

Written By Rev.
John Marinelli

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P. O. Box 831413 Ocala, FL. 34483**

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Introduction

In Christian theology, the term **Body of Christ** has two separate connotations:

1. It may refer to Jesus' statement about the Eucharist at the Last Supper that "This is my body" in **Luke 22:19-20**, or
2. The explicit usage of the term by the Apostle Paul in **I Corinthians** to refer to the Christian Church.

Bruce N. Fisk, of the Quick Search Reference Library, further explains...

The Church and the Death of Jesus significantly, in both 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, the metaphorical body of Christ is tied tightly to the physical body of Jesus in His death on the cross. Jesus' body is represented by the bread of the Eucharist (**1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:29**) so that those who share the single loaf of communion constitute a single body; their actions demonstrate both corporate inclusion into Christ and their membership in the Christian community that Christ's death brought into existence.

But it is connection to Christ and his death that establishes connection to his people. In Ephesians, the bodily death of Jesus on the cross is what abolishes the enmity between Jew and Gentile (**Ephesians 2:13-15**), and replaces it with

reconciliation and unity (**Ephesians 2:16**)... and Christ's role as Savior of the body (5:23) is explained in terms of his sacrificial death on behalf of the church (5:25; cf. 5:2).

In Colossians, the relationship between the physical death of Christ and the church as the body of Christ is less explicit, but foundational nonetheless (1:18-24; 2:12-3:4). The redemptive work of Christ, accomplished bodily on the cross, established unity among God's people. To call those people the body of Christ was to highlight dramatically the event and the person responsible for their very life and final destiny.

The body metaphor for the people of God is a powerful image that speaks of the new historical reality brought about in Christ. It surfaces in only four New Testament epistles, but in a bewildering array of associations.

The Body of Christ As The New Testament Church

C. Marvin Pate, **Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology**

The New Testament word for "church" is *ekklesia* [ejkklhsiva], which means "the called out ones." In classical Greek, the term was used almost exclusively for political gatherings. In particular, in Athens the word signified the assembling of the citizens for the purpose of conducting the affairs of the polis. Moreover, *ekklesia* [ejkklhsiva] referred only to the actual meeting, not to the citizens themselves. When the people were not assembled, they were not considered to be the *ekklesia* [ejkklhsiva]. The New Testament records three instances of this secular usage of the term (**Acts 19:32 Acts 19:39 Acts 19:41**).

The most important background of the term *ekklesia* [ejkklhsiva] is the Septuagint, which uses the word in a religious sense about *one hundred* times, almost always as a translation of the Hebrew word *qahal* [l;h'q].

When we come to the New Testament, we discover that *ekklesia* [ejkklhsiva] is used of the community of God's people some *109 times* (out of *114 occurrences* of the term). Although the word only occurs in two Gospel passages (**Matt 16:18; 18:17**), it is of special importance in Acts (*23 times*) and the Pauline writings (*46 times*). It is found *twenty times* in Revelation and only in isolated instances in James and Hebrews. We may

approach the subject of the biblical teaching on the church by drawing three general conclusions from the data so far.

First, predominantly ekklesia [ejkklhsiva] (both in the singular and plural) applies to a local assembly of those who profess faith in and allegiance to Christ.

Second, ekklesia [ejkklhsiva] designates the universal church (Acts 8:3 ; 9:31 ; 1 Cor 12:28 ; 15:9 ; especially in the later Pauline letters, Eph 1:22-23 ; Col 1:18).

Third, the ekklesia [ejkklhsiva] is God's congregation (1 Cor 1:2 ; 2 Cor 1:1 ; etc.).

The Nature of The Church

The nature of the church is too broad to be exhausted in the meaning of the one word, ekklesia [ejkklhsiva]. To capture its significance, the New Testament authors utilize a rich array of metaphorical descriptions. Nevertheless, there are those metaphors that seem to dominate the biblical picture of the church, five of which call for comment: ***The People of God, The Kingdom of God, The Temple of God, The Bride of Christ, And The Body of Christ.***

The People of God.... Essentially, the concept of the people of God can be summed up in the covenantal phrase: "I will be their God and they will be my people" (see Exod 6:6-7 ; 19:5 ; Lev 26:9-14 ; Jer 7:23 ; 30:22 ; 32:37-40 ; Ezek 11:19-20 ; 36:22-28 ; Acts 15:14 ; 2 Cor 6:16 ; Heb 8:10-12 ; Rev 21:3 ; etc.).

