

The Mystery Of The Church

The Human Body Is a Simile for the Body of Christ

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A professing Christian wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday.

"I have gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But, for the life of me, I cannot remember a single one of them. So, I think I am wasting my time, and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks, until someone wrote this clincher.

"I have been married for thirty years, now. In that time, my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall what the menu was for a single one of those meals. But, I do know this: they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be dead today."

No comments were made on the sermon contents anymore. I thought that was an interesting analogy that really explains a lot.

The existence of the church is a mystery to most people in the world.

Church success, in this society, depends on the amount of money a church brings in, and the number of people who attend. So, we have a relatively new term in the English language that is used to refer to the most successful of these churches—"Mega churches". The September 17, 2003 issue, of Forbes Magazine, carried an article by Luisa Kröll entitled, "Christian Capitalism—Mega churches, Mega business." Here is how the article began:

Maybe churches are not so different from corporations. World Changers Ministries, for instance, operates a music studio, publishing house, computer graphic design suite, and owns its own record label. The Potter's House also has a record label as well as a daily talk show, a prison satellite network that broadcasts to 260 prisons, and a twice-a-week Web cast. New Birth Missionary Baptist Church has a Chief Operating Officer, and a special effects 3-D Web site that offers videos-on-demand. It publishes a magazine,

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and holds Cash Flow 101 game nights. And Lakewood Church, which recently leased the Compaq Center, former home of the NBA's Houston Rockets, has a four-record deal and spends \$12 million annually on television airtime.

That is incredible.

And so, we see the focus and direction of the churches of the world moving toward visually pleasing entertainment with their record labels, talk shows, videos on demand, and television airtime. What a contrast this is to the church that Jesus Christ established almost 2,000 years ago.

The first place in the New Testament where the word *church* appears is Matthew 16:18. Speaking to Simon Peter, Jesus said, "I will build my church." The inspired Greek word for *church* was *ekklesia*, which means called-out-ones.

Jesus calls out of Satan's world disciples to follow Him, to grow into an entirely new and different world, which will be God's Kingdom. In Ephesians 5:23, it is stated that Christ is the Head of the church.

We know that Christ came to call out selected and chosen ones from Satan's world. They were to turn from Satan's way into the way of God's law, and to qualify to reign with Christ when He comes to replace Satan on the throne of this earth.

They were not called merely for salvation and eternal life, but to learn the way of God's government, and develop the divine character during this mortal life in this church age.

Tomorrow, we will keep the Day of Pentecost, originally called Feast of Firstfruits, which pictures the church as the first to be begotten and born as children of God. The church was to provide the first actual harvest of human beings. We are in the process of being translated into Spirit-composed God Beings.

The church is the instrumentality God is preparing, to be used, with and under Christ, in completing His purpose of saving humanity and reproducing Himself. The church will be the firstborn harvest, with Christ being the Forerunner to lead the way.

God first called out the church to be converted and changed to become kings and priests under Jesus, when He comes to save the world. And so, the church is being trained to assist Christ, in saving the world. But, as you know, the time for saving the

world is not yet.

So, the wonderful, liberating truths of God are not yet being revealed to the world. That is why we can talk about God's truth until we are blue in the face, and all we receive back are disinterested, blank looks, or flat-out rebellion against God. As a result, this world's churches insist on teaching doctrines diametrically contrary to God's true doctrine.

The foundation for the Church of God has been laid. Christ Himself is the Head and Chief Cornerstone. He is the main foundation. His apostles, with the prophets, formed the remainder of the foundation.

On the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 31, the Holy Spirit was sent, and on that day the church was founded. That day symbolized the firstfruits of God's Kingdom. God's feast days picture God's spiritual harvest. The first part of God's spiritual harvest of humans finally to be resurrected—made God Beings—is the church.

That is why, even those who will be born into the Kingdom of God at Christ's return, starting with ancient prophets, are part of the Church of God. Even prophets of Old Testament times are part of the foundation of the church.

