

The Body of Christ.

by Gareth Evans

The church is the body of Christ, a living organism with interdependent organs and a common life, where the Holy Spirit exercises his gifts among God's people.

Scripture: John 17:21, Acts 1:4, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Ephesians 4:7

Topics: "Church Unity", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Gareth Evans preaches on the church as 'the BODY of Christ', emphasizing the importance of unity, interdependence, and diversity within the body. He highlights how the church, as a living organism indwelt by the same Spirit, should function together to fulfill Christ's will and grow in love. Evans stresses the priority of unity in Jesus' high priestly prayer and its significance for evangelism and the church's witness, despite Satan's attempts to disrupt it. He also delves into the charismata, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, urging believers to embrace and operate in these gifts for the common good and the edification of the body of Christ.

Transcript

Today we shall consider the church as 'the BODY of Christ'.

This was a favourite metaphor for the apostle Paul who wrote of it in three of his letters.

Romans 12: 4,5 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 Ephesians 4;4, 12, 16.

As we think of a body, several things spring to mind that should show us something of the character of the church: Interdependent organs; common life; unity of purpose and function; living organism (rather than organization); indwelt by the same Spirit; etc.

Many of these are the same as we saw when considering the church as a building for God's habitation (teaching #1).

Paul presents the ridiculous picture of any part of the body refusing to recognize another part of that same body -"can the hand say to the foot, 'I have no need of you?'" Christ is the head of this body, dictating all its actions and controlling all its impulses. It exists to fulfill his will, not to 'go off and do its own thing'!

We are to 'grow up into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when every part is working properly, makes bodily growth

and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

Unity: The church as a building expresses the unity of the church, but there is something more here. Whereas the bricks that make up a building may be radically different from one another, though 'fitly framed together', the cells that make up a body are essentially the same. They all contain a nucleus in which is found the same DNA that identifies the whole. This is what makes cloning a distinct possibility. Without a nucleus, the cell is dead.

Within each believer, of whatever denominational persuasion, there is the seedgerm of the likeness of Christ. We are 'born again' to be formed in his likeness as sons of the Father. Herein is our unity found - not uniformity to one style of worship, one form of church government or one doctrinal box! We are not called to all be 'the same' but to find unity in our diversity as differing members of the body of Christ, functioning in different 'giftings' or ministries.

I believe our unity is a priority upon the heart of Jesus - this was his high priestly prayer just before Gethsemane (John 17) and is, I believe, still his priority prayer before the throne of his Father. It is the foundation of evangelism and witness of the church. (See John 17:21&23). It is certainly a priority upon the heart of Satan to mar our unity. (Which he evidently does quite successfully!)

Consider this: What have you or I done this week to display or augment the unity of the body locally?

Charismata: What strikes me as I consider the three references above, is their context. These three chapters are also where we find Paul's teaching on charismata - the gifts and operations of the holy Spirit.

The church - as a body - should be where the Holy Spirit exercises his gifts among God's people - gifts that enable the "power to be my witnesses" that Jesus spoke of as the purpose of the Father's promise. (Acts 1:4-8).

Sadly, these gifts have been so abused and misunderstood, that many in the church would rather deny their value or existence - how that must grieve the Holy Spirit, the giver of the gifts!

Let us list these gifts as recorded by Paul - though one would suggest the list is not exhaustive.

Romans 12:

v3: Paul uses his grace (gift) of apostleship to justify his appeal.

v3: Each of us given a 'measure' of faith.

v6: Our gifts differ, according to grace (a free gift).

vv6-8: Prophecy, (preaching and foretelling?); Serving; teaching; exhorting; giving (financially); helping;

"Let your love be genuine!"

1 Corinthians 12:

v1: Concerning charismata (grace gifts):

v4: Varieties of gifts from the One Spirit.

v7: To each is given a gift for the common good.

vv8-10: Word of wisdom; word of knowledge; faith; healings; miracles; prophecy; discernment of spirits; various kinds of tongues; interpretation of tongues;

v11: All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually, as he wills ... for you are one body.

(Now Paul outlines clear teaching on the unity of the Body with its different gifts and parts.)

v27: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

v28: apostles; prophets; teachers; miracles; helpers; administrators; speakers in tongues;

Ephesians 4:

v7: Grace is given to each of us according to Christ's gift.

v8: He gave gifts to men (love gifts to His bride).

v11: His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain unity of faith, and of the knowledge of God ...

1 Corinthians 14 is a chapter addressing the abuse of these gifts in the church at Corinth, and is well worth the study to see how the charismata were meant to operate in a local church. We must also note that Chs.12 and 14 are separated by Ch.13, that great treatise on love. How amazing that so many who treat Ch.13 as a pinnacle of the scripture, should ignore its context of Chs.12 & 14!

Thus a local expression of the church should demonstrate commitment to unity - both locally and kingdom-wide. This would be seen in prayer, concern, financial support, etc., for all the work and workers in the Body. This is a social mandate and a missions mandate.

There should be openness to the ministrations of the Holy Spirit in giftings, as he wills them to be present and operative. This means setting aside time for Him to minister.

"Lord, may your Holy Spirit, gentle as a dove, be welcome in our midst. May we glorify you as he moves among us." Amen.

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