

## **What does the Bible teach about: 1 Corinthians 12: the Body of Christ and how it works**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **Introduction**

Today we come to the last talk in our series entitled, 'What does the Bible teach about'. It is always good if we are truly interested to learn about what the Bible teaches on any subject. Perhaps this was where the power lay in the late Dr. Billy Graham's preaching, his frequent use of the statement, "The Bible says." Today, when just about everyone seems to have an opinion on just about everything, it is vital to know what the Bible says! However, knowing what the Bible says is only half of the answer. We need to then be obedient to what the Bible teaches. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye know these things, happy [or blessed] are ye if ye do them" (see John ch. 13 v 17). And this is just as true for us today; the blessing is ours if we are "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (see James ch. 1 v 22).

Our subject today is 'the Body of Christ and how it works,' and although we will be looking at a range of Scriptures, our focus will be on 1 Corinthians ch. 12. I won't read all the verses now, but if you are able, open your Bible at this chapter and we can read some of the verses together later in the talk. Hopefully you will have heard some of our earlier broadcasts in this series. Last week we looked at the difference between gifts and the fruit of the Spirit, and you can find a full list of the subjects covered in the present series, or on any of our talks, on our website [www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk). Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off to read, and if you have enjoyed any of our broadcasts, then tell your Christian friends about us, so that they can benefit from them too.

### **Questions raised**

Thinking about our subject, the body of Christ, several questions came to my mind. What is the body of Christ? Who are the members? What is its purpose? How does it work? How is it seen? With the Lord's help, I will try and answer these questions in the course of this talk.

### **What is the body of Christ?**

Let me say at the very outset that the body of Christ is a spiritual concept, not a physical one. We do not read of this spiritual body whilst the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth. It is a marvellous truth that the Eternal Son of the Eternal God came into this world in a body of flesh and blood. A body subject to weakness and limitation. A body which could feel tiredness and pain. A body just like ours, and yet, a body without sin! But this human body is not what we are talking about today.

The body of Christ as we are considering it today is the spiritual reality of a Head in heaven (the Lord Jesus Christ) with His body on earth (the church). This truth, the body of Christ, was a mystery to the disciples in their day. By that I mean, it was not revealed to them as an open truth.

When the Bible speaks about a mystery it is not something mysterious, but simply something that was not previously revealed. It is not a surprise that of all the apostles, it is the apostle Paul who speaks most (almost exclusively) about the body of Christ. Paul speaks of the church as the body of Christ in Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and in Colossians.

In Acts ch. 9, we see a zealous young Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, on the road to the city of Damascus obsessed with stamping out the name of Jesus Christ. He was filled with violence against the early church, those who had believed in the name of Christ. But when a bright light from heaven struck him down, Saul was made to realise this great fact that in persecuting the Christians on earth, he was persecuting Christ in heaven. The voice from heaven said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?", and again, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Perhaps it was then that this truth of the body of Christ first dawned upon him. The risen Lord spoke of His own in this most intimate way, when instead of saying to Saul, "Why persecutest thou them?", He said, "Why persecutest thou me?"

So the body of Christ, as we will consider it today, is a figure of the Christian church on earth vitally linked to Christ, the Head, in heaven.

It has often been pointed out that the apostle Peter speaks of the church as a building. He speaks of each Christian as being lively, or living stones, being built into a spiritual house. The apostle John speaks of the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife. Christ is the bridegroom, and the cry of the Spirit and the bride is, "Come." Isn't it wonderful how these men, under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit bring different illustrations to us of the church of God, which God has purchased with the blood of His own (see Acts ch. 20 v 28 JND).

### **Who are the members of the body of Christ?**

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. It must be so, as the church is composed of all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the church (as we have seen), is the body of Christ. We do not have to enrol in this or that denomination to be in the body of Christ. If you have your Bible open at 1 Corinthians ch. 12, read verse 13,

"For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

The church was formed by the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven on the day of Pentecost. Fifty days after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit came down, sent of the Father, to form the church of God on earth. We can read the historical account in Acts ch. 2. The work of the Spirit has continued ever since that day, with both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) being saved, and added to the church. I think the last sentence of Acts ch. 2 is amazing; it reads, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." I believe that there is joy in heaven, joy in the presence of the angels every day, as a result of sinners repenting and being saved.

I think it is good to be reminded of this, that every believer on Jesus is a vital part of the body of Christ. Sometimes we can perhaps lose sight of that and we can become narrow in our thoughts concerning the church of God.

In our chapter, as we will consider in more detail later, although there is only one body, there are many members. Each member is set in his or her place by God, and it is good if we recognise that. What we see in these verses is that each member of the body is vitally joined to the Head, and as a consequence, linked to each of the members of the body. Paul asks the rhetorical question to make the obvious point, "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of

the body; is it therefore not of the body?" Well we hardly need answer that! Feet, hands, ears, eyes, all vital parts of the body, all different but all vital if the body is to function as intended.

