

The Body of Christ

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On March 11, 1830 a young girl named Victoria began her daily lessons with her tutor. Her lesson was the succession to the royal throne of England; as she studied the charts before her she discovered for the first time that she was the next heir to the throne! Victoria's first response was to weep. However, she then promised, "I will be good." Several years later Victoria inherited the throne and lived up to her promise because she knew who she was and acted accordingly.

One of the most powerful truths revealed about who we are as Christians is that we are the body of Christ! Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us that,

the church ... is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (NKJV).

But now what exactly does this mean? How does knowing that we are the body of Christ affect our behavior? Five important words help to give us the answer. These words are: vitality, unity, diversity, maturity and ministry. With each of these words there is a privilege and a responsibility. Let's look at these key words.

1. Vitality: Our union with Jesus Christ is a living union. I Corinthians says that,

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

A Christian is not simply someone who tries to imitate Christ, we are one spirit with him! We can become more and more like him in faithfulness, kindness and love because we have his life within us. I Corinthians 12:12-13 says that every believer helps to make up the body of Christ and that we have been incorporated into this body "by [in] one Spirit." The same Spirit of God that dwells in Christ dwells in each and every one of us. We all share the same empowering presence of God! What a privilege this is! Our responsibility now is to walk in fellowship with the Lord so that we can manifest this life that is within us.

2. Unity: Ephesians 4:4 tells us, "There is one body." There are many members of the one body of

which Jesus Christ is the head. We may all live in different places and serve the Lord in different ways but we all belong to Christ and to one another through a spiritual unity created by God. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians exhorts us to endeavor,

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Paul then lists seven bonds that unite us:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

There is one body - the church; one Spirit - the gift of holy Spirit; one hope - the return of Jesus Christ; one Lord - the Lord Jesus Christ; one faith - the fundamental doctrines taught by the apostles; one baptism - the baptism in the Spirit; and, one God - the Father of us all. Our responsibility is to endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Our different "church bodies" may have minor differences, but we should build on our common beliefs to show a united witness of love and purpose in Christ (John 13:34-35; Acts 1:8).

3. Diversity: Though we are one body in Christ this does not mean that we are all the same. God is not interested in churning out little "cookie cutter" Christians. In Romans 12:4-8 Paul tells us that just as we have many different parts to our own physical bodies, "so we being many, are one body in Christ." And just as each part of our physical body has its own function to perform for our overall well being, so each and every believer has a special role to fill for the benefit of the whole church. Each and every one of us has been gifted by God for service to the church and we should all get busy sharing this gift with one another for the good of the church and the glory of God. Each of us is important and essential (I Cor. 12:14-27). Not a one of us should feel like a "second class" Christian because we are unlike one another in our gifts and ministry. Rather we should be proud of how God's grace is uniquely manifested through us for the good of the whole church.

4. Maturity: God's goal for us as believers is that we all mature into a "perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In other words, God desires for us to all become more and more like Christ in all our

knowledge, attitudes and actions. Leaders are to share the Word of God in order to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). Then as "each part" of the body of Christ "does its share" the church is built up and matures in love (Eph. 4:16). Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us that we should "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together," but, instead, we should strive to help each other to be our best. The privilege in being "one body" is that we can *all* grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. Our responsibility is to help one another to grow up in him.

5. Ministry: When Jesus Christ came to Israel the scriptures state that he,

did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

Since Jesus Christ is now in heaven until his future return, it is up to his spiritual body, his church, to serve. The church is primarily and fundamentally a body designed to express the very life of the indwelling Christ through each uniquely and fully equipped believer. You and I were saved not just to "get", but to give! God almighty saved you to be a conduit of His blessings - not a cul-de-sac! Christ's ministry needs to be seen in the world today through you! I Peter 4:10-11 declares:

As each of us 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.

Each of us has received a gift from God and we are to minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God - all to the glory of God. As the body of Christ it is our responsibility to serve fellow believers in the church and then also to minister to a needy world.

What a privilege it is to be a part of the body of Christ! And what an awesome responsibility we have. Like Victoria we should weep at the grace and mercy of God bestowed upon us. And like her too we should promise to be good, not because we will inherit an earthly throne, but because we will inherit the kingdom of God.

During the time of his earthly ministry in Israel Jesus Christ could only minister in one place at one time. Today he lives in the lives of his people and through us he can touch the lives of countless men and women. May we, the church, rise up to the truth of who we are as the body of Christ so that we can be a greater witness for Christ and bring greater glory to God, our heavenly Father.