

A MEMBER OF THE BODY

The Disciple's Place

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another"
(Rom. 12:5)

The Bible refers to the church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is a spiritual body, with Christ as the head and every member as a part of the body. The Bible uses the word "church" in two ways. Sometimes it uses the word in a universal sense, referring to all of those who are saved (Matt. 16:18). Other times, it uses the word in a local sense referring to all of the saved in a given physical location. All disciples are made a part of the universal church the moment that they are saved (Acts 2:47). However, the Scriptures teach that individual disciples are to identify themselves as members of a local church (Acts 9:26).

Paul makes frequent use of the portrait of a body as a means of emphasizing the importance of disciples working together in the local church. A disciple is not the only person following his master. While disciples have a special relationship with their Master, they also have a special relationship with other disciples (Rom. 14:7). It is important that disciples realize their place and their role in this body of fellow believers.

Benefits Of Being In The Body

1. Salvation. As the church is the body of saved people (Acts 2:47), it makes sense that salvation is found in the Lord's church, not outside of it. Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). All spiritual blessings are found in Christ, not outside of Him (Eph. 1:3-14).

2. Identification With Christ. Members of the church are members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5). Just as a bride is identified with her husband, so the church is identified with Christ. A failure to be identified with Christ will result in our eternal damnation (Matt. 7:23; 25:12; 2 Tim. 2:19).

The wisdom of God is shown in joining disciples together into one body. In addition to the eternal benefits of being in

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the body of Christ, there are also some immediate benefits to being a member of a local church.

3. Support and Edification. God has seen fit for disciples to assemble together on a regular basis as a means of exhorting one another and stirring up love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25). When they are together, weak members receive strength (Gal. 6:1) and comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-5) from stronger members.

4. Prayers. Members of a local church assemble together and pray for one another (Acts 12:5). Prayers can be offered for those who are sick or struggling with physical or spiritual problems (James 5:14-16).

5. Strength in Numbers. It is God's will for disciples to draw strength from one another. This can only happen if disciples spend time together and build relationships with one another. The members of the church in Jerusalem are said to be "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). While a band of faithful disciples draw needed strength from one another (Eccl. 4:9-12), the disciple who chooses to be a loner makes himself vulnerable to the roaring lion who is seeking to devour his soul (1 Peter 5:8).

Responsibilities Of Being In The Body

As with everything else, where there are privileges there are also responsibilities. One who is a member of the body of Christ must...

1. Respect God's Plan and Purpose. Just as God designed and created the human body, He also designed and created the church (1 Cor. 12:18, 24). The church functions correctly when it functions the way God designed it to operate. We must respect the fact we are not authorized to make any changes to the Lord's church.

By equipping individual members with various talents and abilities, God composes every local church (Rom. 12:3-8). We respect God's pattern for the church and our role within the church by making use of our talents in accordance to God's will.

2. Respect the Authority of Christ. Christ is the head of the church, which gives Him all authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). As the head directs the body, so Christ directs His church. As members of the body, we must hold fast to Christ as the head (Col. 2:19). We must continue to follow His teachings. We can only abide in the body of Christ as long as we are willing to hold fast to the Head of that body.

3. Respect the Other Members. This respect is shown in different ways.

- Recognize the fact that we are members of one another (Rom. 12:5). Disciples are bound together in Christ.
- Have care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25-26). The members of the human body have care for one another. When one part of the body hurts, the entire body is affected and comes to its aid.
- Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:12-15). We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We are to treat one another with humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, and kindness. We are to be quick to forgive one another, putting on love "which is the bond of perfection."

- We are to do our share (Eph. 4:16). There is work to be done in the body of Christ. Members are not spectators; they are workers (Eph. 2:10). Every part has a role to play. Every Christian is to use his God-given abilities.

Diversity, Yet Equality

The Scriptures admit there is diversity in the body of Christ, but they also show how God is able to use this diversity to our benefit. The equality of the members is shown in different ways.

1. Diversity in Backgrounds, but Equal Access to God.

In Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Things like race, socioeconomic status, and gender do not make a difference in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-18; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28). We all come from different backgrounds, but through Christ we all have equal access by one Spirit to the Father.