Ephesians 2:19-21 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

The church is in the process of being transformed from a living body of spiritual embryos—into the mature, pure, and perfect spiritual body of Christ.

All of the prophets, apostles, and members of God's church, in whom resides the Holy Spirit, will be resurrected and changed to immortality at Christ's coming in glory and power.

Millions of mortal people have died since the creation of Adam. Their decayed physical bodies are, for the most part, worthless and useless. In the late 19th century, millions of human mummies were used as fuel for locomotives in Egypt. Wood and coal was scarce, but mummies were plentiful.

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The apostle Paul says, that it is the greatness of the power that God exercised when He raised Christ from the dead that is working in us. This is the great difference between mortality and immortality.

Paul wants us to realize exactly how it works. He does so in terms of the concept, the doctrine, of the church, as 'the body of Christ.'

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

There is no figure that is used so frequently, in order to give us some idea of the doctrine of the church, as this picture, or metaphor, of the church as the body of Christ. Paul uses it in his epistles to the Romans and to the Corinthians very explicitly, and by suggestion in other epistles as well.

It is not surprising that Paul would have prayed so earnestly that we have the 'spirit of wisdom and revelation,' nor is it surprising that he repeats the petition, and says that we need to have 'the eyes of understanding enlightened.' This is one of the most inspiring doctrines, but at the same time one of the most difficult to understand.

Paul refers to this doctrine as a "great mystery" in Ephesians 5. And, a mystery, by definition, is something that cannot easily be understood. It is only as the Holy Spirit enlightens us, that we can understand it at all.

If we are to become mature Christians, if we are to rise to the height of our calling in Christ Jesus, then we must exercise our minds, our understandings, and all our senses, to begin to have some dim conception of ourselves in this great setting and context of the body of Christ.

What does Paul say about the church? It is clear in his writings that he knew the difficulty of conveying this truth. And so, he varies his comparisons and metaphors. The most common of all his illustrations is that of the church as the body of Christ. But, it is not the only picture.

We read, in Ephesians 2, that he compares the church to a building. Paul says, that Jesus Christ Himself is 'the chief cornerstone,' and the apostles and prophets are the foundation. But, he also compares the church to a household, to a family. We are members of the 'household of God.'

Paul also compares it to a great empire. Being a prisoner in Rome it seems natural that he would notice administrative similarities to the Roman Empire. There was a great central seat of authority, but she had her people scattered throughout the world, and various officers who governed the Empire.

Later, in Ephesians 5, he compares the church to a bride, and says that the relationship between Christ and the church is similar to that between a bridegroom and his bride. We also notice, in John 15, how Jesus Himself compares the church to a vine and its branches.

All of these illustrations are designed to enable us to have some understanding of our relationship to Jesus Christ, and how the mighty power that is in Him comes into us. We should not consider the doctrine of the church in a theoretical or academic way. We should be interested in it, in order that we may see how this exceeding great power of God, how the energy of the strength of God's might, actually operates within us. It is something that is extremely exciting, positive, and uplifting.

Paul tells us that the way to realize the truth about this power is to realize our relationship to Jesus Christ. The best way for us to do this is through the picture of the church as His body.

Certain principles flow from this picture of the body of Christ.

The first principle is that we are 'joined' to Christ. The analogy emphasizes that we are united and joined to Christ, not in a mechanical or loose way, but in a vital and living way.

Consider it in terms of the human body. From one standpoint, a body is a collection of a number of parts—fingers, toes, arms, legs, and so on. But, the essential truth about the body is that it is not a number of loose parts that somehow are attached to one another. Each part has its essential function, and is intricately unified with the other parts. Listen to these amazing facts about the human body that help to show how marvelous the design truly is:

- The adult human heart beats about 40,000,000 times a year. In one hour the heart works hard enough to produce enough energy to raise almost one ton of weight three feet from the ground.
- The liver is often called the body's chemical factory. Scientists have counted over 500 liver functions.
- The feet account for one quarter of all the bones in the human body. So, when

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we attach that analogy to our part in the Church if we are a foot we are quite important having one quarter of all of the bones in the body.