Thus, the people of God are those in both the Old and New Testament eras who responded to God by faith, and whose spiritual origin rests exclusively in God's grace.

To speak of the one people of God transcending the eras of the Old and New Testaments necessarily raises the question of the relationship between the church and Israel.

Modern theologies prefer not to polarize the matter into an either/or issue. Rather, they talk about the church and Israel in terms of there being both continuity and discontinuity between them.

Continuity Between The Church And Israel

Two ideas establish the fact that the church and Israel are portrayed in the Bible as being in a continuous relationship.

First, the church was present in some sense in Israel in the Old Testament. Acts 7:38 makes this connection explicit when, alluding to Deuteronomy 9:10, it speaks of the church (ekklesia [ejkkhlsiva]) in the wilderness. The same idea is probably to be inferred from the intimate association noted earlier existing between the words ekklesia [ejkkhlsiva] and qahal [l;h'q], especially when the latter is qualified by the phrase, "of God."

Furthermore, if the church is viewed in some New Testament passages as preexistent, then one finds therein the prototype for the creation of Israel (see Exod 25:40 ; Acts 7:44 ; Gal 4:26 ; Heb 12:22 ; Rev 21:11 ; cf. Eph 1:3-14 ; etc.).

Second, Israel in some sense is present in the church in the New Testament. The many names for Israel applied to the church establish that fact. Some of those are:

1. "Israel" (Gal 6:15-16 ; Eph 2:12 ; Heb 8:8-10 ; Rev 2:14 ; etc.); "a chosen people" (1 Pe 2:9);
2. "the true circumcision" (Rom 2:28-29 ; Php 3:3 ; Col 2:11 ; etc.);
3. "Abraham's seed" (Rom 4:16 ; Gal 3:29);
4. "the remnant"(Rom 9:27 ; 11:5-7);
5. "the elect" (Rom 11:28 ; Eph 1:4);
6. "the flock" (Acts 20:28 ; Heb 13:20 ; 1 Peter 5:2);
7. "priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9 ; Rev 1:6 ; 5:10).

Discontinuity Between The Church And Israel

The church, however, is not coterminous with Israel; discontinuity also characterizes the relationship. The church, according to the New Testament, is the eschatological Israel incorporated in Jesus, the Messiah and, as such, is a progression beyond historical Israel (1 Cor 10:11 ; 2 Cor 5:14-21 ; etc.).

What was promised to Israel has now been fulfilled in the church, in Christ, especially the Spirit and the new covenant (cf. Ezek 36:25-27 ; Joel 2:28-29 ; with Acts 2 ; 2 Cor 3 ; Rom. 8 ; etc.).

However, a caveat must be issued at this point. Although the church is a progression beyond Israel, it is not the permanent replacement of Israel (see Rom. 9-11, esp. Rom 11:25-27).

2. The Kingdom of God.... Many scholars in this century have maintained that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, producing an overlapping of the two ages. The kingdom has "already" dawned, but is "not yet" complete.

The first aspect pertains to Jesus' first coming and the second aspect relates to his second coming. *In other words*, the age to come has broken into this age and now the two exist simultaneously. This background is crucial in ascertaining the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God, because the church also exists in the tension that results from the overlapping of the two ages. Accordingly, one may define the church as the proleptic appearance of the kingdom. Two ideas flow from this definition:

- (1) the church is related to the kingdom of God;
- (2) but the church is not equal to the kingdom of God.

The Church And The Kingdom of God Are Related

The historical Jesus did not found or organize the church. Not until after his resurrection does the New Testament speak with regularity about the church. However, there are adumbrations of the church in the teaching and ministry of Jesus, in both general and specific ways. In general, Jesus anticipated the later official formation of the church in that he gathered to himself twelve disciples, who constituted the beginnings of eschatological Israel, in effect, the remnant.

More specifically, Jesus explicitly referred to the church in two passages: Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:17. In the first passage, Jesus promised that he would build his church despite satanic opposition, thus assuring the ultimate

success of his mission. The notion of the church overcoming the forces of evil coincides with the idea that the kingdom of God will prevail over its enemies, and peaks of the intimate association between church and kingdom.

The second passage relates to the future organization of the church, particularly its method of discipline, not unlike the Jewish synagogue practices of Jesus' day.

