

Many Members ~ One Body

Romans 12:4-5

The Bible is full of deep mysteries that we cannot fully understand. No, not to all eternity!

There are mysterious doctrines such as election and covenant. There are mysterious truths in creation, providence and especially redemption. Take what we studied last week – that the way up is the way down; and the way down, humility, is the way up!

But some of the greatest depths are the mystical unions of the Bible.

Human nature is one – flesh and soul in one person. The Trinity, of course – three Persons, one nature. Then the Person of Christ – two natures, divine and human, in one person.

But before us here is the mystical body of the Church. Every believer, and all believers, are united into one head, Jesus our Lord.

We are more than individual and isolated Christians. We are not islands. This means in many ways we are the same. And it also means we are each different and there is variety in the church.

We all are challenged, individually, to live to God's glory – sacrificial living to the Lord, worshipful living to the Lord, otherworldly living, thoughtful lives and obedient lives unto our heavenly Father!

We were brought down then from this mountain of glory, to be humble and think of ourselves aright.

We are soon to come to the treasure of gifts in 6-8.

This opens up a wide river for us to enter.

The NT Church is to be prophetic, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, guiding, merciful, loving, good, devoted, brotherly, honoring, diligent, fervent, worshipping, rejoicing, persevering, prayerful, diaconal, hospitable, blessing, sympathetic, unified, humble, forgiving, respectful, peaceful and evil-overcoming.

But first we come to these connecting verses.

Christians are one in their new life, having the same focus. They are one in sharing the same glory of God. They are one in their battle with pride and to be humble. But we are one in more than name.

We are one in Spiritual union with each other. 12:4-5 addresses this real, true connection, the body life of believers. You each are to live life as a doxology. You do so individually. But you never do so alone!

This idea of one body is a favorite with Paul.

As your physical body is a unit, with a wide variety of parts and functions to make up one body; so is the church.

If our bodies all lived for themselves – legs doing one thing, arms another, eyes, ears, lips – what a crazy body that would be! No body, no unity actually.

But what harmony when each part works together!

As the great Apostle writes to the Ephesians:

“...we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each

individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Eph 4:15-16)

Three brief points for us today:

First of all, if you are a Christian **you are a part of the body of Christ mystically.**

You are not saved apart from that body because you are not saved apart from Christ your Head.

This is simply a fact.

To be a believer and to be separate from Him and His body, is impossible.

We don't believe, become Christians, and then somewhere later, we become part of Christ's mystical body.

Our questions then should not be, “Is Jesus my Head?” but “What is it to have Jesus as my head?” What is this connection I now have with Christ Jesus.

There are two sides then to Lord Jesus being your Head.

The first is the vital connection, and the second is the authority connection.

The vital connection is obvious. As your body does not live or even survive without your head, so Jesus is your very life!

Everything flows from Him – grace, the Spirit, power to believe, love, goodness, vitality; you name whatever you have in Christ, and I will show you that it came from Christ.

So that means we are forbidden to look to any other as our head in this way. And rather, we are to live and walk by faith, receiving him every day as our very life, eternal life!

We do not contribute anything to Him; not our wits, or righteousness, or powers, or gifts. All flow down to us from this mountain peak, Jesus!

What an awesome and wonderful life this is then! Animated and supported by Christ every step of the way! And He who is at work in you, by the Spirit, is your guarantee not only for this life, but the life that is to come! Christ in you – the hope of glory!

Do you not know that Christ will be your head, your life, for eternity?

His vital union with you is made up of the Holy Spirit – His Spirit – who has graciously and in an almighty way, recreated you and holds you in Christ. And on your side, faith is exercised; until at last you see His face, and are made perfect!

Now, as rich, bountiful, and beautiful as that is, it does not exhaust the meaning of the Headship of Christ.

For a head also means authority, the right to lead, and to be obeyed.

Paul commanded us to not be inflated with a fleshly mind, but hold fast to Jesus the head. And again: “Wives, be **subject** to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is **subject** to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:22-24)

The presence and grace of Christ in and to you, owns and molds you to Himself. This is why full and true grace does not lead to license and sin.

His love to you, inspires love to Him; and that love which unites with Him, leads to conformity to Him, loves His authority in your life, and draws you closer in His ways.

We still want to sin. It is in our flesh. But we want to not sin. We want to show love to this great Redeemer who loved us so much. We love to have him be our boss, our master, our number one. No other place will do. We love his right and authority who paid such a price for me!

So we cannot pick and choose between his being our Savior, and His being our Lord. They are a package deal – and the sooner we grasp this, the better place will we be.

How profound a thought – Jesus has taken full authority over you. You are slave, a servant – an extension of Him as His body!

You have no right to be anything other than a child of God!

I ask you – do you have the right to sin? Ever?

All that you are is new, and His, and you love it to be so, right?

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
(Gal 2:20)

To live by Christ and to live for Christ are one, inseparable. The one leads to the other. The other is the fruit of the one.

Now the next two points are simple but profound.

This fact of **having Jesus as your head is true for every other Christian** as it is for you.

