

CHAPTER THREE

THE BODY OF CHRIST

One Body

“We, who are many, are *one body* in Christ, and individually, members one of another.” (Romans 12:5). (emphasis mine).

The apostle Paul takes up the theme of the Lord’s upper room prayer to teach us that the relationship called for in one-to-the-other serving and loving, is best demonstrated in the example of a living body. He sees the church as the living **BODY of CHRIST**, instituted by God. It is not a man-made organization, but a God-made organism - a living, vital reality. It is the training and exercise ground for serving and loving. This is why Christian fellowship is so important.

John Donne, a sixteenth century Anglican priest, wrote,

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

His sentiments could well be those of a member of the Body of Christ, recognizing his interdependence on all other parts of that body.

Islam teaches that Mohammed was called by God to complete what Jesus failed to do! Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet, second only to Mohammed, but they believe He failed in that He was

not able to make all people into ONE nation. Islam calls peoples of all nations to be ONE as Muslims. They have failed to understand that the unity Jesus came to bring was for those who are members of His kingdom and not one of this world. How tragic that there is such obvious disunity in that kingdom - no wonder Islam is growing so rapidly!

At conversion, the new birth, we were, “by one Spirit all baptized into one body.” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This includes Baptists, Anglicans, Pentecostals and whatever group you belong to. Not the denominations, but the individuals within all such groups who know the Lord as a personal Saviour, and know their sins are forgiven through the work finished on Calvary. The baptism *into the Body* must not be confused with the baptism *into the Spirit*, experienced by the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and by many since that day. The former is “*by the Spirit into the Body*”; the latter is “*by the Lord Jesus into the Spirit*.”¹ We are to be “in Christ” for justification; Christ is to be “in us” for sanctification.

Fullness of the Spirit

One major division in the *body* is due to various doctrines concerning this baptism in the Spirit.

Are *tongues* the initial evidence of being so filled? Are they an evidence at all? I am not getting into that argument except to say that, whichever view we hold, should we make our disagreement a cause for division, we certainly are not exhibiting the reality of any fullness of the Holy Spirit! He comes to make the presence of Christ and His will, real to us. He leads us into truth. I find it rather striking that, when Paul exhorts us to (continue to) be ‘*filled with the Spirit*’ he follows by giving us three evidences of a life so filled.

Ephesians 5: 18 *Be filled with the Spirit*

¹ Luke 3:16

Evidence #1. **A worshipping Attitude** *speaking to one another in psalms and
hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*
verse 19

Evidence #2. **A thankful Attitude** *always giving thanks for all things in the name
of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.* verse 20

Evidence #3. **A servant Attitude** *and be subject to one another in the fear of
Christ.* verse 21

Don't tell me that you are a Spirit-filled Christian unless these three are evident in your life!

Paul then continues in his letter to the Ephesians, by showing how this third *evidence* is worked out in our relationships, husband and wife, children and parents, workers and masters.²

The local church

I am not among those who consider denominations as such to be evil. I believe that the Lord established most of them to enable us to mature as believers within a group of people most like us in personality and persuasion. However, when our groupings cause us to be divided from those, *within the Body of Christ*, who do not share our opinions concerning styles of worship, interpretation of Scriptures (many obscure) and emphases, we are in danger of bringing condemnation upon ourselves. We may not like one another, but we are **COMMANDED** to love one another!

² Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9

There are three major Scripture portions where the apostle outlines his understanding of the **Body of Christ**.

1. Ephesians 4: 1-16. We are challenged to walk *in a manner worthy of our calling* showing humility, gentleness, patience, love (all fruit of the Spirit within) and *being diligent to preserve the UNITY of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. For, he declares, “*There is ONE BODY ...*” He continues by writing about some of the grace gifts (verse 7) given to that Body. They are ministry gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, which are given *for the equipping of the saints... unto maturity*.

2. Romans 12: 1-8. We are challenged again to give ourselves as a *living sacrifice* with renewed minds. All members of the Body do not have the same function but we are all interdependent on one another. We all have different grace gifts (verse 6) with which to serve one another. “*Stop being hypocrites and be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour.*” (verses 9,10)

3. 1 Corinthians 12-14. We **CANNOT** separate chapters 12 & 14 from that great chapter on **LOVE**, chapter 13!

The first chapter deals with the doctrines of the **BODY** and the *charismata* (grace gifts) given to that Body. (It is striking that each of these three references to the Body of Christ also refer to the grace gifts given to that Body). Note that these charismata are given to the individual, not for his/her own use, but for the benefit of the whole Body!

Paul expands on his teaching concerning the Body by showing just how foolish it is for one part of the Body to claim that they do not need the other parts! The eye cannot say to the hand, “*I have no need of you*” or again the head to the feet, “*I have no need of you*” *On the contrary . . .*

(1 Corinthians 12:21). We need one another!

At the end of this chapter, he gathers together the lists of grace gifts he recorded in Ephesians and Romans showing them all to be among his long list of *charismata*.

Such gifts are of little value unless exercised with love (Ch.13) and *properly and in an orderly manner* (Ch 14).

Are you fully functioning in the Body of Christ? Are you grounded in a local church, serving others, loving others, and obedient to His Word? If your ministry is wider than the local church, are you in right relationship to its God - appointed leaders, accountable to them as a member of the same local expression of the Body?

Some might seek to be an *arm* reaching out; others a *voice* speaking to this world. I often see myself as nothing more glamorous than a **BIG TOE!** As a pastor, I am often working in dark and smelly places, feeling under pressure, dealing with peoples' problems - sand between the toes. However, I feel I am privileged when asked to minister in bringing **BALANCE** to the Body. That surely, is the main function of the big toe!