

## J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

19<sup>th</sup> February 2006

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

Text: v.12

***The Features & Functioning of Christ's Body***

In the New Testament the word that is translated “church” literally means *the called-out ones*. Therefore, when Scripture refers to the “church” it basically speaks of those who have been called out of the great hordes of humanity to be the Lord’s people – to know Him, to experience His saving grace in their hearts, and to serve Him throughout both time and eternity.

Again, thinking about this word “church” and its significance, it will be found that the Holy Spirit employs it in a number of distinct ways in the Scripture. For example, it is used to identify believers in a particular place, such as in 1 Thess 1: 1 where we read of “the church of the Thessalonians.” It is also used to denote a number of congregations associated together, interlinked and interdependent, such as in Acts 15: 2 where the word *church* is used of all the believers in Jerusalem, obviously therefore of a plurality of churches. The word is also used to denote the visible company of all those who profess Christ and the Gospel as in 1 Cor 12: 28 where Paul refers to various offices and gifts that God had “*set...in the church...*” obviously referring to the visible church in general.

However, the word “church” is then used in Scripture to describe the entire company of believers, both in heaven and on earth; indeed all those who have already believed in Christ or who will yet believe on Him. Take the words of Eph 5: 25 – “*Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.*” In this statement the word is not used of one local company of Christians; or of a plurality of congregations; or even of the visible society of professing Christians on this earth. The reference, it should be noted, is set within the framework of Christ’s death; therefore with one particular point in human history in view – the day when Christ was crucified. But the point is that on that day He gave Himself for the *church*, signifying that He died for a particular company, multitudes of whom were not even yet born into this world; who, therefore, had not yet believed on Him. Take also Matt 16: 18 where Christ speaks of continuing to do what He already had been doing, namely building His church – “*I will build My church.*” But the point is that He speaks of myriads of souls right to the end of time and calls them His *church*.

In relation to this meaning of the word “church” are those descriptions of it that cannot be limited to any particular Christian group, society, or denomination on this earth. I refer to terms such as “*the general assembly and church of the firstborn...*” in Heb 12: 23. That is a description of the church that does not belong to any individual visible body of Christians. As the Westminster Confession puts it, the term is used of “the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the head thereof.” Then there are other descriptions of the Church that obviously refer to the entire company of redeemed souls in all ages – “*the bride of Christ...*”; “*the building fitly framed together...*”; “*the holy temple in the Lord.*” Furthermore there is the term that we noted last Lord’s Day – “*the body...*” a description of the church that is frequently employed in the N.T. in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

The verses at the conclusion of Eph 1 employ the word “body” with reference to Christ’s Church – “*the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*” Note the little phrase “the fulness of Him...” i.e. of Christ; hence the church, the body, is the fulness of Christ the head. Just as in the human anatomy the head would have no completeness & no meaning without the body, so at the spiritual level Christ as the head needs a body and that body is His church – all those who are genuinely in union with Him through the work of the Spirit and by saving faith alone.

Since this truth of the church’s being the fulness of Christ is presented under the analogy of the head with its body, we need to look again at what the Scripture reveals about this matter. Here in 1 Cor 12 Paul gives a most extensive exposition of this analogy of the head and the body, from which I wish to set before you a number of points. To be specific I want to consider with you certain truths that will enable us to see the importance of this thought that the church or the body of believers is the fulness of Christ.

### I. NOTICE FIRST TWO IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE BODY

Note what our text states about the human body – “*the body is one and hath many members.*” God’s word is marvellously precise as we see here, in that in these few words the Spirit of God presents two vital features about the human body, namely *unity & diversity*. See also in this chapter the same truth in v.v. 14, 20 & 27. Other Scriptures underline the same features, Rom 12: 4 – “*we have many members in one body.*” See also Eph 4: 4 – “*There is one body...*” – *unity*; then v.7 – “*Unto every one of us is given grace...*” – *diversity*.

Now in all of these Scriptures that stress these two features of the human body the Holy Spirit is teaching that the same features exist within the Church or the Body of Christ. Again note our text & observe the final words – “*so also is Christ.*” That is, so also is that spiritual body of which Christ is the Saviour & the Head – in the company of believers which constitutes the body of Christ there are these twin features of unity and diversity.