- The human body is well designed for injury. If you go blind in one eye, you will only lose about one-fifth of your vision (but all your depth perception.) It is amazing what God has done to even look out for us in the way of injuries.

The marvel of the body is that all the parts are really one. They are in organic, essential, and vital unity. Our fingers are not loosely joined to the palm of our hands. They are not just tied on; it is a living essential connection. In one sense, there is not a distinct separation between where the palm ends and the fingers begin. Even though it is a separate named part on the body they are still intricately connected. This is the way we are in our connection with each other and with Christ. They are part of each other. The connection is intimate, vital, and living.

This is the first essential principle, in Ephesians 1:22-23, that we must understand if we are to grasp the doctrine of the true church. All the pictures and analogies suggest it; but it is especially clear in this analogy of the body.

I Corinthians 12:12-27 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. For by one Spirit 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. 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 an 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? 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 no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And 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 that 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,

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all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

I cannot help but think about the question, "Why can we not get along better?" We fight like family but not like a body. The body does not fight against itself, unless there is something foreign in it, like cancer.

As with any analogy, we should not carry it too far. We know that the various parts of the body are developed out of an original cell from which we all began. Every one of us is a child of God, and we have come from Him in a physical sense. We are not merely loosely attached to Him.

But, it is through Jesus Christ that we are members of the church of God and that we are spiritually connected with the Father. This is essential to the idea of the church.

In verse 13, Paul tells us how it happens: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." It is a spiritual unity, it is a mystical unity; and it is therefore something that is indissoluble because it is vital and living.

It is, however, a unity that we ourselves cannot bring into being. So, we see the efforts of individuals trying to bring unity to the church when it is not their responsibility to force others into unity. Our individual responsibility is to be in unity with Jesus Christ. Essentially, it gets back to the fundamental principle that it is the result of the power of God working in us. Our relationship to Christ is not something sporadic. It is something that is maintained because of the Spirit of God imparted to us, and that is what makes us different from the world.

We cannot pass in and out of the body of Christ. We may backslide, we may be separate from a physical corporate group calling itself a church; but if we are of the body of Christ, we *are* the body of Christ. The church of God, the body of Christ, is not restricted to a physical group; it is not limited to a physical organization. The union is living, spiritual, and it is dynamic.

The second principle that is emphasized by the apostle Paul, in Ephesians 1:22-23, is that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. He is not a Head of the church; He is the *only* Head of the church.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who

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fills all in all.

Verses 22-23 are difficult to expound because of the human limitations of our minds in describing the greatness of God. So, we start with considerations of what we are sure. Paul says that Jesus Christ is 'the Head of the church.' 'The Head of the body.' Of that we have no doubt.

Christ as Head of the church is the sole authority. There is no other head of the church, and we recognize no human being as head of the church. But, that is not what Paul is emphasizing at this point. He is concerned with the fact that Christ as the Head of the church is the source and center of the life of the church.

This is made very clear by the analogy of the body. In the human body the head is the source and center of power. The body drives its vital energy from the head.

In the way of a little bit of trivia again:

- Except for your brain cells, 50,000,000 of the cells in your body will have died and been replaced with others in about 12 seconds. It is not a coincidence that the brain, which is the most important part of the head, does not have the extensive and rapid tendency to die, as does the rest of the body.

Just even in that little fact we see the brain being greater.

The fact that the apostle Paul and others were led to use this analogy is a great proof of the divine inspiration of the scriptures.

Although they had some knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the human body, they did not have the extensive knowledge that we now have; but the analogy is quite perfect in such terms as Paul uses there.

