

# THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (10)

June 08, 2008.

## Introduction.

Please turn with me to *1Cor.12*. (**read**). In our last study we began to look at the church as the body of Christ. I will do an extended review of what we covered before proceeding to look at the remaining points to be drawn from *1Cor.12*. We noted that the context of this chapter is the Corinthian church and the many problems that existed in that church. Paul's teachings concerning the body of Christ in *1Cor.12* are really a response to some of the problems in the Corinthian church.

## The Body Of Christ.

In our study we noted that, firstly, there is one clear fact that stands out very clearly in this chapter : *vs.27* declares, "you are Christ's body." The Corinthians are the body of Christ. You are the body of Christ. The word "**you**" is plural and emphatic. This truth emphasizes your relationship to Christ and your relationship to one another. Together, inseparably together, we are the body of Christ. If you are a Christian you must get comfortable with this fact. If you are not comfortable with this fact the options you have are not Biblical and very dangerous to the spiritual and eternal welfare of your soul. I have been stressing and I want you to clearly understand : there is no salvation outside of the church, outside of the body of Christ, that is, outside of being savingly joined to Christ and committed to the membership of a local Biblical church.

The second point to be noted in *vs.27* is in the possessive expression, “Christ’s body”. The body belongs to Christ and no one else but Christ. He owns it because He bought it with the price of His blood. (*1Cor.6:20; 1Pet.1:18-19*). He is the head of the church. (*Eph.1:22-23*). He has the preeminence over the church. (*Col.1:18*). We have looked at all the passages you have in your notes in previous studies in this series.

This brings us to the important question : **How did the Corinthians become a member of Christ’s body?** And by extension, how did you become a member of Christ’s body? The answer is in *vs.13*. (**read**). The better translation is : “for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” The Spirit is not the agent in this baptism. The Spirit is the element into which “we ... all” are baptized. The agent of this baptism is the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist declared in *Matt.3:11*, “He (Jesus) will baptize you in the Holy Spirit...” Note the words “we” and “all” in *vs.13*. This baptism is the common experience of **all** Christians. The word “all” must be emphasized. Not even one Christian is excluded here.

Baptism in the Spirit is not some special post-conversion pentecostal experience. Baptism in the Spirit is carried out by the Lord Jesus on every Christian at the point of conversion. You do not seek this baptism. You do not pray and / or fast for this baptism. This is what Jesus does for you when He saves you. And you are not consciously aware that this baptism has taken place. The stated Biblical purpose for which we are all baptized in the Spirit is to place us into the one body of Christ. We noted that Jesus placing you into His body creates in you the desire to be publicly identified with the body of Christ through water baptism. And this desire is no passing fancy because it is also in keeping with Christ’s commands for you as a new Christian. In closing the review of this point I want you to note that baptism in the Spirit is not self-orientated. Baptism in the Spirit is not for spiritual exaltation or spiritual elitism. Baptism in the Spirit is church-orientated. If you are baptized in the Spirit you become a church orientated person.

We come now to the **third** point we looked at. In this point there will be both review and additions. The third point we must note in *1Cor.12* is that the body of Christ is one, but it has many members. Let us take note of the following verses :

*Vs.12*, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (This verse can be properly completed with the words, “**so also is Christ’s body**”.)

*Vs.14*, “For the body is not one member, but many.”

*Vs.20*, “But now there are many members, but one body.”

*Vs.27*, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

The word “many” points, firstly, to plurality. There is plurality in Christ’s body. The body is made up of many members. But it is this plurality that is knitted together to make up the one body. This plurality in the body of Christ is dominated by unity in the body of Christ. The word “many” points, secondly, to diversity. There is diversity in the body of Christ. As we shall see, this diversity is God’s will. But this diversity is dominated by its unity. And it is this unity that makes the diversity meaningful and constructive. At the same time it must be emphasized that unity is both uniformity and not uniformity. This fact will become clear as we proceed.

Now Brethren, let us seek to open up from God’s word this unity that exists and must exist in the body of Christ. This unity is theological and it must be practical. From a theological perspective Christians are one. We are one in Christ. We are one in the church universal. We are one in the church local. We are one in Christ by virtue of our salvation in Christ. We are all saved by Christ. We are all saved through repentance of our sins and faith in Christ after hearing and coming to understand the gospel. If you became a Christian by some other means, then you are not a Christian.

