

Three Things to Know about Christ's Spiritual Body, the Church

12¹²Just as the body is one [organism, although] it has many parts—and even though the [various] parts of the body are many [in number], there is one body—so it is with Christ. 13Indeed, by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether [we were] Jews or Greeks, whether [we were] slaves or freemen—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

14Now the body does not consist of one part, but many. 15If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body. 16If the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body. 17If the entire body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the entire body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18But now [the fact is] God has arranged the parts, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased. 19If all [the parts of the body] were the same, where would the body be? 20Now there are many parts, but there is one body. 21The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you.” Or again, the hand [cannot say] to the feet, “I do not need you.” 22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. 23And we treat with greater honor those parts of the body that we consider to be less honorable. And the unrepresentable parts of our body are treated with greater modesty, 24while the representable parts of our body do not need [such treatment]. But God has arranged the body, giving greater honor to those parts that lack [honor], 25so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts should have the same concern for one another. 26When one part [of the body] suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the [other] parts rejoice with it. 27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Cor. 12:12-27)

Introduction

While ministering in Korea, an American pastor had a special experience that graphically emphasized the fundamental unity of Christ's body despite its diversity. One afternoon the pastor and several of the young people attending the Christian conference went hiking. As they neared the top of the mountain, they met another group of Christians who were also attending the conference and were also out hiking on this particular afternoon. The two groups of Christians sat down together on the top of the mountain and began to ask each other questions about their respective countries and backgrounds. Then someone suggested that they all sing a well-known Christian song together, but that they each do so in their native language. So they all got up and formed a circle, each holding hands with the Christians on either side of them, and then they began to sing. Although the tune was the same in each language, none of them could understand the words the others were singing as they each sang in their own native language, some singing in English, some in Korean, some in Russian—until they came to the word “Jesus.”

The church of Christ is composed of many diverse members, but together we comprise Christ's one spiritual body. As we study 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, let us consider Three Things We Should Know about Christ's Spiritual Body, the Church.

I. Know that We were All Baptized into the One Same Body (12:12-13)

In this twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul is comparing Christ's spiritual body, the church, to the human body. Just as the human body consists of many different parts, so does Christ's body consist of many diverse members, (coming from different backgrounds, possessing different spiritual gifts, etc.) But just as the many physical body parts are combined to form one body, so the many diverse members of the Christian church are joined together to form the one spiritual body of Christ—with Christ Himself as the sovereign Head of the body, and His Holy Spirit imparting spiritual life to each of the members and connecting them into a fundamental unity in Christ.

In verse 13 the apostle begins by focusing on the fundamental spiritual unity of the church as Christ's body. Every Christian was baptized into the one spiritual body by the one and the same Holy Spirit (vs. 13a;) every Christian has been born again by the operation of the Holy Spirit and each has put his faith solely and completely in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for his eternal salvation. Every Christian has been made to drink of the one and the same Holy Spirit (vs. 13b;) that is to say, it is the same Holy Spirit who dwells in the heart and life of each and every Christian, note John 7:37-39a,

Now on the last day, the great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water. ³⁹Now he was referring to the [Holy] Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive. (Jn. 7:37-39a)

Notice that in this verse Paul is alluding to the two sacraments shared in common by the whole Christian church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. His point is that the two sacraments of the church, which are the common experience of every Christian, should serve to remind us of our spiritual unity in Christ and with one another in Christ.

The first thing that we must know about Christ's spiritual body, the church, is the fact that as Christians, we were all baptized into that one body. Each one who receives Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their Savior and Lord as He is presented in the Scriptures, belongs to the one spiritual body of Christ. One obligation we have as Christians is to recognize and honor and seek to maintain this sacred spiritual unity, as Paul reminds the Ephesian church,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with

one another in love. ³Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

II. Know that Christ's Body Consists of Many Different, But Valuable, Parts (12:14-25a)

Verse 14 points out that by definition, the body consists of many different parts, and together those parts constitute the one body and contribute to the health and well being of the body. Paul is now focusing on the diversity that exists within the church: each individual Christian possesses different spiritual gifts, but is a part of and contributes to the one spiritual body of Christ.

Verses 15-18 emphasize the fact that each individual member must appreciate his God-given role and the contribution he personally makes to the well being of Christ's spiritual body, the church. Because the foot is not a hand, and the ear is not an eye, it does not allow them to resign from the body (vs. 15-16.) The foot may feel inferior to the hand, and the ear may feel inferior to the eye, and out of a sense of comparative uselessness, or out of a sense of envy and jealousy, they may be tempted to withhold their services—but they must resist the temptation to do so.

Each member must appreciate that it has a unique and necessary function (vs. 17.) If the whole body were only an eye, it would lack the ability to hear; so the ear, though different from the eye, is necessary and it, too, makes a useful contribution to the body.

Each member must appreciate that his particular function has been assigned to him by God (vs. 18.) God created the various members of the body and arranged them as He saw fit; so for any member to withhold his services out of a sense of uselessness or envy, is to protest against God.

By way of illustration and application of the teaching contained in these verses, consider the testimony of a Christian lady named Violet:

We huddled tensely around the tiny table—"Poppy," Christina, and I. We were playing a simplified version of that age-old pastime Old Maid. We watched anxiously as our two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter Christina made the crucial decision to match Gorgeous Gertie with Gorgeous Gertie rather than Suzie Steno. We applauded and praised her victories as she matched the pairs one by one.

