

The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ Our Messiah

'So we who are many are one Body in the Messiah, and as individuals, are members one with another' (Romans 12:5). 'For as the body is one unit with many parts, and all the parts together form one body, so it is with the Body of Believers in the Messiah ... so we are individual members of the Body of Christ our Messiah' (1 Corinthians 12:12 & 27). 'Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews; members of the same Body and fellow partakers in the same promise of Jesus the Messiah through the Gospel' (Ephesians 3:6).

We hesitate to use the phrase the 'Body of Christ', because Christ is a Greek word and Jesus was a Jew, He spoke Hebrew, the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew by Jewish men 300 years before it was translated into Greek, so we prefer to use the phrase, Body of our Messiah. Jesus is also a Greek name. Our Messiah was given the Hebrew name Yeshua, which means Saviour.

How do we define the Body of our Messiah? There is no earthly institution that corresponds to the whole Body of Believers. The Kingdom of God is Spiritual, not earthly; so we need to be one in the Spirit, not just sit in the same building at the same time each week. People have produced an organisation they called 'church'. The word 'church' started as an ancient German word that was adopted into the English language. The Hebrew word for the equivalent is Beit or Beth, meaning house – as in House of God. People have tried to bind themselves together in a 'church' to achieve some kind of unity. Of course this does not produce the unity that God intends for His Body. We can have any number of religions, organisations or denominations, each with their own relationships, rules and regulations, but that is not the Body of Jesus our Messiah. We are not talking about a body of flesh and blood or a building; we are talking about a group of people that make up an assembly of genuine, committed, born-again believers. The first New Testament groups called themselves an assembly (Acts 2:47), a word first used by Jesus Himself (Matthew 16:18), and the collective Body was called The Way (Acts 9:2) after Jesus announced, "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6).

God has shown us that He cannot be represented by any kind of portrait, picture, carving or image. The attempt to make any image of God or any idol is strictly forbidden (Exodus 20:4), so having a life-sized crucifix bearing an image of Jesus on the cross is wrong, according to the scriptures. In the same way, the Body of Believers in Jesus cannot be represented institutionally as an organisation of the kind that we are familiar with in secular life, because it is a Spiritual Body. Again and again, Christians try to make something visible out of that which is Spiritual. They try to produce an organisation or a union that will replace the unity and the relationship of the Body and of course it has failed. Within a church, there is strong organisational unity, structure or a 'pecking order' but that is not spiritual unity. Sometimes we can see what denomination people belong to by their clothing; an outward sign of so-called 'unity' yet there are times when two people from the very same church are at loggerheads with each other. Their 'unity' is superficial and they may be in complete opposition.

It is possible that two people attending the same church are not even walking in the same spiritual sphere; one may be born-again and fully committed to God, while another may be attending solely for the free lunch after the service. That is not unity. The outward union has nothing to do with the inward spiritual relationship that exists in the Body. We must not accept the outward appearance of unity for what should be the inward. It is true that we are called to fellowship together (Hebrews 10:25) and these assemblies are where the spiritual gifts are exercised to build up the Body (1 Corinthians 14:12), but even that is no substitute for unity in the Spirit.

Mankind has divided the Body of Believers into segments. People may not even be aware that they are themselves, substituting the outward for the inward. God did not divide His Body into religious organisational groups – man did that. Sadly, each denomination believes theirs is the 'true' church and all others have failed. That thought is wrong. Catholics are not better Christians than Anglicans; Anglicans are not better than the Salvation Army; Pentecostals are not better than Baptists; Presbyterians are not better than Catholics. To refuse to acknowledge that true Christians can attend a church other than our own, is having a wrong relationship with a fellow believer, and many Christians are not conscious of having a wrong attitude. We all have to learn that we are not in competition with each other – we are all part of one whole 'Body', one Kingdom, one House of God – one Beit. 'Be eager to keep the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one Body, one Holy Spirit, even as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all, and in us all' (Ephesians 4:3)

The deception has crept in by allowing the outward appearance of unity, to substitute the inward or spiritual harmony. If we have accepted Jesus as our Saviour and are a born-again believer, we are part of the Body of Believers in our Messiah – part of the Kingdom of God and we are equal with all other born-again believers, no matter what church organisation we choose to attend. Real unity can be seen when people

from several denominational organisations can fellowship together in harmony, worship God together, sup together, pray together and love each other as Jesus said we should, because by this love, shall all men know we are His disciples (John 13:35).