The various members of the body all working together is such a powerful illustration of the diversity and yet order in the church. As Paul points out, it would not do if every member was an eye, and the body had an abundance of sight, if there was no hearing or smelling. There must be unity in the body, but unity is not uniformity; we are all different. We are placed in the body as God sees fit, and we should recognise that, and be content. We also need to view our fellow believers in this light as being complementary members of the body, as we read in v. 25, "That there be no schism in the body." Perhaps the term schism is not in our everyday language, but it simply means a split or division. The Lord's prayer before leaving this world was that His own should "be one" (see John ch. 17 v. 21). The body is one, but as we read in Ephesians, we need to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (see Ephesians ch. 4 v 3).

### **What is the purpose of the body of Christ?**

The body of Christ is not an organisation or club with an elected president or secretary. The body of Christ derives life from its Head, our risen glorified Lord. The purpose, or mission, of the body of Christ, the church, is to be seen to act on earth as directed and controlled by its Head in heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ is set forth as Head, that He might give direction, control, and nourishment to His body. [As the Lord, we bow to His supremacy, authority, and administration. As the Great High Priest, we are blessed by His succour, sympathy, and salvation. But as the Head, we learn that He directs, controls, and nourishes us.](#)

[The purpose of the body of Christ then is to display Christ, the Head. As we have just said, it is good to be reminded of these basic Bible truths. I guess if we asked the question, "What is the purpose of the church?" of our society today, we would get a very wide range of answers. Some answers may come out of a distorted view of what the church is, but remembering what we have learned, that the church is the body of Christ, the simple answer would be that the church would act in a Christ-like way in the world.](#)

Let us just consider these 3 things for a moment, direction, control, and nourishment, as coming from the Head of the body. As we consider direction, we are thinking about the way things are done in the body, and ask, are we following the instructions and guidance of the Head? If the control of the body comes from the Head, then it is He who determines who does what, and when. Nourishment is perhaps easier to define, as it is clear that as the body, we need to be nourished by Christ, the Head.

I know Christians speak of "my church" or "our church", and of course we know what is meant. But the church is God's, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, it is His body. I guess most of us quite like governmental structures and to know who is in charge. We feel comfortable knowing that decisions will be taken by a person or a group of people set up to make these decisions. But let us remind ourselves that as the body of Christ, we have but one Head, Christ Himself. Through the apostles we have been given all the direction, instruction and guidance we need in the Scriptures. Perhaps the thing we find difficult is to obey these directions. I remember hearing of a woman who said that while her husband was the head of the house she was the neck which turned the head. Hopefully there was some jest in that statement, but let it not be the case in our relationship, as the body of Christ, with our Head in heaven. The body gets its direction from Him alone!

What about control? Well in the natural body we see how vital the head is in relation to the control of the body. If our bodies are working as intended, then each of our members act as they receive commands from our brain. The head controls the body, and it is amazing and beautiful to see a dancer or an athlete moving perfectly under control. On the other hand, it is a tragedy to see one,

who through illness or accident has little or no control over their body. If this is true in the natural world, how much more we should be concerned about being under the control of Christ, our Head, as members of His body. Our risen Head controls who does what, and when, in His body, the church. How is it that some members challenge His right to decide who does what? We will say more on this later, but a cautionary note is struck in relation to disorder (or lack of control in the body), as we read in the previous chapter, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (see ch. 11 v 30). It was evidently true in Paul’s day, and I believe it is still true in our day, that there are some Christians who are fit for heaven, but are not fit for earth. The Lord can (if He chooses) remove such from the testimony through death.

Where does the body get its nourishment? Hopefully this is such a straightforward question that it hardly needs to be answered. Writing to the Christians at Ephesus Paul says,

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (see Ephesians ch. 5 vv 29-30).

Our nourishment comes from our Head, the glorified Man, Christ Jesus. The Lord Himself instructed His disciples that it was only by feeding on Him could they sustain their life Godward, and only by abiding in Him could they glorify their Father by bearing fruit for Him (see John ch. 6 and ch. 15). Is it any different for us in our day? I think not! [There has been a saying going about for some years, “You are what you eat”. This is with a view to promoting healthy eating for our natural bodies. How much more necessary this is, then, for the body of Christ. If we are what we eat, let us be continually feeding on Christ.](#)

### **How does the body of Christ work?**

The chapter we have turned to today is most helpful in relation to how the body of Christ works. I suppose we need to be honest and say that while we have often experienced the joy of the body of Christ working, we have also experienced times when it has failed to work as God intended. This is not a new or modern day problem only; this was the experience, too, of the early church. In fact, one of the reasons why the apostle Paul was writing these things to the Christians in Corinth was that they were failing to live up to what they were, the body of Christ. They were beginning to split into factions, and various groups were forming amongst them, as we read in the early chapters of this epistle. In their low spiritual condition, they had become tolerant of wickedness in their congregation. They had become unbalanced, valuing some gifts and ministries wrongly above others, forgetting that these gifts were all given by the Holy Spirit and were all to be exercised under His control for the blessing of all. No doubt the emphasis of Paul’s teaching in the following chapter demonstrates clearly that the Christians in Corinth were failing in the key area of love.

