

Thankful Living | Romans 12:3-21 | November 20, 2016

Text

For as in one body we have many **members**, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another. (12:4-5)

Members = melos

TDNT, Vol. IV

Usage in Classical Secular Greek: “a member of the body” and “song”... In Plato we find in the singular (as already Pindar) in the sense of “melody,” “song.” [Footnote #3: On the etymology of **melos**, F. A. Wright seeks the connection between member and song in the dance as the most ancient art. **Melos** is the member, especially the lower member (leg), and from the movement of this in dancing comes the musical sense when the movement of the voice is expressed by the same term as that which denotes the movement of the body in the dance.] 555

The Use on Jewish Soil: In the LXX [Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture] the word is used for the bodily members of men (cf. Judges 19:29) and animals (Ex. 29:17). It is also used for song and melody (see Ezra 2:10; Micah 2:4). 557

In LXX usage we have reference to the concrete member of the body. The body is never used as a figure for the harmonious whole to which the members are subject. The body is created by God and dependent on Him... In the main attention is directed to the function of each individual member, not to its harmonious integration in the whole. 558

NT Pauline Epistles: In Paul a man’s members are not something autonomous whose activity (Rom 12:4) he may arbitrarily control. Man with his physical body stands responsible to God the Creator who has set the members in the body (“*it is God who arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose*”) I Cor 12:18. 561

[NOTE: **In Christ** articulates **how** we are forgiven, **why** we are made “partakers” of all the Father’s promises and through whom we live christianly. See Romans 6 & 7. Our current position *in Christ* is summed up in 6:22-23, “*Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” This position precedes our action, “*I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*” Romans 6:19.] See pages 561-562

Only on the basis of an understanding of these passages can one proceed to what is said about the **soma** [body] and the many [**melos**] in the well-known passages Romans 12:4 f. and 1 Corinthians 12:12 ff.

Normally the image of the *body* and *members* presupposes the idea of the community as an organism... The unity of a body with many members to which Paul points (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12) does not derive from the law of organism which holds the members together. It is the ongoing act of the creative will of God; *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”* Since God has brought the members into this unity, none of them can argue that it does not belong thereto, vr. 15 ff. Each member has its distinctive function. Hence very different functions are at the command of the body. If it had only one, it would not be the *soma* [body] which is rich in members. In the same way, it is the miracle of the new creation that Christ has integrated the most diverse members into one body. Paul does not speak in general of a *soma*, and then go on to speak of the *soma* of Christ. From the very first he has in view the *soma* of the community which belongs to Christ, and he illustrates this by the metaphor of the *soma* and *melos*... This miracle of creation has been accomplished by the [Spirit], who permeates believers as does life the members, and who in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper demonstrates His reality as the One who binds together in unity: *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jew or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit”* vr. 13... This pneumatic interrelation finds expression in suffering and rejoicing with one another (see vr. 26). In view of the common life of the members in the [Spirit] they can now be addressed as the [Body of Christ]. Nevertheless, this does not imply a mystical obliteration of the boundaries of individuality. The whole is the *soma* which belongs to Christ. Seen in part, they are members, and each is a specific member: *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”* vr. 27. 563-564

The conclusion is not that they should integrate themselves. They are already integrated. What is needed is that they should avoid arrogance, Rom 12:3. In a congregation threatened by faction and the playing off of specific gifts, they must keep in view what is given to them in their unity: *“though many, we are one body in Christ,”* Rom 12:5. We are all one body, and we are this in Christ, and in Him alone. We belong to one another only as we are related in faith to Christ. Membership does not consist in belonging to a social body... When Paul uses the metaphor of the body he speaks of the [action] of the members (Rom 12:4). So, here, he speaks of this and the [empowerment] of the Spirit (I Cor 12:11). Hence the [body of Christ] is not just an ontological statement. It can be paraphrased as follows: So Christ does this. This is justified by the fact that what Christ does by the [Spirit] is again expressed by an active term in the verse which follows: *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”* (vr. 13). Similarly, Rom 12:5 does not mean that Christ is one body and we are the members, but that we are one body, and that we are this in Christ; *“and individual members one of another”* (Rom 12:5). It is worth noting that here, too, there precedes a statement emphasizing the underlying creative act of God: *“as God divided a measure of faith to each”* (Rom 12:3). 564

Constantine R. Campbell, **Paul and Union with Christ**, (Zondervan, 2012).