There are many parts to the natural body just as there is in the Spiritual Body and there are various gifts given to us by the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 12:4 to 31). Verse 4: There are distinctive varieties of gifts but the same Holy Spirit. Verse 5: There are distinctive varieties of service but we serve the same Lord. Verse 6: There are distinctive varieties of operations but the same God Who inspires. Verse 11: All gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. Verse 12: Just as the body (of flesh) is a unit yet has many parts, so it is with the Body of Believers. Verse 13: We are all baptised into one Body (not into a particular denomination). Verse 15: One cannot say, because he is not the hand, he is not part of the Body. In spiritual terms, that would be like saying, because we do not attend an Evangelical church, we are not part of the Body. That thought is wrong. Verse 18: God has arranged the parts of the body as He sees fit. In spiritual terms, God has placed us, as individuals, in the assembly that is the best place for us to grow spiritually. Verses 21 & 22: We all need one another no matter what building we go to for teaching and fellowship. The stronger Christians need to aide the weaker. Verse 24: God has harmonised the whole Body. Verse 25: There should be no division or discord between the parts of the Body, but the members all alike, should have a mutual interest in one another. Verse 27: We are collectively Jesus' Body (assembly of believers) and individually, members of it.

'We are many members of the one Body, but we do not all have the same function, so we who are many, are one Body in Jesus the Messiah' (Romans 12:4 & 5). That is the true Body of our Messiah as defined by scripture. A building, no matter how grand, can never house the Spiritual Body of Jesus – it can only house the spiritual temples, which are the people. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). So what is it that really keeps the Body? Where is the true nature and Source of our unity? There are two parallel scriptures. 'For because of Him, the whole body is closely joined and firmly knit together, through the joints and bands (ligaments) with which it is supplied, and when each part is working properly, grows to full maturity' (Ephesians 4:16). 'Holding firmly to the Head, from Whom the entire body, supplied and knit together by means of its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God' (Colossians 2:19).

There are two things that Paul says unite the Body; they are joints and bands (ligaments). The same applies to the physical body. What are the joints and ligaments? To make it simple, the joints represent the relationships with one another in the Body. The ligaments represent the attitude that prevails amongst us. In the natural we have bones, but the effective function of our bones depends on the joints. Our bones are not flexible and they do not bend. We bend at the joints. We could have strong healthy bones, but if our joints do not bend, we cannot function properly. We need all the parts of our bodies to function correctly and in harmony for our bodies to be healthy. We also need healthy, nourishing food and water to keep us that way.

The same applies to the Spiritual Body. We need to have harmony with one another to keep the Body healthy, and we need the correct spiritual food and drink to keep us that way. What is our food and drink? The pure Word of God, prayer, a good strong, healthy relationship with God the Father through Jesus, and obedient service doing the will of God. Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again, and the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life ... My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:14 & 34). We are related to all others within the Body, regardless of their religious affiliation. We are joined together through our belief in Jesus and His sacrifice. Our relationships with one another have to be right; that is we need to accept that someone from another Christian church denomination, is equally as important to God and we serve the same Lord, and we need to love them as much as we love people from our own church. That is the 'joint'.

The ligament is a 'band' that holds the bone ends together at the joint. Several ligaments bind joints and when a ligament is damaged the joint is affected. In spiritual terms, if we have a wrong attitude to a fellow believer, the Body does not function properly. We cannot be an effectual witness to the Gospel if we dislike another Christian, especially if non-Christians see that animosity. We must 'be eager to keep the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3). 'Above all things, walk in love which is the bond of perfection' (Colossians 3:14). The words bind, bond and band mean the same thing; they hold together that which needs to be held together. It binds everything together completely in ideal harmony. There is only one thing that can keep the Body together; it is the love of God which brings peace. Wherever possible, we are to live at peace with one another (Romans 12:18).