"Christina, you're *such* a good game player," I told her at bedtime.

"Grandma, you and Poppy are *such* good clappers," she responded.

Now I know what my special gift is. I'm a good clapper! I can praise and encourage others for their efforts.

For years I have puzzled about the role I can play in the LORD's service. I've envied the talents of my friends as they sang, preached, counseled, visited hospitals, or filled magazines with inspirational thoughts. I had the frustrating and unsatisfying feeling of being mediocre at everything. I filled a gap—but with such lack of aplomb.

I couldn't sing, but I enjoyed the choir's selection—and I told them so. I couldn't speak, but I reveled in the speaker's message—and I told him so. I always seemed to be congratulating people on the good job *they* were doing—a job *I* seemed unable to perform.

Now I've discovered that giving encouragement (congratulations, too) in itself is a gift! How wonderful to know I don't have to strain to be someone I'm not—to display a talent I don't have. I can fulfill *my* calling by admiring and encouraging the talent of others. I'm a *good* clapper.

"Therefore encourage one another, and build each other up," Paul told the Thessalonians, *"just as in fact you are doing"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11.) I get discouraged easily, so I know how much a word of support, or the squeeze of a friendly hand can mean when you're feeling down. Some of the sweetest words in our language are "Thank you" and "What a good job you're doing!"

I thank the LORD for showing me, through little Christina, what He wants me to do for Him. Clappers—people who encourage—are important! (*POWER*, 11/28/82, p.8)

Verses 19-23 go on to teach that, just as no member of the body should de-value his role or envy another; so, too, no member should exalt himself and de-value any other member. There must be the appreciation of the fact that the body, by definition, is composed of many diverse, but significant, members: each makes a unique contribution to the well being of the body as a whole (vs. 19-20.) No member may disparage the value of any other member (vs. 21.) The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor can the hand say to the foot, I have no need of you.

Although a given member of the body may seem to be more feeble, it is in fact a necessary part of the body (vs. 22-23.) Note in verses 22-23 the caution against misjudging the significance of any member of the body, especially by applying our own human standard of judgment: the parts *"that seem to be weaker,"* are in fact necessary, and the parts *"we consider to be less honorable,"* receive special attention. By way of example and application, Joshua, as the commanding general, may have "gotten the headlines" when he returned from defeating the Amalekites, but what would have happened had Moses not been on top of the

mountain interceding for him in prayer? And what would have happened to Moses had it not been for Aaron and Hur being there to aid him? As we learn from Exodus 17:10-13, each one had his own essential and God-given role to fulfill:

So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹²When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. (Ex. 17:10-13)

Verses 24-25 inform us that God designed the body in such a way that it would function as a cohesive unit with all the parts contributing to and caring for one another. God arranged for the less honorable parts of the body to receive greater honor (vs. 24.) By way of example: whereas the face has its own unique honor, the torso is honored with attractive clothing. God did so in order to avoid there being any schism in the body and to provide for the care of the whole body (vs. 25.)

With regard to Christ's spiritual body, the church, the second thing we need to know is that the body of Christ consists of many different, but valuable, members.

III. Know that the Members of Christ's Body Must Take Care of One Another (12:25-27)

According to verses 24-25, God designed the body in such a way that it would take care of itself. In a normal, healthy body, all the parts contribute to the benefit of the whole body, no part disparages or attacks another part. The LORD desires that the same type of "self-love" and concern be present in His spiritual body, the church, note Philippians 2:3-4,

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others higher than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

Verse 26 indicates that because they all belong to the same body and are all vitally interrelated, all the members of the body have sympathy for one another. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Again, by way of example: When you step on tack with your bare foot, your voice cries out in an expression of agony, your leg lifts your foot to ease the pain by taking the weight of the body off of it, your eye examines the wound, your mind prescribes the necessary first aid, your finger extracts the tack, while your hand caresses your poor injured foot—you do not find one part of the body ignoring the pain of another part, the whole body is affected.

When one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Once more, by way of example: When your eyes get a new pair of designer eye glasses, the ears and the nose support the frames and the lens; when they need to be cleaned, the feet carry the body to the cupboard, the arm reaches for the lens cleaner, the fingers and hands carefully polish the lens and re-position the glasses before the eyes—you do not find one member envying another member and out of spite withholding itself from participating in the activity of the body.

Verse 27 reminds us that we are the body of Christ, and individually each believer is a member of Christ's spiritual body. Our Lord calls us to recognize our spiritual identity, and by His grace, to function accordingly:

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Rom. 12:15-18)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Rom. 14:19)

With regard to Christ's spiritual body, the church, the third thing we need to know is the fact that, as members of His body, we have the obligation to take care of one another.

Conclusion

Because we as Christians all belong to the body of Christ, it is important for us to understand our vital relationship to that spiritual body and to its members. If we would stop to consider how the members of our physical body relate to one another, we would gain a greater understanding of how the spiritual body of Christ should function:

- all the members recognize that they belong to the same body
- the various members may differ from one another, but each is valuable and has a significant function to perform
- all the members care for one another and are interested in the well-being of one another and of the body as a whole

The Apostle Paul concludes this present teaching by declaring, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it"* (1 Cor. 12:27.)

