

THE BODY OF CHRIST

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE TWO: THE EXPRESSION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

In this message we will consider what the expression of the Body of Christ is. We realize that the Body of Christ is something universal, and something of God's own life. Everyone who has ever believed and been regenerated has his or her place in this glorious Body. Therefore, it may seem that the Body is something almost impossible to apprehend, for it too great a matter. Yet as we know Christ, we are given to know His Body, and the more we know Christ, the more we are able to know His Body. As we apprehend Christ in all His dimensions, we are granted a glimpse of His Body, and once we see the church as the Body of Christ, it becomes the controlling element of our lives.

Since the Body of Christ involves us as well as Christ, the church life often plays host to human failure and weakness. For instance, if things seem dead, some may blame the elders, and so on. The Lord, however, would say, "The real issue is whether or not you are laying hold on Me! Don't blame anyone else! Am I your reality, your sufficiency, your total satisfaction and enjoyment, your strength, your hope, your future, and your living?" When we have only Christ, we will begin to see the Body as the marvelous entity it is.

Young people like challenges. There are some new efforts being carried mainly by young people among us to raise up churches. If in their labor they are merely aiming at increase or at being unique, that would indicate they do not see the Body. If they are trying to distance themselves from the "old" church life that has produced and supported them, that would be very foolish, for the saints they seek to distance themselves from are the saints who have raised them up, who finance them, and who have done what

they can to encourage them. If they would feel, “you older ones are a liability to what we are trying to achieve,” that would be terrible, yet we who are older must also be careful not to overly criticize the younger ones, for then no one would be seeing the Body! The Body is marvelous. It is Christ in the saints. The younger ones would be wise to bring their new contacts to see where they have come from. They should introduce their new ones to the established saints and say, “These saints are our source. They may not seem very impressive, but they were able to raise us up!”

I know of a story of a young man in China whose parents were poor farmers, yet managed to send him to university. His father even took multiple jobs just so his son would not have to do anything but study. The son once asked his father to deliver something to him, and when the other students saw the uneducated farmer, they asked who he was. The young man was embarrassed, so he said, “O, he is just a family servant.” How sad and how foolish. If he had instead said, “Let me tell you who he is! He is my father, who has sacrificed so much for my growth to provide me with this opportunity!” Wouldn’t his fellow-students have appreciated his father and honored such a man? The entire university should have shown their appreciation, saying, “You are a great father, for you had such a high view for your son, and in spite of great obstacles, you have succeeded in carrying it out. We would like to honor you.” The younger serving ones in these places should help their new ones appreciate where they have come from. The older saints may not seem that impressive to you, but your ability to preach the gospel and raise others up is has much to do with them! Therefore, honor them as your source.

ONE BODY EXPRESSED IN MANY LOCALITIES

Let us now speak further about this marvelous Body of Christ, the church! If you are saved, you are a part of it! You are joined with the Body organically and because of this you are one with all others who are also in this Body. What form does the expression of Christ's Body take? It takes the form of local churches!

Every local church is an expression of the one Body of Christ. Those in a local church may feel they are just common people, but the Lord has raised them up to be His testimony! Paul said to the Corinthians, "there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, or not many high-born among you" (1 Cor. 1:26). We may not feel we are so much, and yet we are the expression of this universal, organic, unique Body of Christ! We, the churches, are His local expressions! Every local church is the expression of the Body of Christ in that locality. Paul declared to the saints in Corinth, "Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Cor. 12: 27). This does not mean that each local church is a Body of Christ, but each is the Body! The same Body is expressed in each locality. It is not that each church can call itself a local Body of Christ, but instead that each local church is the local expression of Christ's unique Body. The Body of Christ is the church in Dayton, the Body of Christ is the church in Columbus, the Body of Christ is the church in Cambridge...but does that mean that because He has a church in these three towns, Christ has three bodies? By no means! He does not have three bodies in these three towns, but rather three local expressions of His one Body. Even if there were thousands of local churches, there would only be one Body, yet with thousands of local expressions.

EACH CHURCH IS EQUALLY PRECIOUS

We must also see that each local expression of the Body is just as precious as every other local expression of the Body. It would be ridiculous to think that the Body in one locality is better than the Body in another. Anyone who thinks such a thing has not seen that each local church is an expression of the some one unique Body of Christ.