The Church And The Kingdom of God Are Not Identified

As intimately related as the church and the kingdom of God are, the New Testament does not equate the two, as is evident in the fact that the early Christians preached the kingdom, not the church (Acts 8:12 ; 19:8 ; 20:25 ; Acts 28:23 Acts 28:31).

The New Testament identifies the church as the people of the kingdom (Rev 5:10 ; etc.), not the kingdom itself. Moreover, the church is the instrument of the kingdom. This is especially clear from Matthew 16:18-19, where the preaching of Peter and the church become the keys to opening up the kingdom of God to all who would enter.

3. The Eschatological Temple of God.... Both the Old Testament and Judaism anticipated the rebuilding of the temple in the future kingdom of God (Ezra 40-48 Hag 2:1-9 ; etc.). Jesus hinted that he was going to build such a construction (Matt 16:18; Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22). Pentecost witnessed to the beginning of the fulfillment of that dream in that when the Spirit inhabited the church, the eschatological temple was formed (Acts 2:16-36).

Other New Testament writers also perceived that the presence of the Spirit in the Christian community constituted the new temple of God (see 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 ; Eph 2:19-22; also Gal 4:21-31; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

However, that the eschatological temple is not yet complete is evident in the preceding passages, especially with their emphasis on the need for the church to grow toward maturity in Christ, which will only be fully accomplished at the parousia (Return of Christ). In the meantime, Christians,

as priests of God, are to perform their sacrificial service to the glory of God (Rom 12:1-2 ; Heb 13:15 ; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

4. The Bride.... The image of marriage is applied to God and Israel in the Old Testament (see Isa 54:5-6 ; 62:5 ; Hosea 2:7 ; etc.). Similar imagery is applied to Christ and the church in the New Testament. Christ, the bridegroom, has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church to be his bride (Eph 5:25-27). Her responsibility during the betrothal period is to be faithful to him (2 Cor 11:2 ; Eph 5:24). At the parousia, the official wedding ceremony will take place and, with it, the eternal union of Christ and his wife will be actualized (Rev 19:7-9 ; 21:1-2).

5. The Body of Christ.... The body of Christ as a metaphor for the church is unique to the Pauline literature and constitutes one of the most significant concepts therein (Rom 12:4-5 ; 1 Cor 12:12-27 ; Eph 4:7-16 ; Col 1:18).

The primary purpose of the metaphor is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of diversity and unity within the church, especially with reference to spiritual gifts. The body of Christ is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), the new humanity of the endtime that has appeared in history. However, Paul's usage of the image, like the metaphor of the new temple, indicates that the church, as the body of Christ, still has a long way to go spiritually. It is "not yet" complete.

The Sacraments of the Church

At the heart of the expression of the church's faith are the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The former symbolizes entrance into the church while the latter provides spiritual sustenance for the church.

Baptism.... Baptism symbolizes the sinner's entrance into the church. Three observations emerge from the biblical treatment of this sacrament.

First, the Old Testament intimated baptism, especially in its association of repentance of sin with ablutions (Num 19:18-22 ; Psalm 51:7 ; Ezek 36:25 ; cf. John 3:5).

Second, the baptism of John anticipated Christian baptism. John administered a baptism of repentance in expectation of the baptism of the Spirit and fire that the Messiah would exercise (Matt 3:11 / Luke 3:16).

Those who accept Jesus as Messiah experience the baptism of fire and judgment.

Third, the early church practiced baptism, in imitation of the Lord Jesus (Matt 3:13-17 / Mark 1:9-11 / Luke 3:21-22 ; see also John 1:32-34 ; Matt 28:19 ; Acts 2:38 ; 8:16 ; Rom 6:3-6 ; 1 Cor 1:13-15 ; Gal 3:27 ; Titus 3:5 ; 1 Peter 3:21 ; etc.).

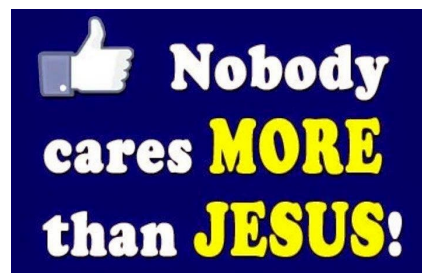
These passages demonstrate some further truths about baptism:

- (1) baptism is intimately related to faith in God;
- (2) baptism identifies the person with the death and resurrection of Jesus;
- (3) baptism incorporates the person into the community of believers.