The apostle Paul emphasized in **Eph.2** this theological oneness or unity that exists in Christ's body. Please turn to **Eph.2**. (**read**). The Christians in Ephesus were predominantly Gentiles. So we can place ourselves in this chapter. In **vss.1-3** Paul described our condition before we were saved. He said that as sinners we were dead men; dominated by the world; dictated to by Satan; dedicated to the flesh; and destined for hell. **Vs.4** begins with the words "But God". What happened? God intervened. The God who is rich in mercy and who loved us greatly, this God intervened and made us alive together with Christ. He regenerated us. He carried out in us the new birth. And then He saved us in Christ. Why did God do this? **Vs.7** gives us one of the amazing answers. (**read**). "In the ages to come" point to eternity. In eternity God is going to do something. The verb "**show**" means to put on display. God is going to have a grand exhibition in eternity. God is going to do some holy showing off in eternity.

What is God going to show off? God is going to put on display "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The word "surpassing" also means "**extraordinary**". The word "surpassing" is combined with the noun "riches" or "**wealth**" to show how incomparably rich or extravagant God's grace in Christ is towards us. The word "kindness" also means "**goodness & generosity**". The extraordinary wealth of God's grace is displayed in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. *"This is an amazing statement, given that the recipients of this generosity had been the enemies of God and liable to His wrath."* (**O'Brien**).

**Vss.8-10** emphasizes the sovereign graciousness of God making us His new creation in Christ. Now in **vss.11-12** Paul returns to describing what we were as Gentiles. Note the words : "separate ... excluded ... strangers ... no hope ... without God." The five descriptions listed constitute the grave predicament we were in. Paul's intent is to help us appreciate more fully what God has done for us in Christ. We will appreciate more fully what God has done for us in Christ when we understand that the backdrop of the surpassing riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus is that we were

separate from Christ, excluded from Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in this world. As a Gentile whom God has saved in Christ, you must take the time this week to meditate upon *Eph.2:7 & 12* and let the extraordinary truths in these two verses sink into your minds and grip your souls until you break forth in praise and thanksgiving to God.

From *vss.13-22* Paul shows us what God did as He made Jewish and Gentile Christians “one new man” (*vs.15*), “one body” (*vs.16*), “fellow citizens” (*vs.19*), “God’s household” (*vs.19*), “a holy temple in the Lord” (*vs.21*), and “a dwelling of God” (*vs.22*). I want you to take note also that apart from one exception Paul used only singular words to describe what the Lord Jesus did. The exception, which is “fellow citizens”, maintains the idea of unity in plurality.

What God did, as described in these verses, goes far beyond when Gentiles became proselytes in Judaism. In Judaism Gentile proselytes remained Gentile. Cornelius and his household were devout God-fearing proselytes and yet that’s what they were, Gentile proselytes. (*Acts 10:42*). Their devotion to God and their fear of God did not remove Jewish prejudices against them. This is why the Lord had to deal with Peter in such a dramatic manner before sending him to Cornelius and his household to preach the gospel. And even then Peter would remind Cornelius and all the Gentiles gathered in his home to hear the gospel that it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with, visit with or enter the home of a Gentile. (*Acts 10:28*). In *Acts 11* the church in Jerusalem was angry with Peter. They took issue with Peter and declared, “You went to uncircumcised and ate with them.” (*vss.2-3*).

Brethren, what *Eph.2:13-22* is showing to us is that God has created in Christ a new community, a new people, a new nation, which transcends Israel and its privileges and where Gentiles, along with Jews, have equal status and are on equal footing with equal privileges. In this holy nation (*1Pet.2:9*) there are no second class citizens. We are all

fellow-citizens with the saints in God's kingdom. (*Eph.2:19*). A man whom you know recently posted an article on his website entitled, "**Multi-cultural glory in the church.**" He went to show in his article that in *the epistle to the Ephesians* Paul left no room for the formation of churches divided along racial and cultural lines.

This is also what Paul was arguing for when he said in *Gal.3:28*, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is also what Paul was arguing for in *Col.3:11* where he said that in the church "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." In the church we must resist the formation or existence of any lines of division that are racial, cultural, social or economic. We are all the people of God. We are all God's precious possession. We are all God's sons and daughters who belong to God's household. We all have equal access to our Heavenly Father through the one Holy Spirit.

*Vs.13* tells us that the immediate consequence of being in Christ is that we have been brought near by the blood of Christ, that is, through Christ's sacrificial death. *Vs.14* makes it clear that Jews and Gentiles were two distinct divided groups. There was a dividing wall and barriers between both groups. But what happened? The emphatic answer is in one word : **Christ!** Note the emphatic opening statement in *vs.14*, "For He Himself is our peace." *Vs.15* says He established peace. *Vs.17* says twice, "He came and preached peace."

