

PREFACE

There are aspects of life in Christ that beggar description, that render our small earth-bound minds to quivering Jell-o in the face of such other-worldly truths.

Among these we might include

- the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and how He is so essential to our life in Christ;
- that each individual believer is *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and that Christ is *in* him or her (Colossians 3:3);

To these and others we can add the extraordinary concept of the church being the “body of Christ”—not just that it exists, but that each individual believer, with his or her associate Spirit-gifts, is an active, at times critical part of that body. No matter how different we are from each other, no matter our personality, lineage, like and dislikes—with all that, we are “one” in the body of Christ. What the apostle has been emphasizing is that it is not in spite of our differences, but *because of them* we are one.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:18-20.

I read v27 as the declarative climax to the groundwork he has been laying since the chapter began. He subtly broached the subject in v7:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Then watch how he builds his case, piece by piece, defining the body:

v12-13 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

v14 For the body is not one member, but many.

v18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

v20 But now there are many members, but one body.

Then, if he were standing before them, he pauses for dramatic effect, looks them straight in the eye and points his finger at them like a first-century Uncle Sam, and declares: “Now *you* are Christ's body, and individually members of it.”

Now you are Christ's body,

First, let's look at a few details hidden in the English. In the Greek text the "you" is first and emphatic: *you!* In other words, after all this data describing the church, the body of Christ, he now nails them with the line he has been aiming at all along: "You are Christ's body!"

Second, although almost every one of our translations has it, there is no definite article in the Greek ("the"), which makes the NASB, the sole exception, the most faithful with "Now you are Christ's body." Gordon Fee explains the significance of this.

Fee: Paul is not trying to say something about their relationship to other churches, but about their relationship to Christ and to one another. Thus he does not mean *the* body, as if they were the whole, nor does he mean *a* body, as if they were one among many (true as that might otherwise be). Rather, he means something like "your relationship to Christ (vv12-13) is that of being His body."

In Paul's letter to the Romans he restates this in a slightly different way.

Read Romans 12:4-5.

There he re-words the thoughts from our previous passage, where he emphasized how the members of the body are to care for one another: if one member suffers, all the members suffer; if one member is honored, or flourishes, then all the members rejoice. To the Romans Paul adds that the individuals are not just members of the body, but *members one of another*. The picture, the diagram of the church body then changes from a tree with single branches coming off the trunk and root, to a tree in which every individual branch is connected as well to *every other* individual branch. This explains how we are able to—indeed compelled to—live out v26:

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Of course! We share in the suffering and honor of our brothers and sisters because, through the mystical power of the binding Holy Spirit, it is as if we are *physically attached* to everyone else in the body.

The church is indeed connected to the "church universal"; the church is indeed to minister to those outside the church local and church universal. But what Paul refers to here pertains specifically to the local body *internally*—especially internal *unity*. Even the listing of gifts and appointments that follow in vv28-30 all pertain to the edification of the church—"not to ministry without" (Fee).

v27B

...and individually members of it.

If the first part of this verse addresses the body of Christ as a whole—“you are” (plural “ya’ll”)—the second emphasizes the body’s respective parts. And this caps what Paul has been saying for most of this chapter: Every individual believer has been purposely placed into the church by God and the Holy Spirit, each with a kit of Spirit-gifts meant to be employed in the edification of the rest.

Read 1 Peter 4:8-10.

Paul mirrored that in v7: “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

CONCLUSION

I return to where I began this session: the wondrous, mysterious, mystical concept of a church being “Christ’s body.” And a passage in Ephesians has taken on fresh meaning for me, for the way it illumines our passage in the Corinthians letter. The Corinthian passage was written first; the apostle later expanded on it to the Romans (12:4-5, which we read), the Ephesians, and finally the Colossians. Let’s look at the Ephesians passage.

Read Ephesians 1:18-23.

v18

Even though this passage is a hymn of praise to Christ, it is also all about what God is doing in and for us *through* Christ. Paul prays for our spiritual eyes to be “enlightened,” so that we will “know”—perceive, appreciate, understand—the “hope” to which He has called us, and—here’s the breathtaking part—“the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” That’s a lot of words that mean God has invested Himself into our eternity, and our relationship to Him through His Son.

F. F. Bruce: That God should set such high value on a community of sinners, rescued from perdition and still bearing too many traces of their former state, might well seem incredible were it not made clear that He sees them in Christ, as from the beginning He chose them in Christ. [incredible indeed]

v19

In an observation that I have used before, Bruce writes, “If the death of Christ is the supreme demonstration of the love of God...the resurrection of Christ is the supreme demonstration of His power.” And in v19 Paul exhausts his pocket thesaurus in an attempt to express this same love and power that God expends—and will expend—on the saints. Just as Christ was raised from the dead (as Paul details in vv20-21), so too will He raise the saints who are Christ’s body on earth.

vv20-21

So that the Ephesians, and us, will grasp and appreciate what awaits us—perhaps even believe it in the first place—Paul then paints a glorious picture of what God did for His Son in His resurrection and glorification.

Read 19b-21.

v22-23

In the next two verses Paul continues this narrative about Christ, but now injects how it pertains to the church—Christ’s body—including the fact that God the Father installed Christ Jesus as the “head” of the church. But just who is this “head”? Beyond being “the Lamb who was slain” for our sins, vv21-22 explain that Christ has been given authority over (“far above”) “all rule and authority and power and dominion” from now until forever; *everything* is “in subjection under His feet” (quoting Psalm 8:6). This is the One who is “head” of and over the church.

Let that sink in for a moment. The church is a communion of saints, a fellowship of believers, followers of Christ. As such, *someone* needs to be in charge. Do we have the richest man in the world? Do we have the smartest, the most knowledgeable man on earth? Do we have the wisest man on earth in charge of the church? No, we have the One who is very God, under whose feet, under whose sovereign rule is every last institution, every last molecule and atom that has ever been and ever will be created in the entirety of the universe. But wait; it gets even better than that.

...which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

To be fair, because of the Greek text, there are several different interpretations of v23—i.e., whose “fullness” are we talking about, and who is doing the filling. But all of our common translations interpret this in a way that connects it to our passage in 1 Corinthians. That is, the church is Christ’s body and the church *is* the fullness of Christ (“Him who fills all in all”). [Back to 1 Corinthians.](#)

When we combine these two passages, we learn that the church—both as a collective, and each individual member of the collective—is not just *led* by the sovereign brilliance and wisdom of Christ Jesus. It is *filled*—it is energized, supplied, informed—by the fullness of who and what Christ is. We are filled with His power, His greatness, the riches of His glory, His strength.

And on top of that, He fills us with the hope, the glorious expectation and confidence that what Father God did for His Son, He will one day do in and for us, joining Them in eternal glory, in heaven and, ultimately, on a New Earth.