For the sake of analogy, let us consider a certain family. The parents live in Columbus, and the son lives in Cleveland. Therefore this family has two expressions, one in Cleveland, and one in Columbus. When I am in Cleveland, I can visit the son, and here in Columbus, I can see his parents. This family thus has two expressions: one in Cleveland and one in Columbus. Does their being in two locations mean that there are two families? Not at all; they remain members of the same family, yet that one family is expressed in two localities. This analogy is imperfect, for, divinely speaking, the Body of Christ is much more than this. In a good sense, the church in Cleveland IS the church in Columbus, and the church in Columbus IS the church in Cambridge, for they all are identically the Body of Christ. They all are of the same Christ, they all are with the same Christ, and they all are expressing, testifying and declaring the same Christ. Even if someone sought to “escape” from one locality to another, he would find they all are expressions of the same Lord.

MINISTERED TO BY THE LORD’S SLAVES

How are the local churches able to go forward? This is very practical. The growth of the Body in the localities is made possible by means of the labor of the Lord’s servants. Therefore, if any locality declares it is for Christ and yet denies the servants of the Lord, the Lord will not be able to see as much of His increase there. (And, if anyone who has been meeting as the church takes the stand that they are for some headquarters and no one else, they are no longer standing as the church.) A local church must always be open to receive help from the servants of

the Lord. A certain brother has begun to visit a certain locality because the Lord told him to do this. If that locality refused him as the servant the Lord was sending to them, would the saints there be able to grow as the Lord desired?

They Have Received a Stewardship for the Local Churches

In position, the servants of the Lord are considered the Lord's prisoners and the Lord's slaves (Eph. 3:1; Rom. 1:1). Yet as His slaves and prisoners, they have received a stewardship for a local church (Eph. 3:2). As Paul said, on the one hand we can say, "Am I nor free?" (1 Cor. 9:1). That is when I think, "I would like to take a vacation." There is a place I have read about that I have always wanted to visit, but the Lord tells me, "Vacation granted. Go there and preach the gospel!" Why? Because I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Those who serve the Lord should realize they have no future and can hope in nothing other than the Lord Himself. Everyone who serves the Lord is His heavenly prisoner! You will not find them in the local jail, but in the heavenly one!

Every prisoner of the Lord has received a stewardship for a local church. If we think the stewardship from the Lord is to get people saved for salvation alone, or to do some other work, we are wrong. Those the serving ones gain must be for the local church, for our stewardship is to raise up His local testimonies. We may feel, "Hallelujah! I have gotten twenty-five people for the Lord!" Yet the Lord would ask, "Have you brought them into the church life?" He is happy when we bring people to salvation, but the stewardship He has committed to us has the local churches in view. Paul preached the gospel and raised people up, laboring day and night, so that each local church might be a healthy testimony of the Lord. Once we have this in view, all our freedom is gone. Since this is the case, we may feel like quitting, but we are the Lord's prisoners, and do not have such an option. As the Lord's servants, His prisoners, we have not received a stewardship for a young people's work or a particular hall; we

have received a stewardship for a local church. In our labor, we must be able to strongly tell the Lord, “I am not here to carry out a work; I am here for Your blessing. Therefore, I desire to be Your prisoner, and to carry out this stewardship.”

I hope you young serving ones would take this word to heart. The elders in your locality have the full right to commission you to produce a proposal for the church in your locality, and they have the full right to rip it up and tell you to do it again. Why? Because you are the Lord’s prisoners, serving that locality. If you are forced to gather to fast and pray until the Lord makes this stewardship real to you, how marvelous that would be, and how blessed would that local church become! Who are the servants that cause the church life to become a reality? They are the prisoners of Christ, those who have received a stewardship for that local church.

These Stewards Serve the Churches as the Mystery of Christ

The content of this stewardship is the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:3). In other words, as I exercise my stewardship before the Lord, I dispense Christ in the church life by watching the saints and attending to their needs. A good waiter or waitress is attentive to those whom they serve. The local church is like a restaurant, and all the saints are those we are serving. The saints are just like those reading the menu, with the riches of Christ as the items. When the saints are ready, the elder or serving one should immediately appear, inquiring of them what it is they desire, and then insure that that particular “dish” is properly prepared and presented so that the saints are fully satisfied. We must learn to serve the saints according to their need, and according to all the items of the riches of Christ. Every local church is a dining hall, selling only one kind of food - Christ! Yes, Christ may be served in so many ways, yet it is always Christ we serve.

