

August 13, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (50) Disciples of Jesus – 7 A Part of His Body

We have been study what it means to be a disciple of Jesus as part of our 2022-23 theme, “Closer to God”. The past few lessons we have noted how a Christ/disciple is compared to an athlete as it relates to endurance and competing according to the rules, a soldier as to dedication as we fight our spiritual battle and clay in the hands of a potter, as we submit ourselves to God’s will and shaping. Today we want to address how we as Christians are part of the body of Christ. This helps us understand our relationship with one another to be functioning together, as well as our place with our Lord.

I. The Church is the Body of Christ

- a. We frequently address or mention the church in lessons. That is because it is a subject we need to be reminded about, one that is misunderstood by many and it is addressed frequently throughout the New Testament. Several NT books are addressed to churches, Acts record her beginning and growth, and in our studies we can determine a pattern for every aspect of her existence and purpose. In scripture, we learn about her nature, organization, work, worship, enrollment, & identity.
- b. What is the church?
 - i. The word *church* is based upon the Greek word (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) which means, “to call out”. In common Greek usage, it had reference to an assembly. “Church” in the NT, has reference to an assembly or gathering of God’s people.
 - ii. Simply stated, the church is the body of Christ. Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter (and those with him) that He would build HIS church. Ephesians 1:22-23 notes that God made Christ the head of the church which is His body. Colossians 1:18 concurs. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*
 - iii. As such it is the body of the saved – Acts 2:47, *praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* (NKJV) Ephesians 5:23 says, *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.* IF you are saved, you are part of His body, His church.
 - iv. Used in 2 different senses in the NT – the body or gathering of ALL the saved (of all time), sometimes described as the “universal church”. It is also used in a local sense describing a *body of the saved (who to the best of our knowledge are part of the universal church), who join together in a given location to do the collective work the Lord has assigned them to do.*
- c. Are you a part of a congregation of His people?
 - i. It is my conviction that one who is saved OUGHT to be part of a local church. There are many reasons for this:
 1. Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us that the church is a manifestation of God’s wisdom, AND that it was a part of His eternal purpose. IOW, the church as described in the Bible is FROM God. Why do call ourselves “the church of Christ” (i.e., Romans 16:16) or “the church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2)? It is not a title, but a designation. We are reminded that the church belongs to Christ as we have already noted. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 12:18 & 24 tells us that He composed the body as He pleased to do so (NOTE: This was written to a local church).
 2. WE have examples of it – Acts 9:26, 13:1 (cf. 11:26).
 3. Many NT letters were written to congregations revealing God’s word for how we are to live AND various aspects of being the church (both local and universal).

4. Because we need each other. That is often the focus of such letters written to congregations and saints.
- ii. Consider what it means to be part of a congregation.
 1. As already noted, the church is the body of the saved (locally – in a given location). Should we not desire to be WITH God’s saved around us? More as this lesson develops.
 2. As part of His church, we are identified with Him. IF the church is His body (of the saved), why would we NOT want to identify with Him? 1 Corinthians 12:27 reminds us of this. ALSO consider this in relation to being a disciple of Jesus. It is in essence saying the same thing.
 3. The local church supports the preaching of the gospel and reaching the lost. Acts records early growth of the church in Jerusalem. 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul commended them because the word sounded forth in surrounding regions “and in every place”.
 4. For support and edification. Why did God give us local churches? ***Because we need each other!*** Hebrews 10:24-25 calls for us to exhort one another including assembling together. Ephesians 4:12 God gave us various teaching leaders “for the edifying of the body of Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11 calls for us to comfort and edify one another. Galatians 6:1 notes how we help restore one who is overtaken in a trespass (1 Corinthians gives us instruction on this). How can we do this if one is not part of us?
 5. Prayers – James 5:14-16 notes that we pray for one another. If you believe in the power of prayer (cf. 1 John 5:14-15), you will see the importance of being part of a local congregation. Acts 12:5, as Peter was in prison, constant prayers were being offered to God for him by the church.
 6. There is strength in numbers. When we, as a local church, are working together as we ought to, we will be there with each during the difficult times. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 illustrates this. Hebrews 3:12-13 notes that we ought to beware lest an evil heart spring up resulting in us departing from God. It is prevented when we “exhort one another daily” lest we be hardened. The more we grow as a body, the more impact we can have within the community around us.
 - iii. NOTE: Based upon my understanding, the local church is JUST AS MUCH a part of God’s plan as the universal body for the above reasons. This is why I ought to want to be a part of one that is trying to stand firm in the faith.