"For He Himself is our peace." Christ is identified with peace. He is peace itself and He is our peace. When He came and preached peace to those who were far, the Gentiles, and to those who were near, the Jews, what did He preach? He preached Himself. He who is our peace established peace for us, peace with God and peace with one another. I want you to note the picture here. As sinners we were the enemies of God. We were

separated from God and actively hostile toward God. (cf. **Rom.5:10; 8:7**). Christ our peace established peace between us and God. Christ our peace spanned the infinite hostile divide between God and us and brought us together and established peace between us. Now we have peace with God and the peace of God. **Rom.5:1** says, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” **Phil.4:7** says we have “the peace of God.”

The division and hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles were also very real. This division was physically and hostilely expressed in the most sacred place of the Jews, in their temple. I stated in our last study that there was no more clearly defined division that existed in the ancient world than that which existed between Jews and Gentiles. There was clearly marked division, contempt, hostility and hatred. We already saw in **Eph.2:11-12** the five major things we did not have as Gentiles.

By contrast, what did the Jews have? Paul stated in **Rom.9:4-5**, “to [the Jews belong] the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple services and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” In other words, the Jews had it all.

Jesus did not hesitate to reference this great divide that existed between Jews and Gentiles. He told the Samaritan woman, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” (**Jn.4:22**). Jesus told the Canaanite woman, “It is not good to take the children’s bread (*that is, that which belongs to the Jews*), and throw it to the dogs (*that is, to Gentiles*).” (**Matt.15:26**). These two statements from Jesus reveal to us something of the Jewish mindset that existed in that day towards Samaritans and Gentiles.

What did Jesus do by His death on the cross? He broke down the barrier of the dividing

wall, He abolished the enmity, and He put to death the enmity. The theological barriers that existed between Jews and Gentiles literally became a physical barrier. **The Epistle of Aristeas**, written in the second century B.C., stated, *“Our lawgiver ... fenced us about with impenetrable palisades and with walls of iron to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations...”* The Jewish temple had an outer court for Gentiles. This outer court was surrounded by a wall. On this wall the clear warning was displayed at regular intervals : *“No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”* In other words, the warning to Gentiles was, *“Trespassers will be executed.”*

Jesus, who is our peace, spanned the hostile divide and established peace between races, cultures and individuals who were sworn enemies. Jesus established peace between man and man, between Jew and Jew, between Jew and Gentile and between Gentile and Gentile. It is only Jesus who could take Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector and establish peace between them and make them His disciples. (*Lk.6:15*). The Zealots were the Jewish guerrilla fighters who waged war against the Romans. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who worked for the Romans. The Zealots hated the Jewish tax collectors and their greatest desire was to murder the tax collectors.

It is only Jesus who could take a bigoted Jew like Peter and send him to the Gentile home of Cornelius to preach the gospel. (*Acts 10*). It is only Jesus who could take an exceedingly bigoted Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus and make him Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. (*Acts 9:15; 22:21*). It is only Jesus who could change Paul to such an extent that he would accept and acknowledge Euodia and Syntyche, two women, as fellow workers in the gospel. (*Phil.4:2-3*). It is only Jesus who could take the wealthy Lydia, the middle class jailer and the slave girl from whom Paul cast out a demon and start a church in Philippi. (*Acts 16*).

It is only Jesus who could take fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers, save them and start a church. This is what He did in Corinth and in so many other cities in the Roman Empire. (*1Cor.6:9-11*). It is only Jesus who would take a black man and use him to win a Brahmin Hindu priest to Christ. That priest was my father. You heard the testimony yourself from **Bro. Alfredo George** on **May 30th**. Those of you who were here on that day came to some understanding regarding the nature of the miracle the Lord Jesus worked between these two men in **1958**. You heard **Bro. George** repeatedly describe my father as : *“my son, my brother, my fellow laborer.”* It is only Jesus who could do this.

What else did Jesus do? He took enemies, men and women divided along insurmountable religious, social, and economic lines and made them into one new man, into one body. He made them into His body, the church. And He is still doing the same today.

Our unity in Christ is theological. This theological unity in Christ is an established indestructible fact. But our theological unity must also be a practical unity. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul called upon us in *Eph.4:3* to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” How does Paul describe this unity? He wrote from *vs.4-6*, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also 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 all.” The word “**one**” is repeated seven times.

