

Powerful Christian Living

Chapter Fourteen

One Body Many Members

What is the church? Is it a building or a religious business or organization? As a pastor I am often asked the question, “Where is your church?” What the person wants to know is where the church building is located. I enjoy being asked that question because it gives me the opportunity to answer as I do. I respond by saying that on any given day my church is scattered all over the city and suburbs! Parts of the church are in office buildings, other parts are in schools, homes, factories and stores. When I say this I usually get a confused look from the person asking about my church. But sometimes someone will understand and say, “Oh, I get it. You mean the people.” And I’ll answer, “Yes, that’s exactly what I mean.”

The Christian church is not a building or a business organization. The church is a spiritual organism. It is composed of saved people who make up the body of Christ. The church is composed of many different people who have been united to God, Christ and one another through the gift of the holy Spirit. This is the great theme of 1 Corinthians 12 from verse 12 to the end of the chapter.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ.
(1 Corinthians 12:12)

The point of this verse is simple yet profound. Your physical body is made up of many parts or members, yet it is still one body. In the same way, the church is made up of many individuals, with various gifts and God-given abilities, yet together they all make up one spiritual body—the church. Let’s read the verse again.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ.

In making this comparison between the human body and the church, the apostle Paul might have said, “As the body is one and has many members . . . so also is the church.” But he doesn’t! He says, “so also *is* Christ.” The leap of logic that we are asked to make is that every believer helps to make up the body of Christ. The church, the body of Christ, is designed to express through each beautifully unique believer, the character of Christ. When the church works as it is supposed to work, believers and the rest of the world are touched by the grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ!

This is why it is such a tragedy when believers do not know what their spiritual gifts are, or when they are not using their abilities to serve the church. When this happens the church is not benefiting from the God-given abilities granted to each believer. Christians are not saved just to get things from God but to serve others on behalf of God. We are saved to serve. God saves us to be a conduit of His blessings, not a cul-de-sac. It does not matter how old or young you are, how long or little a time you have been a believer or if you are male or female, you can help other believers to grow and mature in the faith.

The church is the body of Christ. This means that he is spiritually with us every time we gather for fellowship or worship. If Jesus Christ were physically present with me right now, I would be thrilled to be with him! I would want to listen to him, be with him, and serve him. It wouldn't matter one bit whether he asked me to place a crown on his head or to clean the floor under his feet. In reality, Christ is spiritually present with us every time the church gathers together, no matter the size of the group. The zeal with which we would serve Christ if he were physically present, should be the zeal with which we serve one another. Let's continue.

For by [in] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—
whether Jews or Greeks [Gentiles], whether slaves or free—
and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
(v. 13)

How did we become the church? It is through our common experience of the gift of the holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that unifies us. We are all immersed in holy Spirit. We all share in the empowering presence of God through the Spirit. Being filled with the holy Spirit we are forever united to the Lord and to one another. It does not matter that we may be from different ethnic, religious, social or economic backgrounds; the Spirit unites us all as the people of God. When we are born again into the family of God, we are all equal before God, and no one is at any advantage or disadvantage with anyone else. This makes us valuable and necessary to one another.

For in fact the body is not one member but many.
If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am
not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?
And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye,
I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?
If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the
hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be*
the smelling? But now God has set the members,
each of them, in the body, just as He pleased. And if
they *were* all one member where *would* the body *be*?
(vv. 14-19)

There never needs to be a time where any believer feels insignificant and valueless to the church. Sometimes we may think to ourselves, "Well, I'm not like so and so, therefore I'm not really a vital part of this fellowship." This kind of self-deprecation is wrong. It is due to a lack

of biblical knowledge about the church. In God's wisdom we are all made different and gifted in different ways, not to diminish anyone but to show forth His manifold grace. We are all essential and we all have a role to play. We should never feel like a second-class Christian because we are different from others in our gifts and ministry. Using Paul's comparison with the human body, the foot should not think it is disposable because it is not the hand! I suppose we could all learn to walk on our hands, but why, when God gave us feet? The tendency of our sinful, fallen logic is to think that unless we are all the same we are valueless. But God has not made us cookie-cutter Christians. We are all uniquely gifted and rather than mope about what we are not, we should get busy serving as we are.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

Amen.

(1 Peter 4:10, 11)

If our hearts are set on bringing glory to God, we won't be tempted to belittle ourselves or think too highly of ourselves or think negatively of others. Instead we will lovingly serve one another, knowing that as we serve, we make known some aspect of God's wondrous grace. Continuing in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul wrote,

But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, so that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.

(vv. 20-26)

This is a wonderful truth to learn and apply. Just think how beautiful and powerful the church would be if we would honor and care for one another. The church should never churn out cookie-cutter Christians, who all talk alike, dress alike and are expected to serve alike. Rather we should encourage one another to be our best for God through whatever way we

are gifted to serve. The pastor, who preached his sermon well, most likely was prayed for by another believer. The singer, who sang that wonderful song of comfort, had the song composed by another inspired believer. The church's new audio system was purchased by someone's financial gift. A teenager was encouraged in the faith by the letter of another believer. The congregation was exhorted to follow the Lord more closely by someone's prophecy. Each of us is gifted to serve and each of us is necessary for the well-being of the church.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.
And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles,
second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts
of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.
*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all
workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all
speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire
the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.*
(vv. 27-31)

In the church, the body of Christ, God has assigned a special role for every believer. He determines the way in which we serve. Even though we can all manifest the Spirit in the variety of ways mentioned in verses 8-10, God determines who may have a special gift in one or more of these manifestations.

The rhetorical questions posed here, at the end of chapter 12, are not about who has what gift. Rather, they are practical and experiential questions concerning how we use our gift in the church. The Bible says that all may prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:31). But we should not all prophecy when we are gathered for worship. We would never get home on time!

Not everyone will function as an apostle or teacher when the church is gathered. When we come together for worship and fellowship, each and every one of us should desire to serve in the best way possible—sharing the best gift. The best gift is what is most needed at the time. But there is even a better way than simply desiring to serve. And that way is to serve in the love of God.

The church is not a building or a business. It is people empowered by the Spirit of God, serving one another, in a variety of ways, to meet a variety of needs, for the glory of God and the good of His people.