The Lord's Supper. The other biblical sacrament is the Lord's Supper, variously called "communion" (1 Cor 10:16), "Eucharist" (the prayer of thanks offered before partaking of the elements Matt 26:27 ; 1 Cor 11:24), and the "breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42 ; 20:7). This rite symbolizes Christ's spiritual nourishment of his church as it celebrates the sacred meal. Two basic points emerge from the biblical data concerning the Lord's Supper.

First, it was instituted by Christ (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20 ; 1 Cor 11:23-25).

According to these passages, Jesus celebrated the Passover on the night before his betrayal. That commemorative meal would probably have included the following: **the cup of wine**, calling "blessing"; **the four questions of the child concerning the nature of Passover**; **the second cup, called "deliverance"**; the singing of the first part of the Hallel (Psalm 113-14); the Passover meal; **the third cup, called "redemption"**; the eating of the dessert; **the fourth cup, called the "Elijah cup"**; the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Psalm 115-18).



Jesus introduced two changes into the Passover seder. He equated his body with the bread of affliction and his blood, which was to be shed on the cross, with the cup of redemption.

Second, the early church practiced the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42 Acts 2:46 ; 1 Cor 11:23; etc.), probably weekly, in conjunction with the agape [ajgavph] feast (see 1 Cor 11:18-22 ; cf. Jude 12).

A Twofold Meaning Is Attached To The Lord's Supper By The New Testament Authors

First, it involves participation in Christ's salvation-believers are to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). A couple aspects of this celebration call for comment.

- (1) Historically, the Lord's Supper was a rite commemorating Christ's redemptive death, even as the Passover was a remembrance of God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 12:14; Exodus 13:3 Exodus 13:9; Deut 16:3). In remembering Christ's death, believers actualize its effects in the present.
- (2) Eschatologically, the Lord's Supper anticipates Christ's return (Matt 26:29 ; Mark 14:25 ; Luke 22:16 Luke 22:18 ; 1 Cor 11:26) and, with it, the heavenly messianic banquet of the kingdom of God (Matt 22:2-14 ; Luke 14:24 ; Rev 19:9).

Second, the Lord's Supper involves identification with the body of Christ, the community of faith. Two aspects of this reality are touched upon in the New Testament, one positive, and the other negative.

Positively, the Lord's Supper symbolizes the unity and fellowship of Christians in the one body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17).

Negatively, to fail to recognize the church as the body of Christ by dividing it is to participate in the Lord's Supper unworthily and thereby to incur divine judgment (1 Cor 11:27-33).

The Worship of The Church

The ultimate purpose of the church is to worship God through Christ. The early church certainly recognized this to be its reason for existence (Eph 1:4-6 ; 1 Peter 2:5 1 Peter 2:9 ; Rev 21:1-22:5 ; etc.).

Five aspects of the New Testament church's worship can be delineated: *the meaning of worship; the time and place of worship; the nature of worship; the order of worship; the expressions of worship.*

1. The Meaning of Worship.... Although the Bible nowhere provides a definition of worship, one is left with the general impression therein that to worship God is to ascribe to him the supreme worth that he alone deserves.

2. The Time and Place of Worship... Although many Jewish Christians probably continued to worship God on the Sabbath, the established time for the church's worship came to be Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), because Christ had risen from the dead on that day (Rev 1:10).

With regard to the locale, the early church began its worship in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42), as well as in the synagogues (Acts 22:19 ; cf. John 9:22 ; James 2:2; etc.). At the same time, believers met in homes for worship (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 5:42). When Christianity and Judaism became more and more incompatible, the house-church became the established place of worship (Rom 16:15; Col 4:15; Phil 2; 2 John 10; 3 John 1:1 3 John 1:6; etc.). The use of a specific church building did not occur until the late second century.

3. The Nature of Worship.... The biblical teaching on the worship of the church involves three components, which are rooted in the Trinity.

First, worship is directed toward God; God the Father is the central object of worship, both as creator (Acts 17:28; James 1:17; Rev 4:11; etc.) and redeemer (Eph 1:3; Col 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:3; Rev 5:9-14 ; etc.).

Second, worship is mediated through Christ, the Son (Matt 18:20; Rom 5:2; Eph 1:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:14-5:10; 10:20; etc.).

Third, worship is actualized by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 2:28-29; 8:26-27 ; Eph 2:18; Php 3:3; Jude 20; etc.).