There is not a part of the body that is not controlled by nerves and the nervous system. The life of every muscle, and in every part, is conveyed to it by nervous energy and power. The human body is a marvelous creation:

Let me give you a few more amazing facts about the body that will help you to visualize this:

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- The central nervous system is connected to every part of the body by 43 pairs of nerves. Twelve pairs go to and from the brain, with 31 pairs going from the spinal cord. There are nearly 45 miles of nerves running through our bodies. Their purpose is to help us interact on the sensory level of feel. They warn us when the temperature range goes beyond our comfort and natural survival temperature. They help us to feel alive and to experience sensual feelings of pleasure.
- In one square inch of skin there are four yards of nerve fibers, 1300 nerve cells, 100 sweat glands, 3 million cells, and 3 yards of blood vessels.
- Messages travel along nerves as electrical impulses. They travel at speeds up to 248 miles per hour.

All the nerves ultimately can be traced back to the brain. It is the center and the source that controls all the nervous energy of the whole body and of every separate part and particle of the system.

When Paul says that Christ is the Head of the church he means that He is the Head of the church without qualification in that sense. We have no life apart from Him; all the energy and power comes from Him. To state it negatively, we can say that we have no independent life as Christians because we are spiritually tied into the Head, Jesus Christ

He is the Vine, we are the branches; branches would never have existed without the vine. All comes from Him. The apostle John says:

John 1:16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

The life of the whole body, and every individual part, comes from the head. This is what is meant by saying, "Christ is the Head of the church."

The third principle is that the same life is found in every single part of the body; and it is that life that gives unity to the body. A person's body is a single unit because of this intimate connection, because of this inter-relationship.

No part of the body has an independent existence. Because of this principle of natural unity, all parts are bound together and are sensitive to one another. At a time such as this, when there is so much talk about the unity of the church and of the separate splinter groups, we should remember that unity conceived of in terms of a mere joining of external organizations is completely unscriptural.

To merge a number of physical Christian groups cannot produce spiritual unity; and neither is there any precedent that shows it ever has. In fact, just the opposite is true. When two separate groups merge, both the groups compromise their former purposes and philosophies. Some have made attempts at physical unity. But, whether they succeed or not in terms of organization, they cannot succeed spiritually.

It is the Holy Spirit that makes and constitutes the unity; it is the common spiritual life that makes us one. It is this essential living quality in the nervous system, and in the blood that flows through the whole human body, that accounts for the unity of the body. The same principle applies in the life of the Christian church.

That a number of people should meet together in a conference, and agree to say that for the sake of unity they will not count correctly to Pentecost, or will no longer keep the Holy Days, or will keep the Lord's Supper instead of Passover, cannot produce the unity of which the apostle Paul speaks.

The only unity is a unity in the Spirit, a unity that is sustained and maintained by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of truth, and has revealed the truth that is in the Bible. Unity must result from an accepting of that truth, and cannot be produced by any common denominator framed by subtle ministers.

The fourth principle is drawn from the statement in Ephesians 1:22-23, "the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

These words tell us that Christ fills the body with His own life. Paul tells us in Colossians 2:9 that, "For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Here, we are told in the same way, and by the same analogy, that the fullness of the Son is in the church, which is His body. This is an incredible principle. It is exciting, dynamic, and encouraging.

Once again, the analogy of the human body is helpful. In a sense, every part of our physical body is full of our life and of us. Our life and being are in every part of our body; in reality, the moment we cease to be, every individual member of our body will die.

If you sever the main nerve or the blood supply to your finger, it will soon cease to be part of your body. The whole of my body is in every single part, as is yours.

Here are more amazing facts about the body:

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- Each square inch of human skin consists of 20 feet of blood vessels. But in the whole body there are 60,000 miles of blood vessels.
- There are four main blood types: A, B, AB, and O and each blood type is either Rh positive or negative.