The body of Christ works best if we, the members, are close to Christ. This has been illustrated by the spokes on a bicycle wheel. As the spokes get closer to the centre, the hub, they are closer to each other. It is absolutely true that the church will display Christ best if the members are in close communion with Him, and our love for Christ will be reflected in the love we have towards other believers. At the beginning of the Lord’s farewell ministry to His disciples, He said,

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (see John ch. 13 vv 34-35).

How far short we feel we have come on occasions in our love for our Saviour and Lord, and towards His people! However, whilst we recognise that the ideal is not always displayed in the body, I want to focus on the positive teaching in our chapter. We are not blind to the break-up of

the Christian church, and the many groups formed within it, but this is not our focus today. I think we always need to bear in mind that while there are countless groups of Christians, there is only one body of Christ.

Perhaps a key verse is verse 18 where we read, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it pleased him.” Verse 28 has a similar tone; there we read, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...” What a difference this would make if we recognised that the placing and functions given to all in the body was God’s prerogative. As we look at the Christian testimony today, we can see there are members of the body who are not content where God has placed them, but who have re-positioned themselves as they think is more fitting, for them.

We can learn a lot from the instructions given to Moses for the Tabernacle (or tent of meeting) in the Old Testament. There we learn that each tribe had a job to do, as prescribed by Jehovah. There was no point in complaining that one was better placed to do this service, or that job. God had given clear instructions as to how He had ordered things to be done.

It is a sad fact that when Christians wish to do things according to their own thoughts and ideas, often these verses we are considering today are spoken of as being “only Paul’s teaching.” But Paul writes,

“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (see 1 Corinthians ch. 14 v 37).

### **How is the body of Christ seen?**

The body of Christ is seen (or expressed) best when it works. If you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, I’m sure you will have experienced the love and kindness of other believers, which is a wonderful expression of the body. I certainly have! I’ve met Christians for the first time and have felt an instant bond of fellowship and love between us. And this is not confined to our locality, we can experience this all over the world.

I remember my grandfather telling me a story of one of his many preaching tours of America. Due to a cancelled flight, he and my grandmother were facing spending a whole night in an airport. Moving forward to the desk with his ‘assembly address book’ in his hand, he said to the attendant, “Excuse me, but can you call my brother and he will come for me and bring me back in the morning.” Not long after that a man whom they’d never met (but he was a brother in Christ) arrived to take these two elderly folks to stay the night in his house. What a wonderful display of the body of Christ in action!

Many believers give financial help to Christians in other parts of the world where there is greater need, supporting them and the Lord’s work. Sometimes we are made aware of the need for prayer for some brother or sister, or some aspect of the Lord’s service in faraway places, and we respond as members of the body of Christ. These are illustrations of how the body of Christ is displayed, or seen universally. But there is a local aspect to the body as well.

In our chapter, Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that they were “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (see v. 27). However it is better translated, “ye are body of Christ ...”, as the believers in Corinth were but a local expression of the body, not the body as a whole. Sadly we live in days where the testimony of the church is fragmented. I was brought up in a small Scottish fishing village where there were at least six groups of Christians meeting in the same village. Although we were always taught that our gathering together was to the name of Christ alone, and on the ground of the truth of the one body, I look back and wonder how true that was. Usually only

those who thought exactly the same as we did were permitted to break bread, or remember the Lord Jesus Christ at His supper, in 'our meeting.' I do not wish to be contentious, so I will only say that we need to remember that there is only one body, and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a member of that body.

As we gather together to remember our Lord, announcing His death as we read in ch. 11, we have one loaf and one cup before us. These are the symbols which the Lord gave to remind us that His body was given and His blood shed at Calvary. What a blessed way to begin each new week by remembering Him through the partaking of these simple, yet profound, emblems of His death. The Lord's desire to each of His own is,

"This do in remembrance of me" (see Luke ch. 22 v 19-20).

The Christians at Corinth were not perfect, far from it, but Paul writes to them,

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (see ch. 10 v 16).

So we learn that the partaking of these emblems together is itself an expression of the body of Christ. Every Christian is in the body, and has the right to partake if they are not excluded by practising moral, or holding doctrinal evil. The word to us all is,

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (see ch. 11 v 28).

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on 1 Corinthians 12, the Body of Christ and how it works, Talk number T1165.

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