27 - Back to Church

We’ve spent much time discussing the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians 12 and the manifestations. Now, let’s return to the overall context of the church meetings in the Corinthian home! If you’ll remember, the ladies were ‘going wild’ getting topless (no head coverings) and the wealthy were eating, drinking and acting ‘superior’ when they got together in chapter 11. In the 12th chapter, from verse 11 on to the end of chapter 14, God discusses the true ‘superiority’ and freedom in the church - walking by the spirit in love.

1 Cor. 12:11

Now all these are energized by the one and the same Spirit, distributing to each one individually just as he purposes.

“Now all these…” All these what? The manifestations of the spirit. In other words, “All these (manifestations of the spirit) are energized by the one and same Spirit (God)”. Remember, we activate them, but God energizes them. He puts the ‘spiritual juice’ to tongues, prophecy, revelation, etc. There are no manifestations of the spirit without the Spirit (God) energizing our spirit (His gift to us) when we activate it. The next part of the verse reiterates this reality - “Distributing to each one individually just as he purposes.”

What does God distribute to us individually? Is it the spirit? No, everyone gets the same spirit at the time of the new birth. Is it the manifestations? No, we all have the equal ability to manifest the spirit. Ok, then what is distributed? Just what it says, the “energizings”. In other words, God energizes the content of our speaking in tongues. A person’s prophecy in the church can be either general or specific according to the energizing – “as the Spirit gives utterance (the content)”. If God energizes revelation in someone’s prophecy, then that can open the opportunity for trust, miracles and/or healing. So, who is “he (that) purposes”? It’s really both God and us. Remember, the manifestations of the spirit are a fellowship, a partnership with God. We must purpose to manifest the spirit. There can be no energizing without our participation and consent, but the senior partner (the One doing the heavy lifting by spiritual energizing) is God.

1 Cor. 12:6

And there are energizings being distributed to people, but it is the same God who energizes all of them in all people.

God energizes all the manifestations and all the abilities in all of us. So, let’s think about this. If God is energizing all the manifestations and all the ministries in all the saints in the church as a whole and at a church gathering specifically, who should be really running the show? The head of the house hosting the gathering? No. It should be God through Christ! It’s sort of like the physical human body…

1 Cor. 12:12

For as the body is one, and has many parts, and all the parts of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the body of Christ.

The set up of the church after Pentecost is almost as if Christ is the head – the leader and coordinator of the body – and each of us is an individual part – a finger, a knee, an ear, etc. If the head is functioning and the body parts listen, carrying out its direction, then they can accomplish a lot together. This is the physical analogy God paints of the Church of Grace. We are like the body of Christ with him being the head.

God has used many physical analogies to teach us spiritual truths in this epistle. The “Church as the body of Christ” is the latest and possibly the greatest one of all. Let’s read the text of the body analogy and discuss some of its lessons to us.

1 Cor. 12:13

For we were all baptized in one spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and were all made to drink of one spirit.

One Spirit

“One spirit” is repeated for emphasis. There is no “10 pound” spirit for an apostle, and a different “5 pound” spirit for a pastor, and a separate “3 pound” spirit for an elder, and yet another “1 pounder” for the average believer. Nope. There is “one spirit” for the apostle, pastor, elder, and saint. How about those who were formerly Jews, the “chosen people”? Do they get a special spirit? No. How about upper class, free citizens with businesses, homes and families? No. What about slaves, who have nothing but their clothes and depend on their masters for food and shelter? Do they get less spirit? No. There is only “one spirit” for everyone. How can that be? The answer is simple. Holy spirit is a gift and the Giver of the gift makes the rules. If He says, “one spirit”, then that’s the rule. If you don’t like it, tough - or - give yourself a better spirit. Good luck with that! Folks, God couldn’t be clearer – there is only one spirit. There are many manifestations and ministries that are energized by God from that one spirit, but everybody – EVERYBODY – gets the one, same gift – holy spirit.

Now watch this – God makes the point even stronger. He figuratively says that we were ‘baptized in one spirit into the body’. ‘Baptized’ means ‘dipped’ or ‘immersed into’. We were immersed (surrounded) into the spiritual body of Christ, just as a heart, or another body parts is surrounded by the body. Figuratively speaking, we have God’s spirit all around us as we are a part of the spiritual body of Christ. Then God tells us, “We’re all made to drink of one spirit”. We have also been figuratively “filled internally” with that same spirit. So, the spirit God has given us is more than just in us, it’s also something we’re a part of. We are one spirit internally and externally. We need each other because of what the spirit energizes in each of us. In other words, I need to manifest the spirit, and I need you to also. I need what you ‘have” spiritually, and you need what I “have.” This is an aspect of the gift that is bigger than each of us. Is this idea unique to 1 Corinthians? Hardly.