4. The Order of Worship.... Both the language and the order of the early church's worship were rooted in Judaism. With regard to the former, the church utilized Old Testament terms like "high priest" (applied to Jesus, Heb 4:12-16), "priests" (applied to Christians, 1 Peter 2:5-9), "sacrifice" (applied to Christ's death on the cross, Heb 9:23-28 ; 10:11), and "temple" (applied to the church, 1 Cor 3:16 ; 6:19).

With regard to the order of worship, the early church incorporated into its worship the main elements of the synagogue service: praise in prayer (Acts 2:42 Acts 2:47 ; 3:1; 1 Thess. 1:2; 5:17; 1 Tim 2:1-2 ; etc.) and in song (1 Cor 14:26 ; Php 2:6-11 ; Col 1:15-20 ; 1 Tim 3:16 ; Rev 5:9-10 ; etc.); the expounding of the Scripture (Acts 2:42; 6:4; Col 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim 4:13 ; etc.); and almsgiving to the needy (Acts 2:44-45; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9 James 2:15-17; etc.).

5. Expressions of Worship.... The main ingredient of worship in the Bible is sacrifice. David put it well: "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (1 Sam 24:24).

In the New Testament, there are three main expressions connected with the worship of the early church, each of which is based on sacrifice:

1. the sacrifice of one's body to God (Rom 12:1-2 ; cf. Rom 15:16; Php 1:20; 2:17 ; 2 Tim 4:6);
2. the sacrifice of one's possession for God (Matt 6:2 ; Luke 6:38 ; 2 Cor. 8-9 1 Tim 6:10 ; etc.);
3. and the sacrifice of one's praise to God (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Heb 13:16; James 5:13; etc.).

The Service and Organization of the Church

We conclude the topic of the biblical teaching on the church by briefly calling attention to its service and organization. Five observations emerge from the relevant data.

First... the ministry of the church centers on its usage of spiritual gifts (charismata), which are given to believers by God's grace and for his glory, as well as for the good of others (Rom 12:3 ; Eph 4:7-16 ; etc.).

Second... every believer possesses a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:7; etc.).

Third... it is through the diversity of the gifts that the body of Christ matures and is unified (Rom 12:4 ; 1 Cor 12:12-31 ; Eph 4:17-18).

Fourth... although there was organized leadership in the New Testament church (elders, 1 Tim 3:1-7 ; [also called pastors and shepherds, see Acts 20:17 Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; etc. and deacons, 1 Tim 3:8-13), there does not seem to have been a gap between the "clergy" and "laity." Rather, those with the gift of leadership are called to equip all the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:7-16).

Fifth... spiritual gifts are to be exercised in love (1 Cor. 13).

Body Of Christ - The Unit

Excerpts From All About God Article

The Body of Christ, like all bodies, is comprised of many parts. There are limbs, organs, and various members that, when left alone, are useless, but when assembled make up the entire body. **1 Corinthians 12:12-14** describe it like this: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many." This means each Christian is an equal part of the body of Christ!

There is organization to the body of Christ, as described in **Ephesians 1:22-23**, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

1 Corinthians 12:27-28 also says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of

administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." Every Christian possesses a gift and is called to use it in service within the body to build up the body of Christ, to strengthen the body and to carry out its purpose within the world. Each member of the body of Christ is also called to serve the church through his or her natural gifts and abilities. This service is offered out of devotion to Christ for the sacrifice He made on the cross, providing them with eternal life in heaven. The diversity of gifts, each supporting the other, makes the body strong!

Body Of Christ - Personal Application

As a part of the church, what can you do to enhance the body of Christ? The body is a holy entity and is to be respected and treated with complete honor and care. The Bible provides several action principles for building up the body of Christ:

- 1. You are called to promote truth and unity** - Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."
- 2. You are called to service** - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 outlines the importance of using your God-given spiritual gift. Your gift is unique and equally important. It is essential to the body that you use your special gift in service to God.
- 3. You are called to share Jesus** - Romans 1:16 says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." As part of the body of Christ, you are to share your life-changing story with others!
- 4. You are called to worship** - "It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night" (Psalm 92:1-2).
- 5. You are called to love each another** - "1 John 4:11 says, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Are you a contributing member of the body of Christ? Are you actively serving God and sharing Him with others? Are you contributing to peace

and unity within the body? Do you worship regularly? Take a moment to evaluate your life in light of these principles.

The Concept of Body Ministry

I was raised in a church that relied upon the Pastor for everything. He was the minister and I was the one being ministered to. As our congregation grew, so did the professional staff. There was no concept of a body ministry.