Let us look at *vs.3* in some more detail. One writer noted that *“Paul’s appeal is urgent and cannot be easily translated into English. The verb he uses [“being diligent”] has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis to it...”* The verb “**to be diligent**” also means “**to be zealous or eager; to take pains; to make every effort**”. “Being diligent” is a participle that describes what we must actively and continually be. But it is a participle that functions as a command. The idea is : yours is

the responsibility and the initiative. So do it and do it now. Do it with haste and passion, with the full effort of your whole being. The command excludes passivity, quietism and a wait-and-see attitude. (**Barth**).

“Be actively, continually and passionately diligent to continually preserve, (*guard, keep, maintain*) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “**Unity of the Spirit**” points to the fact that it is God’s Spirit who has created this unity in the body of Christ. This unity is not something that you can achieve. But you are exhorted to diligently maintain it. The verb “**preserve**” points to the fact that this unity already exists in the body of Christ. Believers are expected to live consistently with this divine purpose for the church. This unity must be maintained visibly. It must be transparently evident to the members of the church and to a watching world.

The unity of the Spirit is to be maintained “in the bond of peace”, that is, in the bond which consists of peace. The word “**bond**” refers to that which holds something together. Paul’s idea is that peace is the bond or glue which must hold together the unity in the church. This peace is not something we can generate. This peace harks back to *Eph.2:14*, “For He Himself is our peace.” Christ Jesus who is our peace has won and established this peace by His death on the cross. It is in Christ our unity is rooted and it is only in Christ this unity can be peacefully held together. If we try to preserve this unity apart from Christ, it will never be preserved.

Now I want you to look again at *Eph.4:1-2*. (**read**). What will it take for us to be able to diligently preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Paul’s answer is that we must have present in our lives the qualities of humility, gentleness, patience and we must manifest tolerance for one another in love. The qualities Paul listed here were regarded with scorn and shame in the Greek world. These were seen as qualities of weakness. They were shameful qualities that were not commended by the Greek philosophers. On the other hand these were qualities that were perfectly present in our Lord Jesus Christ. In *Matt.11:29* He described Himself as “gentle and humble”. In *2Cor.10:1* Paul

exhorted the Corinthians based upon “the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”

The word “humility” is literally “**humility of mind**”. This word recognizes what Paul stated in *Rom.12:3*, that we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Paul’s word refers to the quality of esteeming ourselves as small but at the same time recognizing the power and ability of God. The word “gentleness” also means “**meekness**”. It refers to that humble and gentle attitude which expresses itself in a patient submissiveness to offense, free from malice and the desire for revenge.

The word “patience” also means “**longsuffering**”. It is used in the O.T. to describe God as “slow to anger”. (cf. *Exod.34:6*). “Patience” is that longsuffering which makes allowance for others’ shortcomings and endures wrong rather than flying into a rage or desiring vengeance. (O’Brien). Finally, Paul wrote, “showing tolerance for one another in love.” This verb may be also translated “**showing forbearance**”. This mutual forbearance further clarifies and is a practical expression of “patience”. “**Forbearance**” is manifesting patience until the provocation is past. When Christians bear with one another’s weaknesses and failures in the midst of tensions and conflicts, they manifest a lifestyle that is consistent with their divine calling. This kind of behavior can spring only from love, God’s love. In *Eph.3:17* Paul prayed that we will be rooted and ground in love. Now he calls upon us to conduct ourselves on the foundation of this love.

These qualities leave no room for the presence of arrogance in the Christian. They are the very opposite of arrogance. Arrogance is the breeding ground for boasting, divisiveness, impatience, an unforgiving spirit, and we can go on and on with the list. Arrogant people are full of themselves. They are not full of Christ. *Prov.28:25* says, “An arrogant man stirs up strife.” *Prov.6:16-19* lists for us seven things the Lord hates. The first is haughty eyes and the last is one who spreads strife among brothers. *Prov.16:5* says, “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.” In other words, God has promised to most certainly punish the

proud.

My dear Brethren, unity in Christ is something God has given to us. Let us not work against this unity because we will be fighting against God. Let us continually work diligently and passionately, with mind and will, to preserve this unity. Let us do so with humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance. Let us do so rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. The lines of division that are tearing this world apart, that keep the peoples of this world in a state of tension and conflict, those lines must disappear in the church because of Christ who is our peace.

We must carefully examine our hearts and ask ourselves :

- 1). Are there lines of division in our hearts that are tearing us away from our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- 2). Are there barriers of prejudices that are separating us from our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- 3). Are we building threatening walls in our hearts like the Jews did in their temple, enclosing ourselves and keeping out others because we despise them like the Jews despised the Gentiles?

We are the body of Christ. We are knitted together by Christ. We are knitted together to Christ? And we are knitted together in Christ. May we live out this truth to the glory of Christ.