38.4% have Type 'O positive' blood; 7.7% have 'O negative' blood;

32.3% have 'A positive' blood; 6.5% have 'A negative' blood;

9.4% have 'B positive' blood; 1.7% have 'B negative' blood;

3.2% have 'AB positive' blood; 0.7% have 'AB negative' blood.

Basically, this is what Paul means when he speaks of the fullness of Jesus Christ in the church. His 'fullness' is here in us. The whole vine is in the branch. It is all there, in this vital natural sense.

We should realize that however much we may be conscious of our weakness, and of the pull of sin within our own human nature and from the world and Satan—all the attributes and powers of Jesus Christ are in us as members of His body. All His life is in us; we are made 'partakers of the divine nature.'

II Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

He is the source of all that is powering us who are the members of His body. He gives us the energy that is necessary for us to perform our individual parts. The whole body is one, and yet it consists of a sufficient number of individual members or parts. As Paul says:

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I Corinthians 12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."

In the human body, as Paul points out, the hand has one function and the foot has another; the nose, eyes, ears, and the various parts of the body all have their individual parts to play. There are attractive parts and not so attractive parts, but they are all essential and they work together to the common end of their proper functioning of the whole body.

But, what we have to remember is that, as members of the spiritual body of Christ, and having our individual parts to perform, the energy and the power we use all comes from Christ. Jesus made this clear when He said, 'Apart from Me you can do nothing.'

We may be very active and busy; but that is not necessarily doing His work. I saw a plaque on the front of a Sunday-keeping church many years ago. It said, "If Satan cannot make you sin, he will make you busy." I have changed that around and said "If Satan can make you busy, he can make you sin. This is very true, and just because we are active and busy does not mean that we are doing the work that God has for us. The apostle Paul warns ministers in I Corinthians 3:12 that some people, in putting up a building, use 'wood, hay, and stubble.' It may have all the appearance of a good building, but when it comes to being tested by fire, it will be entirely burned and destroyed.

The work that is of value, the work that lasts, is the work that He, and He alone, enables us to do in His way and using the materials He provides. Without Him we can do nothing; but with Him all things are possible. So we should say, and believe, the same thing Paul said in Philipians:

Philipians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

All this is inherent in the idea that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church; and so as we contemplate life and all its problems, and as we are tempted by Satan to feel that we cannot continue to resist and go on because we are so weak, we should remind ourselves of this immutable truth that all things are possible through Christ.

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We get our strength from Him if we live just as He lives. To be in Him, is to be unified with Him.

I John 2:5-6 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

We abide, or remain, in our conviction to His teachings, and in the practice of His truth. We are convicted and we live our lives by it.

Even though we may be individually very small and seemingly unimportant members, nevertheless, we are 'in Him'—we are in His church—we are in His body and therefore, the life of the Head of the church is in us. We are related to that nerve center and His vital energy is in us. Of course, I speak of baptized members of the body of Christ having the Holy Spirit. That is what makes us different from the world.

Paul prayed that the Ephesian members, and we with them, would come to understand this. Paul wants us to have spiritual wisdom from God regarding Christ's high position, power, and authority.

Ephesians 1:15-21 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

This is what we are directly linked into spiritually.

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We should not think of Christ as just some removed powerhouse to which we can be occasionally connected. We are always 'in Him,' we are members of His body. Paul wrote:

Colossians 2:9-10 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

He is the Head and we are His members, and there is this essential, enduring connection between us. This truth gives us courage and enables us to do God's work. 'In Christ,' we cannot fail; He will not let us fail.

This body of Jesus Christ, the church, is being perfected and completed—an ongoing process since Jesus established the church.

This change is seen in a similar way in the growth of the human body from conception through to adulthood, but not always as you might expect.

- Babies are born with 300 bones, but by adulthood we have only 206 in our bodies. This change is part of the physical maturing process.

A newborn baby, in a sense, is perfect; but it can grow and develop, and it will mature.