Then I started going to another church where the concept of a body ministry was in practice. It was incredible how one member of the body could minister to another without professional involvement.

Body Ministry... is the actions of one church member towards another church member that encouraged, strengthen, built faith, or in some other way ministered to that persons needs. There was no need to wait for a pastor to do all the ministering. The members of the body ministered to each other according to the gifts that operated in them as they saw needs in the church. The pastors, of course, taught the members to equip them for ministry. However, the teachings were knowledge of the scriptures so the ministering members of the body were equipped properly.

Blind Leading The Blind

Excerpts From Paul Tripp Ministries

You only need to take seriously what the Bible says about the presence and power of remaining sin to know the great danger in allowing anyone to live separate from the essential ministry of the body of Christ. How much greater is the danger then, for the person who's charged with leading, guiding, and protecting that body as a representative of Christ?

If Christ is the head of his body, then everything else is just, the body. The most influential pastor or ministry leader is a member of the body of Christ; therefore he needs what the other members of the body can offer. An intentional culture of pastoral separation and isolation is neither biblical nor spiritually healthy.

Let me suggest one passage, which I've written about before, that powerfully reinforces this point. It's **Hebrews 3:12-13**.

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

This passage gives a critical warning and an essential call that together reinforce the presence and power of remaining sin and the need for the daily ministry of the body of Christ.

I don't know if you noticed, but the warning in this passage pictures the progressive steps of the believer's heart hardening. (The greeting, "brothers," tells us this passage is written to believers.) The warning reads like this: "See to it that none of you has an evil---unbelieving---falling away---hardened heart." It's a picture of what sin does if undetected, unexposed, and un-forsaken. (Paul Tripp)

The Apostate Church

It is true that all believers are members of the body of Christ. However, Believing is a process that begins with being, "Born Again". There are a lot of so-called believers that do not identify themselves as being Born Again.

These folks are, in my understanding of scripture, the members of an Apostate church. Listen to what Paul said, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" **II Thessalonians 2:3**

Paul tells us here that before the Anti-Christ can be revealed, many will fall away from true faith. They will have a form of Godliness but will deny the power there of. They will not adhere to sound doctrine and will chase after seducing spirits.

A recent PEW report revealed the following about today's Christian church.

The recently released Pew Research Center Report By Stephen Mattson 05-15-2015 has revealed that Christianity within the United States is on the decline. Here are a few excerpts from his report.



Christians are freaking out and the fear mongering has begun — many seeing it as an apocalyptic sign of the moral downfall of our secular society coinciding with a theological weakening caused by “liberalism.”

Everyone seems to have an explanation of the data, and among Christians, the infighting has already begun, with most denominations rationalizing their growth, decline, or stagnancy by offering the same explanation: We’re theologically sound and remaining faithful to God while everyone else is getting it wrong.

In 1965 — an astounding 93 percent of the United States population identified as Christian. But again, the sixties were hardly representative of a “Christian” nation. The point is that while the percentage of Christians in America was near its highest — the moral state of our society was far from “Christian.”

In many ways, today’s America is more Christian than at any previous moment in its history! Slavery and segregation has been abolished, gender inequality is on the decline, the wage gap has decreased, church communities are more diverse than ever, and people’s rights and opportunities related to education, jobs, and opportunities are better than ever.

Evangelical churches added more than 2 million people to their ranks, up from 59.8 million in 2007 to 62.2 million in 2014. Meanwhile, mainline churches lost 5 million people. “As a result, evangelicals now constitute a clear majority (55%) of all US Protestants,” noted Pew.

In response, about one-third of American adults (35%) self-identified as evangelicals in 2014, nearly the same as in 2007 (34%). Meanwhile, Americans who self-identified as Christians dropped from 78 percent in 2007 to 71 percent in 2014. *(This is still a huge drop from 93% in 1965.)*

The Problem

Today, Christians are more likely to consider themselves “born-again” or evangelical. Half of self-identified Christians described themselves this way in 2014, up from 44 percent in 2007. This includes 72 percent of those in historically black Protestant churches, up from 67 percent in 2007.

More surprisingly, a rising share of adults in other Christian traditions self-identify as born-again or evangelical, including: mainline Protestants (27% in 2014 vs. 25% in 2007), Catholics (22% vs. 16%), Orthodox (18% vs. 16%).