II. Functioning as part of His body

- a. The body in relation to Christ. As already noted, Colossians 1:18 & Ephesians 1:20-23 – Christ is the head of the body. But consider what that means. He has all authority! Matthew 28:18. It is HIS body!
- b. The body in relation to one another. **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** – this passage helps us to understand what it means to function as part of His body. Paul is writing to a congregation with a number of problems. These problems were causing division (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10ff). Paul uses the analogy of a body to describe how we ought to view each other and function together. Consider what He says in this text:
 - i. Vs. 12 - Paul begins by noting that a body has many members. In the same way that a physical body has many parts, so our spiritual body (of Christ) has many members.
 - ii. Vs. 13 – he emphasizes our spiritual relationship:
 1. We are all baptized into Christ – this implies the body is comprised of the saved (cf. Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3-4, etc.)
 2. Our differences should not matter – see Galatians 3:26-28 – note how this list is ALL inclusive. That is going to be further developed throughout the text.

3. We all appeal to the source. Paul notes that they have all been made to drink into one Spirit. This is likely the H.S. and describes how we are all joined together by the standard – His word (cf. John 17:17, 20-21).
- iii. Vs. 14-16 – Because the body is many members, *we need to realize that we are ALL important and needed.*
1. AND we need to be content to be what we are!
 2. We all have limitations and strengths. Some are God given (such as gender), but others are acquired or developed. Paul here reminds us to be the part you are.
 3. Contextually, Paul had just addressed this as he dealt with spiritual gifts (12:4-11).
 4. We CANNOT act independently and be part of the body. If we choose to sever ourselves from the body we harm the body AND ourselves (can a severed hand survive?). And in essence we are NOT part of the body.
 5. If you choose to NOT be YOUR part of the body, are you really pleasing to God?
 6. The other thought to this verse is one who thinks that because they are not a more important part or what someone else is that they are not important or needed. IF you are doing what you can do, you ARE part of the body and important. Be the best YOU and quit comparing yourself to others! NOTE: This is not to say that you cannot learn from or be “inspired” by others to do better, but don’t let your lack of a specific ability keep you from doing what you are able to do. Think of the 1 talent servant in Matthew 25. So what that he could not do as much as the 5 talent or even the 2 talent servant. He could manage that 1 talent. But instead he failed!
- iv. Vs. 17 – *I need to be me!* Here Paul reminds us that each body part has a different function. ALL functions are needed for a body to work properly. Paul illustrates that in the body, when a part is missing, so is its function.
1. In the church, every member is unique – with unique abilities and traits. USE what you have for God’s glory. Consider Romans 12:3-8, cf. 1 Peter 4:11.
 2. Because we do not get our way, do we become bitter, sulk and do nothing? Consider James 3:13-15 – bitterness is from the devil.
 3. But realize that in so doing, we are causing the congregation to suffer or making their work more difficult.
 4. NOTE: The same is true when we choose to not work with a local body. They are hindered by your failure to provide your part to the work.
- v. VS. 18-20 – *we are exactly where God wants us to be!*
1. Vs. 18 notes that God has set each member right where He wants him to be. We ALL have unique functions. What is my function? That is for me to figure out. But whatever it is, I need to do it do the very best of my ability (Colossians 3:23, Ecclesiastes 9:10)
 2. Remember our last lesson in this study, “clay in the potter’s hand”. We need to let God mold us into what He wants us to be, with our uniqueness and abilities.
 3. Vs. 19-20 is yet another reminder, if everyone was like me, would we have a fully functioning body? Think of an orchestra! Every different instrument contributes to the piece of movement. One instrument by itself, while possibly beautiful, does not complete the composition.
 4. Vs. 20, BUT you are PART of that “orchestra”!
- vi. Vs. 21- *we need to humbly appreciate each other.* After again emphasizing we are one body with many members, he notes that you cannot disregard the other parts. He notes that an eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you...” Instead, I need to APPRECIATE what the function of others is.