Some of us may be able to receive Christ however He is “dished up,” yet not all are so easy to accommodate! For instance, I would be satisfied with only a baked potato if that was all the restaurant offered, but a potato can be served in many ways, and people sometimes have a taste for it fried, boiled, or mashed, as well as baked. We should not tell everyone in the church life, “Since the ‘flow’ is currently french fries, we cannot and will not serve hash browns”! A good steward knows how to dispense the mystery of Christ in many ways so that a healthy church life might be produced. Paul could say, “I am a heavenly steward, serving the churches this marvelous Christ in so many ways according to all His riches, so that all those in the church life may grow and be satisfied.” The mystery of Christ is the church, but when we speak of the church, we always must speak of Christ, for whatever aspect you speak of, the church has no way to be separate from Christ. This is certainly seen in Paul’s writings.

They are Upheld by the Heavenly Power that Raised and Enthroned Christ

In labor, the ministers of Christ are upheld by the operation of His power as they announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel (Eph. 3:7-8). Some may love Christ and want to speak about Him, but they are not able to say much, for they do not yet possess much of His riches. For instance, a young saint may not be able to tell a friend much in detail about Christ’s resurrection, or about the various aspects of the Lord’s cleansing blood, or how the Lord’s life operates within a person as it spreads into the spirit, soul, and body. That young saint may know some terms, but they are not backed up with revelation or experience. We need to go on in the power of Christ’s resurrection to pursue Christ, so that we may gain more of His riches, and speak them out to others!

They Speak Forth Christ's Riches

The riches of Christ are in resurrection and heavenly. Therefore to speak forth the riches of Christ requires that they be spoken forth in the power of Christ's resurrection. I only have one secret after all these years, and that is whenever I attempt to speak forth Christ, I do everything in my power that nothing comes between me and the resurrecting, ascending, and enthroning power as the enabling strength. My secret is not that I can do it, but "O what a power that is operating in us!" Even though something may conspire to drag me down or drag the saints in the church life down, I announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel so that the saints may be strengthened in this power, as I myself am participating in it. And how do I know when others are being strengthened with this power? Because they are strengthened through the Spirit into the inner man!

Their Operation Causes the Inner Man to be Strengthened

We have an outer man and we have an inner man. The outer man is decaying day after day, while the inner man is daily becoming fresher, more mature, and more solid. I may not be able to speak with the natural power of a younger man, yet my inner man within is much more prevailing than it was thirty years ago. I had a stronger outer man then, but now I have a stronger inner man. Who are the able ministers in the church life? They are those who are able to strengthen us into our inner man! After you read the Word with them or fellowship with them or hear them speak, your inner man is strengthened. All the local churches need such servants of the Lord. They are the prisoners of Christ, who possess a stewardship to minister the mystery of Christ by announcing the riches of Christ in power, causing our inner man to be strengthened and more established. Do you like this? These are the kind of laborers needed within and among the churches. Sometimes saints tell me I ministered well, but I tell them they supported me well, for after I ministered, I also was strengthened into my inner man!

KEEPING THE ONENESS

In the local church life, all the saints are diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). What follows does not necessarily match our logic, for instead of “one Spirit... one Lord... one God,” Paul wrote first of all “there is one Body...” (Eph. 4:4). In other words, all the following items in our experience come about upon the basis of having this one Body, therefore we diligently need to keep the Spirit of oneness in the uniting bond of peace (Eph. 4:3)!

Sometimes we are asked, “Since you all believe in the same Christ, how come Christians meet in so many denominations?” The situation among believers is indeed abnormal, but we still have to recognize that in reality there is only one Body. Division is wrong, but we should not use it as an opportunity to say only we are right, and thus unconsciously separate ourselves from other believers. As long as we are in Columbus, we are part of the church in Columbus, as are all the other believers in this city. Even those who have traveled here for this conference are at this moment a part of the church in Columbus! We are simply those in Columbus who bear the testimony of this one Body. Wherever we are, we bear this testimony of the Lord.