By contrast, 15 percent of adults in evangelical churches do not identify as born-again or evangelical. Neither do 21 percent of those at nondenominational churches, or 10 percent of those at Pentecostal churches.

Some Protestant denominational families are quite divided on this measure, including Methodists (45% born-again or evangelical vs. 51% no), Presbyterians (42% yes vs. 55% no), Lutherans (33% yes vs. 63% no), Adventists (63% yes vs. 29% no), and Restorationists (66 yes vs. 29% no).

Christianity is the most adhered religion in the United States, with 70.6% of polled American adults identifying themselves as Christian in 2014. This is down from 86% in 1990, lower than 78.6% in 2001 and slightly lower than 73% in 2012. About 62% of those polled claim to be members of a church congregation.

It should be noted that some folks that claim Christianity may very well be Born of the Spirit but are not familiar with the term, “Born Again” We do not want to pre-judge any one group. Statistics are just that, a snapshot in time. Data can be misleading and should be looked at as a guideline only.

The United States has the largest Christian population in the world, with nearly 247 million Christians, although other countries have higher percentages of Christians among their populations.

Do you know how many denominations there are in our modern world? According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there were an estimated 34,000 denominations in 2000, rising to an estimated 43,000 in 2012. These numbers have exploded from 1,600 in the year 1900. Do you suppose that this is a picture of division, confusion and apathy? I do not see unity and brotherhood. I see virgins asleep (preoccupied with the cares of this world) I also see churches that have embraced immorality.

I was curious to see if I could find denominations that have affirmed the LBTG lifestyle. LBTG refers to Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Gay.

Here's what I found in a Google search. These denominations affirm the LBTG lifestyle: Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Brethren Mennonite, Presbyterian, Evangelical Anglican, Disciples of Christ, Independent Orthodox Greek, Lutheran, and Charismatic.

I realize that most of these denominations have many different offshoots and the above list does not necessarily portray full acceptance by the entire denomination mentioned. It does however; illustrate a trend towards immorality and worldly political correctness. It also shows a church that was once vibrant and on fire for God as falling away from the faith. This is the Apostate church.

The Body of Christ is made up of all, "Born Again" believers. They are the wheat in the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares are the Apostate church. As the parable teaches, as both grow, they look almost alike and it would be hard to pull one out with our injuring the other. So, the decision is to let them both grow until the harvest. It is then that the fruit is seen and removal of the tares can be done.

Why Just, "Born Again"

We cannot receive the Holy Spirit without being "Born Again". Without the Spirit of God, there are no gifts to operate in us that would edify the body. Thus, we could not be part of the body of Christ. Those that claim Christianity but are not "Born Again" are not part of the church at all. They are Anti-Christ and members of the Apostate church that operates by self-will and human expectations instead of the Will of God.

We can see by the PEW report that 72% of Catholics, 55% of Presbyterians, 63% of Lutherans, 29% of Adventists and 29% of Restorationists do not identify themselves as being "Born Again". They are the Apostate church hiding within the true church. These are they that fell away from true faith in Christ. This is our generation, in the last days just before Christ returns. (This group of denominations are just a few. There are more but I did not identify them all due to the length of the list.)

Husbands, Love Your Wives

Ephesians 5: 25-27

“As Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself, for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water, by the word: that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Paul writes to the Ephesian church telling the men to love their wives in a particular way, not like the society that makes women a 2nd class citizen but as Christ loves the church. Here we can see the depth on God’s love for us, the cleansing process that takes place...washed by the Word, the glory that is ours with Jesus and the holiness that results from experiencing His Love. All of this is going on right now in the hearts and minds of those that are “Born Again”.

Jesus will come for a glorious church without spot or wrinkle because He has cleansed it Himself with His own Blood. What wife would reject such a love as this from her husband? None I know...and yet millions reject this outstanding love from God to follow their own sinful hearts.

Conclusion

The Body of Christ is the church of Jesus Christ, the first born from the dead. “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.” **Colossians 1:18**

It was foretold by Jesus at the last supper and established at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the 120 believers in the upper room.

It grew as men and women received Christ as their personal savior and became “Born Again” in accordance with Jesus’ words in John chapter three and particularly **John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Body of Christ is the embodiment of Jew and Gentle into unity so we all grow up together into Christ to one day become His Bride.

We are a chosen generation among all generations in history, the elect of God that has been called out of every century and every peoples to be a holy nation unto the Lord. What a great privilege to share, as joint-heirs with Christ the kingdom of God.