This is not a special benefit to some. This is what each believer has in fullness.

What a difference this makes in how we treat each other. And this has an effect on us – again, to humble us, and not think so highly of ourselves. Putting others first.

WE should realize that we are not alone but a member of a great family.

This family, this church stretches to every corner of the earth, and even into heaven.

The Lord's body is found in the past.

Do you not feel that as you read of the lives of believers in the OT, that they are brothers and sisters to you? You can reach out and shake the hand of old Abraham, of the lawgiver Moses and Captain Joshua, and David the sweet Psalmist, and Jonathan his best friend.

You find this the same in the NT, with Peter and Paul and John.

There is not a place in history where we find fellow confessors of the Lord we love and the truth we believe!

And you find this presently. Wherever you meet a Christian, you meet a brother on his way to heaven, a sister walking to Zion.

This is the mystical communion of the saints – a oneness with them, a solidarity, regardless of their background, culture, or skin color.

We have all come out of the same house of bondage, all through the same Red Sea of conversion, all are pilgrims in the wilderness, and all of us have a place in a heavenly Canaan.

Indeed, we count those in heaven right now as part of Christ's one body! There are not two churches – one in heaven and one on earth. "There is One Body and One Spirit" says Paul in Ephesians 4:4.

We are the church militant, they are the church triumphant.

At first there was only one triumphant member of the church in heaven. Abel was alone.

And then the number of saved in heaven grew larger and larger over the number of saved on earth. But with the population explosion, the number of saved on earth might be approaching the number of the saved in heaven.

But here is the lesson – the Lord is saving all of us. None who are chosen, none who are called, none who are saved, will ever be lost. And the Lord is gathering his flock to himself. You are a part of that. Think well of others who are a part of that!

Now this leads to our last point: we **members are connected to one another**. Actually, more than that. We are members of one another is what Paul says.

You who have a relationship with Christ as your head, have a relationship, a mystical connection, with every other believer.

And you have a special relationship with those close to you in your local church.

And as we will see, we have different gifts and functions to build up and equip one another, as part of a healthy body.

Consider as we close your relationship to your fellow Christian.

As we alluded to already, you are fellow-members, going to the same place, having come out of the same dark night of sin, and are linked. God is not saving us in segments. There are not Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, CMA, Charismatic, Roman Catholic neighborhoods in heaven. Loving the church cannot mean loving *exclusively* your local church, or your denomination as the Only Perfect Church (OPC).

It is wrong to refuse admission to Christ's known people as it is to admit his known enemies.

Second, as you have Christ as your head, they deserve your esteem, honor and respect. They have all that you have been given by a wonderful and generous Father. They are God's handiwork, God's prize and treasure. See them as Christ sees them. Love them as Christ loves them. Serve them as Christ serves them. Christ is in them!

FF Bruce said no member of the body is compared to the head; the head is unique. And yet as we serve one another, we serve the Lord Christ!

Third, as our bodies have members all of which are important to us, but are all not the same; so we are members with one another and an interdependent body. Christ ministers to us through us. His Spirit blesses the means employed by the hands of others. The church is at once living organic body as well as a necessary organized body. We

are passive and receptive, receiving Christ; and we are active, serving and reaching outward to one another and the world.

This is the visible church, the local church. Christians have an assembly that they must not forsake. They have a tie with God's family that includes all the ins and outs of young and old, sheep and lambs, fathers and newborns. The church has elders and deacons who are committed to us and we to them. They are not be kings and lords to us, but have a brotherly authority under Christ and His Word. And we are to welcome them into our lives.

When we think of what the church is commanded to be, and expected to do, we recognize how church membership, union with the church, is commanded and necessary. Consider the commands in the NT to how we are to serve one another. This is the One Another list.

The One Another List

Love one another (John 15:12), don't pass judgment on one another (Rom. 5:8), be members of one another (Rom. 12:5), be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10), honor one another (Rom. 12:10), live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16), build up one another (Rom. 14:19), be like minded toward one another (Rom. 15:5), accept one another (Rom. 15:7), care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25), serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13), don't spitefully hurt one another (Gal. 5:15), don't provoke envy in one another (Gal. 5:26), bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), don't lie to one another (Col. 3:9), bear with one another (Col. 3:13), abound in love to one another (1 Thes. 3:12), comfort one another (1 Thes. 4:18), don't hate one another (Tit. 3:3), encourage one another

(Heb. 3:13), stir up one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24), don't slander one another (Jms. 4:11), don't bear grudges against one another (Jms. 5:9), confess your sins to one another (Jms. 5:16), pray for one another (Jms. 5:9), greet one another (1 Pet. 5:14), and have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7).

How can we pursue a quarter of these things without the aid of the whole body of Christ around us? To say that we don't need church membership to pursue our high calling in Christ, is like saying a newborn doesn't really need a family to survive in the world. Or husbands and wives really don't need marriage and promises in their relationships.

The world may think that way; and it leads to great divisions, heartaches and immaturity. Let us think otherwise. Live up to being a vital part of Christ's body. Fulfill your calling. Only you can do what you are called and equipped to do. No one else!