We all stand as individual members in the Body and we are kept together as a whole by peace and love. Where peace and love are non-existent, then the function of the Christian Body is broken down. That is when we see religious warfare; Catholics against Protestants; Protestants against Catholics; secular 'Christians' against Jews, fighting and killing each other. If they would put their differences of opinion aside and look to the love of Jesus, there would be peace. We cannot enjoy the harmony of fellowship with others;

we cannot enjoy the blessing others can bring to our lives, if we shut ourselves off from the completeness of the Lord's Body. This denominational segregation is typical of churches. Millions of churchgoers have the wrong attitude to other churchgoers, rejecting them on the basis of their denomination. Sometimes two people in the same congregation choose not to get along. There was recently a Pentecostal church where one half of the congregation, who sat on the left, had not spoken to the other half, who sat on the right, for several years. They would even cross the street to avoid speaking to one another. Is that the love we are to have for one another? Until harmony is restored in that church, the Lord will not move in their lives.

We are to love one another as Jesus told us to, not just people in our own denomination, but we are to love every member of the Body. That was the new commandment given to us by our Lord Himself (John 13:34 & 35; 15:12 to 17). There were divisions in the early church. 'I hear that there are cliques, divisions and factions among you' (1 Corinthians 11:18 & 19). In our many years as God-loving Christians, tragically, we have known of many churches or denominations that claim to be the chosen church; the only church who serves God faithfully; the only church with the truth; the only church God can be bothered with. That thought is absolutely wrong and there were problems like that in the early church too. The plain fact is: there is no perfect church; there are truths and errors in every church; there are strengths and weaknesses in every church; and from experience we can say there are genuinely sincere born-again believers in every Bible-based church. There are also those within those same churches who pretend to be genuine sheep and who are false; they are wolves in sheep's clothing. We have encountered a Pentecostal pastor who hated and refused to speak to the Pentecostal pastor of another church, in the same town. The second pastor tried unsuccessfully for years, to bring that carnal pastor to fellowship but it never happened. Strange as it may seem, because God is impartial and full of grace, He blessed and enlarged both churches, in spite of one pastor's bad attitude. We are not in competition with one another. We are to grow together, in unity and harmony, as one Body in the Kingdom of God. The scriptures show us that we are all many parts of one Body, and one should not hold himself up as being more important than another. God is not impressed with the positions that men hold and He is not partial to external distinctions (Galatians 2:6). In other words – God is no respecter of persons. He does not consider one person more important than another, nor does He consider one church group more important than another.

The scriptures tell us not to divide ourselves into separate parts, but that is exactly what the modern church has done. From 1 Corinthians 1:10, right through to 1 Corinthians 4:21, the Corinthian church is repeatedly rebuked for having divisions within the church. They are called arrogant, conceited and pretentious and are ordered to stop considering themselves superior. The Apostle Paul really tells the Corinthians off for dividing the Body. 'I urge you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus, that all of you be in perfect harmony and that there be no dissensions, factions or divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in your understanding and in your judgements. For it has been made clear that there are contentions and factions among you. Each one of you says, "I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Peter, or I belong to Jesus." Is Jesus the Messiah divided into parts? ... For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not proving yourselves unchanged men?' ... Learn to think of men in accordance with scripture and not go beyond that which is written, so that none of you may be puffed up with pride and boast in favour of one against another. For who separates you from the others? Who makes you think you are superior and sets you apart from another?' That is exactly what Christian denominations have done.

We can see that the divisions became apparent in the early church, but in the modern church, we should aim to become one in unity, regardless of what denomination we choose or how we refer to ourself. No denomination is better than another; nor is one denomination worse than another, as long as all believe in the saving blood of our Lord Jesus and walk with Him. 'There is now no distinction ... for you are all one in Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). 'All of you should be of one mind, loving each other ... for know that for this you have been called so you may yourselves, inherit a blessing' (1 Peter 3:8 & 9).