Oneness is Not Uniformity

What attracts us to the Body? It is not uniformity. It is oneness. It cannot be denied that there is an attraction to the power of uniformity, as when soldiers march line by line, shoulder to shoulder. That has its power, but the Body is not a matter of uniformity. Even within a local church, the operation of the Spirit within each saint does not manifest itself in the same manner. One brother may be very sober, and another may be very whimsical, but you can see Christ expressed in both saints. You see Christ expressed in His one Body not in uniformity, but in the oneness of all the very different saints.

Oneness is Executed by the One Spirit, by Means of Which we Also Have One Hope

In the Body, only Christ is expressed, and this expression is carried out by the Spirit, for the church as the Body of Christ is carried out by the Spirit. The operation of the Spirit is what carries the church life. By means of the Spirit, we have one hope and one stand (Eph. 4:4). We stand as believers, living to the Lord, because we have a hope. Our daily life is regulated by this hope of our calling. If you know you are expecting to receive an award for something, you prepare for that day. You do not arrive at that ceremony sloppily dressed or carelessly groomed, for you know such a thing does not match the “calling” of that award. Therefore, your “calling” causes you to live a certain way.

When we really see the Body, we see that it is the expression of Christ, and we spontaneously desire that the Spirit would be in control of all things within the church life. We desire to see that the Spirit would execute all things; that it would lead, govern, operate, encourage, and that all the saints would see their calling, for when we see our calling, we take care of our daily life. We see that the Lord has called us to be overcomers to bear His testimony.

One Lord

There is one Body with one Spirit and with one hope of our calling, and there is one Lord (Eph. 4:5a). Of course, without the Lord there would be no church, for the church was created by the Lord with Himself as the substance. For four thousand years, God waited for something of His substance to be His habitation. He gained Abraham, and then the nation of Israel, with the tabernacle and temple, but this was all still insufficient. He needed something heavenly and spiritual that would match Him as His abode. Therefore He created the church with Himself as the substance for His habitation.

No matter how nice your dog's house is, you would not abide in his doghouse, for it would not match you. It was designed for your dog, not you. The Lord created the church to be His Body with Himself as the substance so that He might be truly satisfied.

One Faith, One Baptism

In the Body life, there is also the wonderful matters of one faith and one baptism (Eph. 4:5b). In this one faith, all the positive things were germinated. I can preach the gospel, love other believers, and pursue all the spiritual things regarding Christ because of the operation of this one faith. Furthermore, in this one baptism all the negative things are terminated! I was baptized as a young man with many others after receiving the Lord at a gospel meeting. I did not know much about baptism; only that it was something you should do if you wanted to follow Jesus. So I passed through the assembly line of quick baptisms with hundreds of others, hoping someone would at least pray over me, but no one did. Over the years, however, I have come to appreciate how much was buried in that water. My sin, the things I liked, the things I disliked, things that could occupy and possess me and take me away from Christ...all were terminated in that water. In the one faith we possess in this Body all the positive things were germinated, and in the one baptism all the negative things were terminated. Praise the Lord for this.

One God and Father of All

In this one Body, eventually we are brought to the full experience of this one God being the Father who is over all, through all, and abiding in us all (Eph. 4:6), telling us, "You are My Body!" Hallelujah!

In light of all this, we have to say "Lord Jesus, I love the local churches." Where is it possible to practically endeavor to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace? The local churches. Sometimes we may argue over doctrines, but

remember that the oneness Paul told the saints to endeavor to keep in Ephesians 4 is the same oneness the Philippians were striving together after (Phil. 1:27). This pursuing has God's eternal purpose and the enlargement of the Body of Christ in view. Beside this there is nothing else we should be together struggling after. Indeed, having any other "oneness" in view will result in division! If I insist that all the brothers with beards should keep the oneness by removing them, then that would produce problems. I may have reasons to advise a brother to shave, but I cannot insist upon it. Whenever we make such issues, we endanger the oneness. As long as we share the same one Spirit, Lord, faith, and hope, we should be satisfied. Don't make issues in the church life. Talking about who is "the apostle" we must follow, or insisting upon only certain publications...all such things only produce division. Remember, we are diligently endeavoring to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace, because we are in one Body with one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is above us all, through us all, and inside us all. Therefore, try not to make issues over how doctrinally flawed or impractical things appear to be in the church in your locality. As long as no divisive issues are introduced, we are in this marvelous oneness!

**In the One New Man,
the Enmity has been Taken Away**

In the church life, there are no ethnic groups, no age groups and no social classes. To ask how someone how they feel about a certain group of people in the church life is to ask a devilish question. When the Lord created the new man, He slew all the enmity. In this Body the Lord has created there is a peace, with a marvelous oneness.