1. While vs. 15-16 could describe the bitter and discouraged because they feel inferior, here we find the antithesis – the arrogant and prideful one.
 2. Clearly, we need humility as we deal with others. See Romans 12:3, Philippians 2:3-5, etc.
 3. We need to be careful when we avoid one another because of our differences. That was a BIG issue among the Corinthians, and others. They were not worshipping properly together (abuses of the Lord's supper), boasting about their abilities, taking each other to court, and just splintering into cliques. That was NOT healthy for them, and it is NOT healthy for us.
 4. Consider vs. 19 again, "*If they were all one member, where would the body be?*" Paul told the Galatians, For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (Galatians 5:13-15) Consider this: If a body keeps splintering over every idiosyncrasy, how long will it be before there will be NO body!
 5. I am convinced this is why division is so strongly condemned. Consider Ephesians 4:1-3. This text reminds us that unity is something we need to be working at.
- vii. Vs. 22-24 – *members we deem less honorable* - upholding the weak
1. Which parts of the body are more important? The appendages or the internal organs. You can live without an arm or leg, or without sight or hearing (and maybe even lose more than one of these), but try living without your lungs or your heart or your brain, etc.
 2. Workers behind the scenes – if you have ever gone to a concert or sporting event, you likely have not seen all the workers behind the scene. Without them you would have no show!!! The performer who takes for granted his support crew is a fool.
 3. There are members whom we PERCEIVE are incapable of doing much, but the truth is you never know. They may be doing things regularly that you never notice, UNTIL they are not there. Who cleans the building, the baptistery, prepares the emblems, manages our sound system, etc.? Who takes care of repairs when they are discovered, often without you even noticing? These are tasks that make our worship services more pleasant and appealing.
 4. The point is, DO NOT assume you know what everyone is doing "behind the scenes".
 5. How often does scripture emphasize humility and service or self-seeking praise? Matthew 23:11-12 – He who is greatest among you, let him be your slave... Luke 18:14 – whose prayer did God hear, when the Pharisee and tax collector went to the temple to pray.
- viii. Vs. 25-26 – *that there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*
1. We have seen in the description that Paul clearly wants them to be unified and to treat each other with proper dignity.
 2. Schism means a tearing (cf. Matthew 9:16) describing a tear in a garment. Bodily, consider a tendon or muscle tearing. It means something is wrong. When a body part is wounded or sick, it affects the rest of the body.
 3. The same thing is true spiritually. That is why the NT deals so much with unity. Bearing with one another – Romans 14, etc.
 4. How do we prevent schism? We HAVE to care! Remember our definition of Christian love (agape) – *Caring enough to sacrifice for what it best.* It is about caring as we should. We prevent schism by ALL of us trying to be the body God intends of us.

Just think about how after this, Paul will lead into 1 Corinthians 13 and describe this love (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

5. Vs. 26 – *if one member suffers...* - this is the interdependence we have been describing. Consider Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:15 – we bear each others burdens, rejoice and cry together, etc. Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 – they ought to have been mourning because one of their members had gone astray.
- ix. Vs. 27 – *now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.* In this text, Paul summarizes his description. The idea of the “body of Christ” is a reference to the church. Contextually, he is appealing to “the church of God at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2), a local congregation. Time will not permit developing how each local church is autonomous and independent of others and exists “as if” it were the only one. The point being, EACH local church answers directly to Christ, and must let Him as the HEAD govern how we conduct ourselves.
- c. Ephesians 4:11-16 – a passage that more succinctly reminds us that if we are to grow, every part must do its share. A body is not going to properly grow if certain parts are failing.

And thus, we can see how as disciples we are all parts of the body of Christ (universally – because we are saved, and locally as part of a local church). If we want to get to heaven, WE NEED EACH OTHER, and we need to act like it, by doing our part to ensure HIS body is functioning at its fullest capacity. What about you? Are you doing your part to help this spiritual body grow? Think about it!