It is very sad to hear about individual Bible-believing churches, which excommunicate people, often to the point of dividing families. That is hardly the behaviour of a God-loving Christian. We are called to love each other as a witness to the world. If loving one another shows our discipleship (John 13:35), does that scripture mean, if you excommunicate fellow Christians from your church, then you cannot claim to be His disciple? If you are not His disciple, then whose disciple are you? We must love our neighbour. 'Owe no man anything except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law' (Romans 13:8). We are taught by God to love each other, so if you excommunicate people from your church, then you are not being taught by God. If that is the case, then who is teaching you? It is not God because He teaches us to love each other. 'Concerning brotherly love for all other Christians ... you should have no need for anyone to write to you, for you have been personally taught by God to love one another' (1 Thessalonians 4:9). 'This is the message which you have heard from the first, that we should love one another' (1 John 3:11). 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and he who loves his fellow man is born of God. For he who does

not love, does not know God, for God is love ... Beloved, if God loves us so much, we ought to love one another' (1 John 4:7, 8 & 11).

For the Christians who attend churches that excommunicate people, and who think they are God's elite, think again. You may be very religious, but this behaviour puts you at odds with scripture and God Himself will call you a liar and a murderer. You are not Christian, according to God's Word, and you are in darkness, which we know, leads to hell. Does that sound harsh? It is what the Bible tells us. 'Whoever says he is in the Light yet hates his brother is in darkness even until now ... He who hates his brother is walking in darkness. He is straying and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes' (1 John 2:9 & 11). 'Anyone who hates his brother in the Lord is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding within him' (1 John 3:15). 'If anyone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen. And this command we have from Him, that he who loves God shall love his brother also' (1 John 4:20 & 21).

We can see by these scriptures that there is no one elite Christian church, so anyone who thinks they attend an elite church, and refuses to acknowledge other Christians and Christian churches, is as the scripture above says: a liar, a murderer, blind, in darkness and has no eternal life. The only "elite" church, according to the Bible, is the Christian church as a whole Body of Believers from every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation throughout the whole world (Revelation 5:9). Every Christian denomination who has the Lord Jesus as its Head, anywhere in the world, is God's elite. It is God's elite body, His elect, His church, without blemish, that Jesus is coming back for at His return, and we will be gathered up from all over the world at the last day, that is the First Resurrection (John 11:24; Ephesians 5:27; Matthew 24:31 & Mark 13:27).

Most Christian churches do many good things for people, and they have mostly dedicated Christians who regularly attend, but none of the churches are perfect or elite, nor should they consider themselves as such. We, that is all Christian churches, are parts of the whole of the Body of Believers, and it may come as a surprise to some, that God does not consider them more important than the others. We are all important to God, He loves us all equally, He works equally in our individual lives, and He works in every Bible-based church, no matter what church we choose to fellowship in, as long as it is a Christian church.

You, the person reading this Bible study, if you are born-again, you are a member of the Body of Believers in the Messiah just as much as we are, yet obviously we attend different churches. It is the love Jesus has for His whole international Body, that empowers us to reach out to try to save the lost, and to teach the saved. Although we may never meet each other on this earth, one day we will be able to rejoice together, in complete unity, in heaven, in the presence of God, brought about by the unity in the Holy Spirit through the belief in the saving power of the blood of Jesus. That is the great hidden mystery of salvation through the blood of Jesus that the ancient prophets and even the holy angels longed to look into. 'Concerning this salvation, the prophets sought and searched diligently, they who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching for Who or what kind of time the Spirit of the Messiah, which was in them, pointed to, when he (the prophet) predicted the sufferings of Jesus, and the glories that would follow them. To them it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you they ministered these things, which now have been announced to you, through those who preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent out from heaven; which things holy angels desire to look into' (1 Peter 1:10 to 12). 'Now to him who is able to establish you according to the Gospel and the preaching of Jesus, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret through long ages but is now revealed, and by the Scriptures of the Prophets according to the commandment of the Eternal God is made known for obedience of faith to all the nations, to the only wise God, through Jesus our Saviour, to Whom be the glory forever! Amen' (Romans 14:24 to 26).

Amen and God bless you.

www.bibleabookoftruth.com