THE CHURCHES ARE BUILT UP BY MEANS OF THE GIFTS

Every local church needs to grow and be built up in love through the operation of some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers. The word Paul used was “some”. “Some” is more than one. Some have asked, “Now that Brother Lee is gone, who is the apostle?” My response to this funny question is that even when Brother Lee was alive, there were others who were also laboring as apostles. He may have been the greatest among them, but there were then some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some shepherds and teachers, and there still are. This word some takes a lot of pressure off those who are struggling to find their operation in the church life. For instance, if someone asks you whether you are a prophet, you may say, “Well, there are some!” You do not have to answer yes or no. If you function as an apostle, you do not have to feel awkward to say so, for there are some! There is no need to abase yourself. In God’s government, He has arranged what He has arranged. If someone asks whether you are this or that, whether you truly are or not, there are *some*. On the one hand, no one can say, “I am *the* apostle,” and on the other hand, no one can say, “I do not believe I will ever be an apostle.” It is very normal that the Lord should raise up some, but remember, it is a matter of operation and function, not of status!

The Gifts Are Given to Perfect the Saints Unto the Work of Ministry

What do these “gifts,” or gifted members, do? They operate to perfect the saints unto the work of ministry. Whether you are one kind of gift or another, you must perfect the saints! Some of you have had a very successful labor on a campus. My question to you is, Do those you have gained really know the church? Do they realize they should receive the help of the servants of the Lord? To perfect others unto the work of ministry is not an easy matter. It is common to see a Christian work where many are

being saved, yet few are being perfected. The new ones may love the Lord, faithfully come to meetings, and even “function,” but do they see the Body of Christ? Do they see the local church? Do they see their need to be perfected? Do they see God’s economy? Do they see that their lives must be for Christ and the church? If not, then you know they have not yet been perfected.

Remember this: the perfecting work of the gifted ones is unto the work of ministry. This ministry is the New Testament ministry, which is simply the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. If those you are caring for are not perfected unto the work of the Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry, then your labor is in vain. Some of you who labor have the thought, “Titus is having a conference, but we should not bring our new ones.” I heard one brother even say, regarding the nearby churches, “We cannot bring our new ones back to the oldness!” I was shocked. Brothers, it is your job to bring your spiritual children into the family life. You must perfect them to realize that we are not here to merely have a good time or to enjoy singing a certain kind of song. We must bring them to realize that their life, their operation, must be one with the very ministry that Jesus Christ is carrying out upon the earth!

Like the word “man,” the word “ministry” is an inclusive word. It is one unique ministry, yet includes many, many ministers, whose labor is to perfect others unto the work of ministry, until we all arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, with all saints “truthing it” in love. With the help of the perfecting gifts, we must learn to hold to reality in love, that we may grow up into Him in all things (Eph. 4:15). How do you know you have grown? And how do you know the church where you are has grown? It is when you have further come to know HIM in your personal life and church life, it is not that you have gained more of someone’s teaching, or more Bible knowledge. Yes, there is teaching and Bible knowledge, but we are not a Bible study church or a church of someone’s ministry, we are here to bear the testimony of the Lord Jesus in localities as the expression of His Body in oneness, and we are able to carry this out by growing up into Him.

The Members are both Joints and Parts

The supply of Christ comes through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in measure of each one part (Eph. 4:16). The Bible portrays that as members, in every situation in the church life we are either a joint or a part.

I never understood this so well until the day I had to go see a chiropractor due to a problem with my shoulder. He told me the problem was with the joint, and after some painful adjustments, the function of my shoulder became normal again. Then I again had problems, and at that point he told me that I needed to strengthen the muscles that held my shoulder joint in place by doing exercises. It was then I saw the difference between the joints and the parts, and how they needed each other. In a certain situation you may not be the one functioning as the joint, but if you do not also do your “part,” neither will the joint be able to function well to carry out his portion. By the Lord’s mercy I can say I am here functioning as a joint. But there are many necessary parts which establish my operation. The joints and parts work together for the building up of the Body of Christ. Through this kind of operation, the Body is joined together and knit together through the operation of the joints and each one part. How good is such a church life! This is the expression of the Body of Christ, and this is the local church.

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