

One Spirit - One Body

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What is the church? Many of us are familiar with the child's game where you fold your hands together to form a building with a steeple, and say, "Here's the church, and here's the steeple, and open your hands to see the people." then having said that, you wiggle your intertwined fingers, to indicate the people inside. In the words to this little rhyme, the "church" is the building.

But it is not just children who think this way. Far too many adult Christians mistakenly believe that the "church" is a building. When I tell people that I am a minister for a Christian church, invariably the next question they ask me is, "Where is your church?" What they desire to know is what street the building is on.

I really do enjoy that question, however, 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 metropolitan Chicago area! Some are at the shop, some are at the office, some are working in medical facilities, some are at school, some are raising their children, but all are bearing witness for Christ.

The Christian church is not a building, it isn't even really an organization. The Christian church is a spiritual organism. It is people, who together compose the body of Christ. The church is made up of people who are bonded together, and enabled to contribute to one another by the gift of the holy spirit. Without the spirit of God dwelling within every believer, and energizing every believer, there would be no church. This is the point that the apostle Paul makes in the second half of I Corinthians 12.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ (I Cor. 12:12 - all verses cited are from NKJV).

The point of this verse is simple. Your physical body is made up of many parts (or members), yet it is one body. Similarly, the church is made up of

many individuals, with various God given abilities and functions, yet they all make up one spiritual body. In my estimation the last phrase of this verse is profound. In making this comparison, 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*." And the leap of logic that we are asked to make is that every believer together makes up the body of Christ! The church is not *like* the body of Christ, it *is* the body of Christ!

The first thing the verse above tells me is that we all contribute to one another. As we all participate and behave like true believers the world gets to see the life and power of Christ through us. Secondly, it tells me that we have Christ right here in our midst, right here and now!

If Jesus Christ were physically present with me at this very moment I would be thrilled to see him! I would want to listen to him, to talk to him, to serve him. It wouldn't matter one bit if I were asked to place a crown on his head or to wipe his feet. Yet, in all reality, he is present with us every time believers gather together. Together we make up the body of Christ. Therefore, the zeal with which we would serve Christ and the excitement we would have just to be with him, should be ours *every* time we are with one another! Let's go on to verse 13:

For by [or, more accurately, "in"] one Spirit [i.e. the gift] we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13).

Why are we one body? We have been baptized, or initiated, or immersed, *in one spirit, into one body*. It is the gift of the holy spirit, God's spirit in us, that makes us all one. All of us share the same life force of God, along with Jesus Christ. Filled with God's spirit we are forever united to the Lord as the Bible declares in the following verse.

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him (I Cor. 6:17).

We all share the same spirit! The same life force that raised Christ from the dead, and declares him to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4), is in us, and binds us together in him. It doesn't matter that we may be from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, or from different social classes, or

even that we are male or female. The gift of the spirit *unites us all* into one body.

When we are born again into the family of God, when we become a part of the church, no one is at any advantage or disadvantage with anyone else. What we may or may not bring to the church due to our natural talents or social background are inconsequential. When we enter the church every believer is filled with the holy spirit of God, and every believer is given new supernatural abilities to share with the whole body of Christ. This makes us all valuable and necessary to one another, as the apostle Paul writes to the believers at Corinth.

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 the 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 one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? (I Cor. 12:14-19).

The verses above lay out a scenario where believers in the church are belittling themselves because of what they perceive as a lack, of a difference on their part. Christians may say, "I'm not like so and so, therefore, I am not really a part of this group." This is self deprecation, due to a lack of knowledge of the goodness and wisdom of God. In God's wisdom we are all different, we all have a different function to play in the church, yet we are all essential, and are all a part of the body.

No believer should ever feel unimportant because he is unlike another. Using Paul's comparison, just because you are a foot and not a hand doesn't mean that you are disposable. I suppose we could all learn to walk on our hands, but why when God gave us feet? The tendency of our natural, fallen logic is to think that unless we are all the same we are valueless. But rather than complain about what we are not, we need to glorify God for what He has made us to be. Each of us has a gift of God's grace to share with one another and the Apostle Peter tells us it would be good to get busy sharing it!

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 (I Pet. 4:10-11).

Whatever ability God has given to you, share it with his whole church, to the glory of God. In His wisdom, God has called you to a wonderful function in the church that only you can perform. God has equipped and commissioned you for the role you are to play!

