed and constructed in this marvelous manner in order that it may be unified and growing!

10. And then note the magnificent way Paul ends this passage: *From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* From Christ, all the body – being closely bound and constantly being knit together, by means of the bands through which the abundant supply of the vital energy passes which is put forth to supply the capacity of each part – works together for the universal growth of the body, resulting in the building up of itself in love. Like the human body – the nervous system, which links it all and makes it an organic unity!

The origin of the life and energy and power and sustenance and all we need as Christians is in the Head, Christ Himself. It passes from Him to every part of the body. If the whole body is to grow and to develop and to build itself up in love, then it is very important that every particular part should be filled up to its capacity with this vital life and energy and be functioning as it was designed to do.

And it is ***“as each part does its work.”*** Every single member of the church is of vital importance.