

January 21, 2007

Epiphany 3

"You Are the Body of Christ"

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-21,26,27

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

It is amazing how two cells can come together within the womb of a mother. The cells grow and multiply into a heart that pumps blood, legs that kick the sidewalls of the womb, lungs that will breath air, a digestive system that will process food, and a complex brain and neurological system that makes even the fastest computer appear to operating at a snail's pace. After nine months the baby comes into the world with eyes that see, ears that hear and a digestive system that works, vocal cords that let the whole world know, "I am here and I need help." How true are the words of the psalmist David, "For you create my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

As amazing as the human body is in all its functions including the complexity of each individual cell, the human body cannot compare to the complexity that exists in the body of Christ, his church, his people, who have him as their head. We are told in the words just read to you that "God has arranged the parts in the body, everyone one of them, just as he wanted them to be." Yes, dear Christian, you are the body of Christ and Jesus is your head. He has put us into different positions and given us different gifts to build each other up and strengthen each other. It truly amazes us and causes us to say, "Wow!" Jesus manages, even micro manages, our lives individually, and help us work together as a team. This is amazing considering how complex our lives are and how many people are in the Christian church world wide.

Think of how often you will use your hands this week, your feet, your ears, your eyes, your mouth, your nose, and how many cells are working in your body with complex maneuvers. Now think of something even more spectacular. Jesus is using you as part of his body, his church, directing your moves and everyday affairs to glorify him and help each other. Nothing happens by chance as the psalmist says, "All the days ordained for me were

written in your book before they came to be.”

It is amazing how this happened in your life

It is truly amazing, something beyond our comprehension, how we became part of the body of Christ and how all these different units form one body attached to Christ. “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though its parts are many, they form one body. Look at the different parts of your body. They have one thing in common, they all part of the body.

Think of how your body works as a unit. You are walking down a dark alley at night. Your ears pick up a rattling sound like the sound of keys. Your brain tells you this is probably not the sound of keys, but a dog with collar and nametag. Your eyes peer into the darkness. You see a dog coming down the alley, a very large dog. Adrenalin pumps in your body and you must make a choice. Run and jump the fence or find a piece of board to defend yourself. Because you are young you decide to run and jump the fence. Your legs start running, you leap up, grab the top of the fence with your hands and pull yourself over to safety on the other side as the dog is ready to bite the back of you leg. This was all possibly because your body is one unit made up of individual parts. In the Christian church there are no solo Christians. We are all connected together as part of Christ’s body with Jesus as our head. We are united in our daily struggle against the devil. Scripture describes him not as a mean dog, but a roaring lion looking for people to devour.

How amazing it is that we are a body attached to Jesus as our head. “So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and were all given the one Spirit to drink.” You were not born into this world attached to Christ. Ephesians 2 says, “At one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without God and without hope in the world.” Then you became attached to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. He became your head and you became his body. That is what Jesus prayed for the night before he died when he said, “I have given them the glory that you have given me, that they may be one as we are one.” Without Jesus we are without a head, we are dead and without life, lost forever.

The Holy Spirit caused you to be born again. You enjoyed this blessing of new birth and new life in your baptism. “There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Because Jesus is our head, and we are his body, we enjoy an equality with each other. “Whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free.” We were baptized by the one Spirit into one body. There are no second rate or second class citizens in the kingdom of God. We all ride first class with Jesus as our head.

Because you are part of the body of Christ you can never claim that you have no importance and no value to other members of the body of Christ. “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for the same reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear where would the sense of

smell be.” Do you get the point Paul is making here? You cannot say because I do not have the gifts that other Christians have I have no value to the body of Christ. The strength of the body is the individual parts that make up a whole. It is great to have good eyes, but what value would there be in having a body with one big eye.

A youth pastor was trying to teach his youth group about the body of Christ and how it works together from these words of 1 Corinthians 12. He took a football, painted it to look like a large eye, and wrapped it into a baby blanket. During the class, he paused and said, “Would you like to see my baby?” Then he opened up the blanket and from the blanket this large eye was looking out at the group. One girl said, “Gross. That’s terrible.” Then he said, “What if you had a girl friend and took her out to lunch and she was just this big eye, sitting on the table, staring at you?”

Gross. That’s terrible. How ugly the body of Christ would be if it were not made up of carefully created parts, people like you and mine, with a variety of different spiritual gifts, different backgrounds of life, different circumstances of life, all coming together and creating one beautiful body. Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism: “Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and innocent sufferings and death, that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.” Jesus bought you, ransomed you. You are his body, his new creation, to serve him with the gifts the Lord give you, and to be there for each other in the body of Christ. It is truly amazing what Jesus has made us considering where we would be without him, and how he makes us different so that we can be there for each other.

It is amazing what you are able to do

But now lets look at how the Lord actually uses us to help each other. “But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is there are many parts but one body.” God arranges the parts in the body. We stand in awe of our God who arranges the parts of our human body to work together and support the whole body. We are even more amazed at how the Lord individually calls us to be his body, his church, and then organizes and orchestrates our lives so that we can serve each other in his kingdom.

In the game of golf, you swing at a little ball, competing by yourself to better your score and beat your opponent. In other sports such as basketball or soccer you learn to play together as a team. The Lakers seem to do better when Kobe passes the ball off to his teammates instead of trying to score all the points by himself. On the front cover of your bulletin you see a group of people working at a construction project. This may even be a group from our church body called “Builders for Christ’ that goes around the country helping churches with smaller building projects. You probably have people who are good at rough carpenter work. Some that are good painters, others are good at finish carpentry. Then there are the electricians and plumbers, and some people that just want to be there to help the others. If they are going to do well at the project they need to get along, using their talents to help each other, not tear each other down or compete with each other.

The Lord calls us into his kingdom and makes us part of his body. Then he gives us individual gifts and arranges us in ways that we can serve and build each other up. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'" If you pound a nail with a hammer you need to have your hand and your eye working together. I can remember first learning to pound nails as a kid. There were times you missed the nail and hit your finger, until your eyes and your hands learned to work together. A basketball player learns to use his eyes to spot the open man and pass the ball accurately. It is called teamwork. The Lord arranges us to serve each other in the body of Christ, and we need each other.

When one part of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body suffers. If one part of the body receives honor and glory, the rest of the body joins in rejoicing to see how one member is blessed. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." Did you ever notice that one part of your body suffers, the rest of your body suffers along with it? Other parts of the body nurture and care for the body that is hurting. The same is true in the Christian church. When one part of the body suffers pain or sorrow or even false teaching and confusion, the other parts of the body rush to the rescue and rush to give support.

A famous football Gene Stallings from Alabama was asked what he thought was the greatest moment in sports. He told about a time he attended a Special Olympics sports meet. The gun went off, the runners took off. Half way down the track one of the boys fell down. One by one the other runners stopped running, turned around, and helped the boy who had fallen. They held him up and all together they crossed the finish line. Dear Christians, you are the body of Christ. Great opportunities are waiting for you this week. Amen.