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4-8).

The thrust of this passage is for us to get busy serving in whatever capacity we are called. The tragedy in the church is not that we are all so different in personality or spiritual gifts, but that so few of us are *actively sharing* the special abilities that God has given to us. Many times the church is like a bus with the Pastor being the bus driver and the rest just going along for the ride. If anything we need to be like an orchestra with all of us doing our part under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has called us to one body. We are unified "in Christ". But you can have unity in uniformity, or you can have unity in harmony! In uniformity the whole orchestra plays the trumpet, in harmony there are various instruments, with various parts to play, who together make wonderful music. What does it matter if you play the violin during most of the symphony, or you crash the cymbals at the very end? What is important is that *you play*, that you do your part to make the music great. The same is true in the church.

If we were all teachers, who would labor in prayer? If we were all especially adept at discerning of spirits and raced around casting out demons, who would encourage and who would show mercy? If we were all pastors, who would evangelize? The point is not that we all can't share God's Word, or all show mercy, or all cast out demons. But like the orchestra, someone must specialize in the violin, and someone must be skilled on the trumpet, and someone must learn percussion if the orchestra is to make its full impact. All of us need to think of ourselves as essential to the cause of Christ no matter the part we have in the church.

On the other hand, not a one of us should ever say to a believer with a different role, "I don't need you!"

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 not need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable 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, that there should be no schism in the body, but 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 (I Cor. 12:20-26).

A Christian ministry or church usually begins when a man, or a group of people, see a need for a fellowship and to make known the gospel of Christ. They have a godly goal and vision. Soon others catch the vision and join. Now we have a *movement*, where everyone sees the goal and everyone plays their part. But if the people are not careful the movement soon turns into a *machine* churning out little cookie-cutter Christians who all talk alike, and dress alike, or all serve alike.

Far too often, rather than encouraging each person's uniqueness in the body of Christ, we discourage it. We want everyone to be on the same page thinking the same thoughts, acting the same way, and serving in the same manner. We say, "If you're not as into evangelism as we are then you are

not a part of this thing." This is wrong! No believer, or group of believers, should ever say to another, "I don't need you," simply because God has called them to serve in a different capacity. For when we do, the church, the body of Christ, loses its God given vitality, it loses the ability to witness for Christ in various ways. When we cut others off, we have made the body of Christ an amputee!

All of us need to recognize each others' special grace gift of God. We need to encourage each other to function to the maximum of our potential for the glory of God. Likewise, when one of us hurts we should rush to heal, and when one is honored, we should all rejoice. Finally, Paul writes,

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 covet earnestly the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way (I Cor. 12: 27-31).

In the church, in the body of Christ, God has sovereignly assigned a role to every believer. He determines the capacity in which we serve, and when and where. Even though we can all manifest the gift of the spirit in many ways, God determines who may have a special gift in one or more of the nine areas in which the manifestation profits us. In the process of our gathering together for fellowship, God determines when the spirit will be energized. When we gather as the body of Christ, not everyone in the church functions as an apostle, not everyone is a teacher, not everyone speaks in tongues in a worship service or interprets. But this does not make anyone more or less valuable than anyone else.

Despite our different abilities, we should all desire the best gifts. We should all desire to bring what is best to the church. And what is the best? The best gifts are those which are the most needed at the time. If the church is in need of physical healing, gifts of healing would be the best gifts. If we needed more knowledge, then we would need a teacher.

Yet, Paul says that there is even a better way than simply desiring the best gifts, and that is walking in love.

Love never fails ... (I Cor. 13:8).

When we are all walking in the love of God, our eyes will be open to every need and every possibility that is before us, and we will be motivated to act. Love never fails!

Many times people ask, "How can I know what my special gift is to the church?" The best answer I can give is to find a need and get involved. Have a desire to serve and walk with your eyes open. Then act on what God has put on your heart. What idea has God inspired in you? Act on it. Who needs prayer? Pray for them. Who needs mercy? Give it. Where is there a need for someone to administer, to

lead, to give financially, to witness? Get involved! As you begin to serve, God will show you your special place and open doors of opportunity for you to give. As the wise writer of Proverbs says,

A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men (Prov. 18:16).

The church is not a building or a business organization. The church is the body of Christ composed of many people who are filled with the spirit of God and minister to one another, and to the world, all to the glory of God.

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