#### 1. Note the production of these features of unity and diversity.

See v.13 – the reference is the supernatural activity & operation of the Spirit of God in regeneration, symbolised here under the figure of baptism. In other words the baptism in this text is a spiritual baptism. Frequently in Scripture it will be found that the communication or giving of the Holy Spirit to men is called a baptism – Matt 3: 11, John 1: 33 & Acts 1: 5. Thus, whether with reference to regeneration, sanctification or the endowment of believers with power, the Holy Spirit is said to be poured out upon men in a spiritual baptism. Thus,

as noted, the reference is to the spiritual baptism of the new birth or regeneration, resulting in the production of these two features of unity and diversity. Note them –

(a) **Unity** – “*By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body.*” Note the pronoun “we” – Paul is referring to people in the plural. But by the miracle of the new birth they are all constituted one body. In spite of former differences they are all merged into one body, intimately and organically. *Thus, a unity is produced by the work & power of the Spirit – this is the essential point to note.* As the human body is one because it is pervaded & animated by one soul or principle of life, so Christ’s body is one, being indwelt by “one Spirit” as the text stresses. All those alone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells constitute the body of Christ. Note the final words of v.13 – “*And have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*” These words employ the symbol of drinking & signify the thought of reception. Therefore, all who receive the Spirit are in the one & same body or company.

(b) **Diversity** – see v.14, “*The body is not one member but many.*” Diversity is plainly in view – many members. As the human body is not comprised of one member or part, so the Church is not one member but many – diversity. The word “member” signifies a constituent part with its own function. Thus, the diversity in the human body is not a multiplicity of the same part but a plurality of different parts, each having its own place, gifts & function. This is the diversity that marks the body of Christ. It has a plurality of members, each person having his or her own place, talent, & function in the spiritual body, Eph 4: 7. Note how this verse teaches or stresses that unto every member is given grace – that is, in a manner that is unique to that individual.

## 2. **Note also the pre-requisite of these features of unity & diversity.**

In order for there to be a living & functioning entity such as the human body, this unity & diversity must mark it. These features are, therefore, a pre-requisite for the very life & existence of the human body; and the same is true for the spiritual body of Christ. Note –

(a) **Unity is the framework within which this diversity can exist.** Take the words in v.12, “*The body is one and hath many members.*” The words signify that within the one body; that is, within the confines & framework of the one body the many members live and exist. Thus, there has to be unity in order to the very existence of this diversity. The Lord’s people, those who are members of His in all their diversity, need a single body & framework within which to function. Just as the different parts of the human body can only exist within the unity of that body, so those who are members of Christ need the unity that marks the body of Christ.

This is why God’s people must, for example, seek to be part of a body of believers who worship Christ, believe His word & stand for His truth. Where the word is preached, spiritual discipline is in place, and the sacraments are dispensed – the believer needs to be part of that body. Within that framework of unity you will be given the security, support and sustenance, counsel & oversight that are necessary to the well-being of your soul.

(b) **But then diversity is essential to the unity of the body.** The unity that marks the human body is not that it is comprised of only one part, v.v. 14 & 19 – this would be a horrid monster. Rather the unity within the human body is that it is comprised of various parts or members each with its own ability that enables it to contribute to the functioning of the body. Thus, this diversity both of parts & gifts create the unity that marks the body.

In the same manner, in the body of Christ there is a diversity of members & gifts, all contributing to the life & function of that spiritual body, thus creating, fomenting & nurturing bonds & unity within the body.

## II. **NOTICE SECOND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BODY**

A human body is designed & made to function in a profitable & beneficial manner, a fact that is also true of the body of Christ. Remember that Christ’s body, the church, is His *fulness*. As already explained, within the eternal purposes of God, Christ the Head needs the body of His people in the execution of His will & work on this earth. Thus, it should be the desire of every believer to function within the body as Christ directs and so contribute to His glory & honour.

The proper functioning of the spiritual body revolves around certain truths that are revealed in this passage where our text lies; truths that must be recognised and obeyed by the Lord’s people.

1. **The divine & sovereign selection & distribution of gifts within Christ’s body** – see v.18. In the human body God has created, arranged & disposed the various parts so as to constitute one living, organic entity; otherwise the body could not function, v.17. It must be recognised that the Lord sovereignly selects & distributes the members & their abilities. For example, in the human body He made the eye and gave it its ability to see, not the eye itself. The same principle is true in Christ’s body – and all believers must recognise this fact in order to be content with the role the Lord has given, v.v. 15 & 16.

2. **Note also the mutual dependence of the members** – v.v. 21 & 22. As in the human body no part can dispense with another but are mutually dependent, the same is true in the spiritual body. See by way of example -- Ex 17: 12, Acts 9: 25. This principle is designed to destroy pride & inculcate humility.

3. **Note also that the least attractive gifts are the most important** – v.23. In the human frame the heart is more important than the face; the lungs are more important than the tongue – for what would the tongue do without the lungs? Thus, what profit is there in having an outward show in Christ’s church if we are missing the heart & lungs of secret prayer & wrestling with God, striving after godliness etc?

4. **Notice the gift of mutual care & sympathy** – v.v. 24b – 26. The use of *schism* here refers to division that comes due to lack of care & compassion. In the human body each part feels the suffering, the needs of the other – and so it is to be in Christ’s body.