The same maturity is true of God's church. So, in humility, we should think of ourselves as someone who is essential to the 'fullness' of the spiritual body of Christ—and with that important function comes great responsibility.

A member of this spiritual body does not, and will not, live a sinful way of life. We cannot live sinfully and still be part of the body of Christ. I speak, of course, of living sinfully as a way of life. I do not mean the occasional sins that come up in our lives.

We are part of 'His fullness,' of His spiritual completeness as the Mediator, as the One given to God's church to be its Head.

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Ephesians 4:4-16 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, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The only way that this can happen is for the body to be one, to be unified, and to be interrelated on an intimate spiritual level. Otherwise, there is no unity in a group of people who have a physical organization.

Since the church is the body of Christ, and He is the Head, and we are an essential part of that body, we are entitled to say, as it relates to the church, that what is true of Him is true of us. Paul is very clear about this in chapters 5 and 6 of his letter to the Roman brethren.

As we, before our conversion, were all 'in Adam,' similarly we who believe in Jesus are now 'in Christ.' Adam sinned, and we all sinned like him. We are now 'in Christ;' He is the Head of the body of which we are the parts. Whatever the Head does, the whole body does also. So we have been 'crucified with Christ.' As He rose, we also will rise.

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The apostle Paul tells us exactly what we must do, if we are unified with Christ, to maintain this intimate relationship.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

It is interesting that the verb "seek" in verse 1 is a present imperative, suggesting a continuing action: (I never did very well in grammar and even as hard as I may try, I still have a struggling time to remember all of those terms. Who had the time to make up all those terms, anyway?) "Keep on seeking." To seek and set our mind on things above is to continually desire and to continually strive for those things. Our interests are continually centered in Christ. Our attitudes, ambitions, and whole outlook on life are continually molded by Christ's relationship with us. Our faithfulness, loyalty, and duty to Him continually take precedence over all earthly demands.

Often, it seems, people are puzzled about the exact relationship of Christ's working in us and our part in working with Him. They seem confused about the doctrine of 'abiding in Christ,' and most people seem to think that it is something entirely passive, and in terms of "Let God do it all for us." It is a happy balance between the two extremes.

But, this analogy, or metaphor, of the church as the body of Christ, should help clear such confusion up and enable us to see the relationship between His working and our working.

Paul's statement in Philippians 2 states it clearly,

Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

This does not mean that if we want to have victory and success in our life we have to cease to work. Paul issues a specific command Philippians 2:12 telling us that we must work, and must do so 'with fear and trembling.' And

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then he adds: 'For it is God who works in you both to will and to do.'

To reconcile the two statements in verses 12 and 13 let us again look at the illustration of the human body. Think of a muscle, or a group of muscles, in a person's arm. In every muscle there is life and power, supplied, as we have already seen, by the nerve that goes to it.

- The human body has over 600 muscles, 40% of the body's weight.
- It takes 17 muscles to smile—43 to frown.
- Jaw muscles can provide about 200 pounds of force to bring the back teeth together for chewing.

The life and power in the muscle comes originally from a center in the brain from which the nerve that goes to that muscle derives its power and strength. The muscle is not isolated, it cannot do anything in and of itself; but it is alive because it is receiving energy and life from the brain through the nerve. In its normal state it is relaxed and flabby. In that state it can achieve little, if anything; it cannot enable us to lift weights, for instance. Before that muscle, or group of muscles, can be of value or help to us they must be exercised and developed.

The same is true for the body of Christ. We must be active. Christ makes sure that the body is exercising itself. In some cases it is through trials and other methods, even blessings.

In that state the human body can achieve little, if anything, and if we fail to exercise and develop those muscles and simply wait for some sudden great accession of power, we will be sadly disappointed. That works true for the human body as well as the spiritual body of Christ—which Christ makes sure does not become unexercised. The more we exercise the muscle, the greater will be the energy and the power supplied to it. Our part in exercising the body of Christ is to take those gifts that Christ has given us and to use them.

