

You belong to the Body of Christ

Sermon for Sunday, August 8, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

1) The Church is the body of Christ

Draw in your mind a picture of church. For most of us, it will be a building. Contrast that with the picture of church most commonly found in the Bible: a body. [1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”] Give some examples of body parts: arms, legs, eyes, teeth; teachers, carpenters, treasurers, workers. But more than that: farmers, store clerks, parents, children, teachers — the church isn’t just what we do while here in the building; the church is what we do in the community all through the week.

2) The Body Needs a Head to Give Direction

Of course, this body wouldn’t be much use if the parts were not working together. Bill Cosby does a great routine on this. The body wakes up in the middle of the night.

The bladder says, “I need to go to the bathroom.”

The legs say, “Let’s get out of here! You know we’ll get it worst if we wait too long.” The legs get out of bed and take the body out to the hallway.

The hand reaches out to turn on the light; but the eyes interrupt, “Hey, what are you doing that for?”

Hand: “So you can see where you’re going. It’s dark.”

Eyes: “There’s enough light, and besides we know the way.”

The hand hesitates, “Are you sure. You remember last time?”

Eyes: “Don’t worry. We can see as clear as day.”

All this while the toes are saying, “Turn the light on. We’re not going through this again. Turn the light ON!”

The body needs a head, which gives direction to all the parts, so they work in harmony. The Bible says, in Colossians 1:18 “Christ is the head of the body, the church.” Christ is the head of the church. That may be a surprise to some children, who think that the minister runs the show. In fact, there are some children who call me “God.” But it’s not just children. Some adults have the same impression.

I’m not the head of the church. When that happens, the church becomes a cult. No, I’m a servant of Christ, just the same as all others here who follow Jesus and call him Lord.

3) Members of the Body are committed to the life of the Body. That takes precedence over their self-interests.

a) The Parable of the Steak

Juan Carlos Ortiz, a pastor of a church in Argentina, puts it this way. Imagine me eating a meal of steak. The meat is swallowed, and falls into the stomach. The stomach juices immediately come forward and say, “Good day, steak.”

Steak: “Good day, juices. What are you doing today?”

Juices: “We have come to digest you. You will be dissolved into millions of pieces.”

Steak: “Oh no! I don’t want that! I want to remain as a steak. I don’t want to change.”

Juices: “You must allow us to digest you. Unless you are broken down in tiny pieces, the body cannot absorb you. Only by being broken down can you become part of Bruce.”

Steak: “But I don’t want to be part of Bruce. I want to lead my own life.”

Juices: “If you will not become part of the body, then the body will throw you out. The body cannot tolerate alien objects inside itself. The body will vomit you back out.”

So it is in the body of Christ. We must submit to Christ, as Head over our lives. We no longer live for ourselves, but he is our focus. This is summed up in that potent verse, Galatians 2:20 “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Let me repeat again what I said earlier: Members of the Body are committed to the life of the Body. That takes precedence over their self-interests. This is so crucial for us that I’m going to tell another story, just to make sure you didn’t sleep through what I just said.

b) The Parable of the Cell

The body is made up of cells, billions and billions of them. Let’s take a microscope, and look at some of the different types of cells around us.¹

One is an amoeba. This is a complete animal in one cell. It does everything by itself: breathes, eats and digests food, excretes the waste, and even reproduces by itself. The only time it ever needs any other cell is to eat it for food.

The other is the white blood cell. This is one of the cells in the human body, which lives in the blood. It does only one thing in its whole life: find and destroy invading germs. It's useless for anything else. Yet this one task is so vital that you would die within days if the white cells in your body stopped working. The white blood cell, however, is helpless without all the other cells of the body. It cannot live on its own. It needs the nourishment and the warmth and the support provided by all the other cells in order to live.

This is how it is in the Body of Christ. No one is an island, complete in himself or herself. We need one another. And we all have a job to do. Each one is vital for the life of the body.

I would like to take this analogy of cells in the body a bit further.

When danger comes, the amoeba flees danger, seeking to preserve its own life. The white blood cell moves toward dangerous invading germs, sometimes sacrificing its own life for the sake of the Body. Remember what I said earlier? We no longer live for ourselves, but Christ is our focus.

On the other hand, the body has some types of cells which share in all the benefits of being part of the body, but do not share in any of the work. They use the Body for nourishment and support and warmth; but they give back no help in return. They were originally life-giving parts of the body, but then something went wrong. They have become parasites, eventually destroying the body while looking after themselves. Medicine has a name for this kind of cell: we call it cancer.

4) REPEAT: You are the Body of Christ

Let me repeat what I said at the beginning: The Church is the Body of Christ; and you are part of it. The church is a living organism, made up of living, breathing human beings, people who are trying to follow Jesus Christ, obey his teaching, and live by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus Christ is the centre, the head, the focus, the life of all that we do.

We have gathered here today to welcome one another back into this living Body. Some of you may be new to this body. You are welcome, too. This coming year will be a time of adventure, challenge, and excitement, as we see where God will lead us. If you are willing to take the risk of committing yourself to live for Christ, and to be part of his body, then join in the journey.

Theme for today: Let's say you win the big lottery: \$50 million dollars. Then you take it all, and invest the whole works in a company whose executives and staff are jealous, bickering and selfish, who don't share the vision of the company, and who don't even understand the company's product. You keep nothing back just in case it doesn't work.

Crazy? Ridiculous? But isn't that exactly what God has done in turning the church over to the disciples, and the ones who come after (including us)? Friends, God *believes* in us, and trusts us!

ⁱ The analogy of the cells of the body comes from *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. Great book!