We are all equal members under one common Head. The clergy/laity distinction is not taught in the New Testament. We are all priests serving equally under Christ as our High Priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9). There are no "second class" citizens in the kingdom of God. The "second generation" Christian has no higher spiritual standing than one converted from the world. The babe in Christ is no less a member of the body than the long-time disciple. There is no probation period for the restored brother. Some Christians may be more mature or knowledgeable than others, but every member stands equally before God (Rom. 14:1-4).

2. Diversity in Functions, but Equally Important.

The Corinthians overemphasized spiritual gifts (especially speaking in tongues) to the point that those who did not have the gifts were made to feel unimportant. This was contributing to the division in the church in Corinth.

Paul used the composition of the human body as a means of showing the foolishness of such an idea (1 Cor. 12:15-27). First, Paul addressed those who did not have the gifts (vv. 15-17). Just because one is not the most prominent member of the body does not mean that he is not a member of the body. There is no room

The Responsibilities Of Church Membership

When one is saved he is **added** by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47), but every disciple should desire to make himself an **active** member of a local church (Acts 9:26). Membership in a local church has great **benefits**, but it also carries certain **responsibilities**:

- Faithful attendance (Heb. 10:24-25)
- Submit to the leadership (Heb. 13:17)
- Receive instruction so that one may grow and mature spiritually (Eph. 4:11-15)
- Contribute to the moral purity of the church (1 Thess. 5:21-22)
- Contribute to the peace and unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6)
- Contribute one's money, time, and talents to the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:2)

for jealousy among disciples. Each of us is unique, and the talents we possess have been given to us by God for a purpose.

Then Paul addressed those who had the gifts and looked down upon those who did not (vv. 21-24). Every member needs every other member in order to function as a body. The reality is that the less honorable, less noticeable members turn out to be some of the most important members. We may play different roles in the local church with our different talents and levels of maturity, but each member is equally important. We cannot function as a body without all of the members.

3. Diversity in Talents, but Unity of Purpose.

God has dispersed different talents and abilities among the members of the local church for the benefit of the whole (Eph. 4:11-16). The church is to work together, making use of every member's talent, for the equipping of the saints, the work of ministry, and the edifying of the body. Through these efforts, the entire church is to grow to a level of maturity, to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.

This necessary growth is only possible when the whole body participates. When **every** joint supplies the love that joins every part together (Col. 3:14), and when **every** part does its share in working effectively, the body grows and edifies itself in love. We all benefit when we all work together in this common goal.

Conclusion

The disciple's place is as an active member in the Lord's church. He can not receive the edification and support that he needs unless he makes himself a part of a local church. This requires more than just "getting our name on the church roll." We must involve ourselves in the work of the church and in the lives of the members.

God has designed the local church just as He has designed the human body – every part has its place and function. Only when each part is joined to the rest of the members can they contribute to and benefit from the body.

Questions

1. Describe the difference between the "universal" church and the "local" church. _____

2. How does one become a member of the universal church (Acts 2:47)? _____

3. What are some benefits of being a member of a local church?
Heb. 10:24-25 _____
James 5:14-16 _____
Eccl. 4:9-12 _____

4. Describe the spiritual danger of one who purposely distances himself from other disciples (1 Pet. 5:8-9). _____

5. What role does God played in the creation of the local church (1 Cor. 12:18, 24)? _____

6. How does Paul describe the closeness of the relationship that should exist between members of the local church (1 Cor. 12:25-26)? _____

7. List some things that disciples are to show toward one another as they endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12-15). _____

True or False

- ____ 1. Some members of the church, by virtue of their race, gender or social status, enjoy a greater access to God than the other members.
- ____ 2. Christ only has one spiritual body of believers.
- ____ 3. Paul teaches that Peter was the head of the church.
- ____ 4. Preachers, elders, and teachers are more important than other members.
- ____ 5. Love is the bond of perfection.
- ____ 6. The Bible acknowledges that there is a diversity of talents and abilities within every local church.
- ____ 7. The local church should not experience any growth.
- ____ 8. A disciple can best please Christ by staying separate from other disciples.
- ____ 9. Every member is responsible for maintaining the moral purity of the local church.
- ____ 10. The church can function at its best with only some of its members doing their share.

Thought Question

Some Christians have the idea that they can be members at large or can float around from one congregation to another. What does the Bible teach about one's need to be identified as a member of a local church?