The *body of Christ* is one of Paul’s most important metaphors for describing the nature of the church... We are interested in how the metaphor of the *body of Christ* may inform our understanding of union with Christ. If the church is Christ’s body, of which he is head, the metaphor must convey connotations of union. The very nature of the idea of the *body of Christ* denotes incorporation, union, and identification of Christ and his people. 268

Romans 12:4-5. Here Paul compares the human body (12:4) to the body of believers in Christ (12:5). Just as the human body has different parts with different functions, so too the body of believers consists of many members and is yet *one body in Christ*. Furthermore, Paul explores the various functions of the members of the body in 12:6-8. Part of the value of the body metaphor is that it allows a strong conception of unity while also preserving the distinctiveness of individuals: the parts are united in one body, yet they perform different functions. Indeed, while the many are described as one body in Christ, individuals are regarded as *members of one another*. Finally, the body is here described as one body in Christ, which provides an explicit connection between the metaphor and union language. As Best enunciates, “those who are *united with Christ* are also *united* with one another and require therefore to behave in such a way that their mutual unity is furthered.” 269

We see that the *body* or *body of Christ* metaphor is rich and capable of several applications. The body is an organic being that is one in Christ and is also growing and maturing. The body has many different parts, and is yet one. This oneness means that believers not only partake in Christ, but they are also joined to each other. The diversity of gifts and roles shared among its members serve to enhance the unity of the body as the body grows and is built up. Christ is the head of the body, *from* whom and *into* whom the body grows. While the body grows by the work of God, it also builds itself through its supporting ligaments and tendons. The body is “in Christ”, partaking in him, while Christ nevertheless remains distinct—alone is the head of the body. Finally, while the *body* language is metaphorical, it is not merely so. There is a concrete reality to which it refers; “while Paul’s reference to the ‘body’ is certainly metaphorical, the unity which he expresses with this metaphor rests upon an ontological reality,” which has implications for the ways in which believers treat their own physical bodies. 287-288

It is plausible to suggest that union with Christ is a key element underpinning the metaphorical power of the *body* language. “Incorporated into Christ, believers form a corporate unity with him and Paul’s designation of the church as the body of Christ basically denotes this unity.” ...the very concept of a body that is organically connected to its head implies union and participation. So Calvin states: “Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the first with which he has been endowed.” 288

This is no decapitated body! It belongs to its head, who shares with it, shapes it, promotes its growth, and cares for it. The body is “in Christ” (Rom 12:5), and it also grows into Christ, its head (Eph 4:15). While the prepositional language that is associated with union with Christ is frequently absent with respect to the body metaphor, the concept of union is never far away and, in fact, is always by the metaphor itself. 288-289

Following is the list from our passage having to do with “members” actions:

- 12:3 Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought... think with sober judgment.
- 12:6 Use different gifts in the body

- 12:9 Let love be genuine
- 12:9 Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good
- 12:10 Love one another with brotherly affection
- 12:10 Outdo one another in showing honor
- 12:11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit
- 12:11 Serve the Lord
- 12:12 Rejoice in hope
- 12:12 Be patient in tribulation
- 12:12 Be constant in prayer
- 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints
- 12:13 Seek to show hospitality
- 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them
- 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice
- 12:15 Weep with those who weep
- 12:16 Live in harmony with one another
- 12:16 Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly
- 12:16 Never be conceited
- 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil
- 12:17 Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all
- 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all
- 12:19 Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God
- 12:20 To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head
- 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil
- 12:21 Overcome evil with good.