

# LESSON 195

## A CHURCH AS A BODY

Related Scripture: Romans 12

**KEY VERSE:** "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."—Romans 12:5.

Lesson Scripture: I Corinthians 12:11-27

### Introduction:

Among the descriptive and figurative terms used in the New Testament with reference to the kind of church that Jesus instituted, we find the expression, "body of Christ." The literal body of Christ was nailed to Calvary's cross, buried in Joseph's tomb, and raised on the third day for our justification. (Ro. 4:25.) This literal body now is in heaven, beyond mortal vision until He comes again. But wherever the living Christ has a genuine living church, functioning in scriptural order, He has a figurative body through which He carries on His work.

Someone has well said that an assortment of arms, legs, and other body parts scattered across the countryside do not constitute a body. There can be no body without definite location and organization. An arm or leg cut off from a body would not even be recognized as such except that we have seen such arms and legs attached to and functioning as parts of real bodies.

Likewise, individual Christians do not constitute a church or body of Christ unless or until they assemble, organize, and function as such. The fact is so simple and obvious that it would not need to be stated except for the devilish deception of the imaginary invisible church.

With all its faults, the church at Corinth was a body of Christ. This week's lesson, from I Corinthians 12:11-27, may be outlined as follows:

1. One Benefactor, v. 11
2. One Baptism, 12-14
3. One Blend, 15-17
4. One Body, 18-20
5. One Benevolence, 21-23
6. One Behavior, 24-26
7. One Band, 27

### Notes on the Printed Text:

**One Benefactor, I Cor. 12:11.**

"All these" refers to the diversities of spiritual gifts, administrations, and operations listed in the preceding verses. Whether these gifts be miraculous or ordinary, the Holy Spirit is our great Benefactor, Comforter, and Guide, "dividing to every man severally as he will."

Spiritual gifts, including repentance and faith for sinners and revival for saints, cannot be worked up, but must be prayed down. Even so, we need to remember that God is sovereign, and will do as He will. If He is pleased to limit His miraculous manifestations to special times and purposes, that is His business. We must not make the mistake of trying to counterfeit His work. Really, if we can accept a true sense of values, His operations in common grace are greater (more difficult, meaningful, and enduring) than those works which we call miracles. (Jn. 14:12.)

**One Baptism, I Cor. 12:12-14.**

"Body" here is used abstractly or generically; that is, we are talking about that kind of thing, with no immediate reference to any specific body. So far as I know, there are no lunatics running loose who pretend that every human being in the world is a member or part of a big universal invisible human body. We all recognize here a mental abstraction which has no real existence except as we apply it to individual human bodies. So it is with the human body in verses 12 and 14; so likewise it is with the (figurative) body of Christ in verse 13.

"For also in one Spirit," says Paul, "we all were baptized with reference to (or into) one (kind of) body." The baptism referred to is the same as in I Cor. 1:13-17; no part of the gospel, but a symbolic immersion in water of the believer to represent the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Ro. 6:3-5.)

This is the "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5) of the Bible. Since it is a church ordinance, it is said to be "into" or "with reference to" the church under whose authority it is administered. Since only believers can be baptized, the apostle could add that all have partaken of the same Spirit.

**One Blend, I Cor. 12:15-17.**

Personifying various members or parts of the human body, the apostle momentarily imagines how ridiculous it would be for the foot to envy the hand, or the ear, the eye, and pettishly disclaim fellowship. One limb or organ by itself does not constitute a human body; such a body by definition requires the union of all its members and the blending of all their varied functions.

**One Body, I Cor. 12:18-20.**

Now to apply the figure, we are reminded that the same God Who created the human body has "set the members every one of them in the (figurative) body (the church), as it hath pleased him." So we read in Acts 2:47, "the Lord added to the church."

So a genuine New Testament church includes "many members," numbering something over two or three (Mat. 18:20) to some thousands (Acts 2:41; 4:4), and yet it is "but one body."

**One Benevolence, I Cor. 12:21-23.**

Referring again to the metaphor of the human body, we are reminded of the interdependence of its members and the mutual concern of all for each. The thumb or the big toe, for instance, may be thought of as relatively feeble, uncomely, and even useless; but let it get sore enough and we will give it abundant attention, or let it be amputated and we will come to realize how useful it was. As it is written in another connection, "no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it." (Eph. 5:29.)

**One Behavior, I Cor. 12:24-26.**

"Tempered" in verse 24 means mixed or mingled. Ideally, a church is so united in loving fellowship that there is no place for schisms, but the whole church behaves as one body with equal concern for the welfare, joys, and sorrows of all the members.

**One Band, I Cor. 12:27.**

Summing up the teaching of this beautiful figure, a genuine New Testament church functions as if it were the physical body of Christ in that locality, manifesting His presence to a world that cannot see Him but can see His manifestation through His church. Individual members of that church, like different parts of the human body, have varied functions to perform in that organization.

Although the Greek has no definite article in this verse, so that it would be better to translate "a body of Christ," yet it is true that the church at Corinth was the body of Christ in that locality, just as any true church anywhere is the body of Christ in its own locality.

**Key Verse:**

**"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."—Romans 12:5.**

In Christ, as members of a body of which He is the Head, we have a special relationship unknown to the lost, unknown to Christians who are not church members of any kind, and unknown to Christians who are members of false churches. Greatly needed among genuine churches today is a renewed sense of a peculiar mission, a mission that no other agency can adequately fulfill. May God revive in our hearts an awareness of the high privilege and solemn responsibility of membership in a body of Christ.