This illustrates a very important truth about our Christian life and warfare, about our development, about our growth in holiness and in sanctification.

The two extreme schools of thought in mainstream Christianity are obviously very wrong in their teachings and conclusions. Those who maintain that

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followers of Christ do everything in the Christian life are wrong, and those who say that followers of Christ have nothing to do but just 'look to Christ' and 'wait for Him to do it' are equally wrong.

Because the church is the body of Christ, and every single part and section is vitally connected to Him as the life of all, every true Christian has this power in Him. But, we have to exercise the power; and as we exercise the power, we will inevitably receive more power.

If we are concerned about failure and constant defeat, we should not only pray that we will have strength and power; but also that we can resist the Devil and put to death the deeds of our corruptible bodies by overcoming sin, Satan, and the world. Jesus Christ will not take our lusts and passions out of us; we cannot expect Him to do all for us while we simply 'abide' in Him. In fact, if we do not exercise that power that He gives us in the way of gifts, then we will cease to abide in Him, just as a muscle can become atrophied and actually begin to disintegrate away.

As a Christian the life of Christ is in us, and knowing this, we must begin to use it and exercise it. We have to use our spiritual muscles by working to overcome sin, Satan, and the world. We have to do all we can with all our might; and as we are doing so, increased power and energy will flow into us from Jesus Christ by His Spirit.

The things that are true about the physiology of the physical human body are equally true spiritually. The way to receive more power is to use and exercise the power we have. If we do not use it, we will lose it, as the old adage goes.

As baptized members of God's church, with the Holy Spirit, we are full of life because we are connected to the Head. The spiritual nervous power is there in Christ. If we think our muscles are flabby, then we must exercise them and exercise them well.

Similarly, we cannot wait for a sudden burst of spiritual blessings and strength, but we have to work to use what we have so more will be given to us.

The Parable of the Talents illustrates this. All members of God's church are given spiritual gifts. Some are given more than others. We must exercise the

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gifts that we have been given.

Matthew 25:14-30 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. "And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money." After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 'And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 'So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 'Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

So it ends in a very sad commentary for the one unprofitable servant. The

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good and faithful servant knew the true nature of his lord. His integrity and loyalty to his master had developed from working closely with him to understand how to serve his desires.

But the unprofitable servant was not of one mind with his lord. His poor character and lethargy in performing his duty had developed as the result of his self-absorption rather than a desire to understand how to meet the demands of his lord.

In brief summary, this parable tells us five things regarding our relationship with our Lord and Master:

1. God gives people differing gifts.
2. Work well done is rewarded with still more work to do.
3. The person who is punished is the person who will not try.
4. The person who uses the gifts will be given more and the person who does not use the gifts will lose even what he has.
5. If a person uses a gift, he is increasingly able to do more with it.

The lesson of this parable is that the only way to keep a spiritual gift is to use it in the service of God, and in the service of one another, in the way that God wills.

God's gifts accomplish much more through some people than they do others, as is seen with what the servants were given to work with. Every true servant of Christ is given the Holy Spirit, but different servants receive differing amounts of spiritual understanding from God. We do not receive more from Him than we can understand and use. Because God's servants differ in aptitude, He accordingly bestows His gifts to each servant as He pleases.

I Corinthians 12:1-11 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to

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each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The picture we get from this is of a church vibrantly alive. Life of the individual members of the church are spiritually heightened and intensified as we get our power and strength through Jesus Christ, in whose body we reside. There is nothing dull and ordinary about the church.

Remember, it is a spiritual organism, not a physical association. It is the body of Christ, not a corporation. It is not made up of self-seeking, contrary, independent, unprofitable servants.

The energy of the strength of God's power is in us because of our relationship with Jesus Christ who is the Head of the church. The energy is there, but we have to use it.

May God, by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, so enlighten our understanding as members of the body of Christ that we may continually work to be unified as one body, one church!