Eph. 4:16

From him [Christ] the whole body, being fitted together and held together by every supporting ligament, produces the growth of the body as each individual part does its proper function with the goal of building itself up in love.

“Each individual part does its proper function with the goal of building itself (the body) up in love.” God has given each of us a proper function to perform. By the way, that function is not sitting in a pew, then kneeling, then standing, then ‘rinse and repeat’. What ‘proper function’ are we talking about? Is it attendance in church? Is it making cookies for a bake sale for a good cause? Is it protesting at a political rally? No. Are you sitting down? Get ready for a shock. Our “proper function” is defined in the context. It’s our individual activation and manifestation of the spirit. Our proper function is spiritual. It’s not a position in the church like elder, usher, or worship leader. Those are positions that can be wonderful, but they are not spiritual functions. Positions are offices you hold. Functions are something you are and do. I can spiritually function and fill an office or not. Let’s say I’m an elder (a position) of a local church and operate revelation well. This allows the church to have spiritually healthy guidance and provision. Let’s say that I’m an elder and I don’t manifest revelation well or at all. From where does my guidance for the church arise? Either from my flesh or some other physical source. In this case, will Christ’s headship of the local church be promoted by me? No. From God’s perspective, position, office, and title is much less important than spiritual function. In fact, we should get our position according to our spiritual functioning, not the other way around.

What is the Church?

Still sitting down? OK, here we go… the Church of Christ is spiritual, not physical. But you may say, “I can physically see my church. It’s a great building. I can also see Pastor Jack, worship leader Jill, elder Elroy. What are you talking about?” OK, let’s define terms. Biblically speaking, the English word “church” is usually translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, from the word ‘*ek*’ meaning “out” and *kaleo*, meaning “to call”. Literally, the ancient meaning of the word church is the “called out”. It has no specific religious connotation in the ancient Greek language or culture. It means a person or group called out for a specific reason, as this scripture says.

Acts 19:32

Meanwhile, some cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly [*ekklesia* – the called out] was in confusion, and most of them did not know the reason that they had come together.

Here, a union protest is called an *ekklesia*. Likeminded artisans were called out to protest their loss of income because of Jesus’ influence outshining that of Diana of the Ephesians, curtailing the sales of the idol paraphernalia they made.

One of the keys to understanding the Bible is to understand its words when it was written, not its current usage. Today we speak of a church as a building with a cross on top, or perhaps the group of people who meet there. Another current use is the collection of churches of a particular ideological stripe, like the Catholic ‘church’ or Baptist ‘church’. Although these are normal uses of ‘church’ today, *ekklesia* was not understood that way when the New Testament was written. It simply meant ‘the called out’.

Eph 1:22

and he put all things in subjection under his [Christ’s] feet and appointed him as the head over all things related to the church, [*ekklesia* – “the called out”]

Who has God called out?

1 Cor. 1:1,2

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother,

to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who have been made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be holy ones, with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—theirs and ours:

Everyone God has called out and has accepted that call is the church. Where? “With all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Where? Everywhere! Everyone everywhere who has answered God’s call to name Jesus as their Lord and believed that God raised him from the dead is part of His church – His called out. Are Catholics part of the church? Maybe. Remember, just because something is in a garage doesn’t make it a car, right? Has a person confessed Jesus as their Lord? Do they believe that God raised him from the dead? If the answer is yes, then they are a part of the church of Christ. If the answer is no, then despite the label, they are not part of the called of God. A membership to a physical church today is no guarantee that they are saved, born again of God’s spirit, or have answered God’s call.

Christ in

The question for determining if someone is saved and a member of the church of Christ is simple. If they have the spirit, they are a member of the church. If they don’t have Christ within, they’re not.

1 John 5:12

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

It couldn’t be clearer. If you have Christ within, you’re saved, a child of God, have eternal life, and a member of the body of Christ. If you don’t have Christ spiritually within, you are not. What if someone is a good person, donates a lot of money, and walks little old ladies across the street? Does that make them a Christian? Here’s the answer. Consider the word “Christian”. It’s a combo of two words – “Christ” and “in”. A Christian is a person with “Christ in” them. It doesn’t matter what they look or act like, the question is “Do they have Christ in them, or not?” And labels are no guarantee. Take for instance…



Check the ingredients. There are neither grapes nor nuts in this cereal, despite its label. It is primarily made of wheat flour and malted barley flour. So much for ‘truth in advertising’! Do you remember who the Bible says was primarily responsible for orchestrating Jesus’ execution? It was Caiphas, the Jewish high priest! He was as Jesus said:

Matt. 23:27,28

“How terrible it will be for you, you experts in the law and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs that outwardly do indeed appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead people’s bones and of every kind of impurity.

In the same way, outwardly, you also appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Just because folks carry the label of Catholic, or Baptist, or “Christian” doesn’t make them so. It’s what’s inside that counts. Recently I heard of several people contesting a wealthy person’s estate. They had to undergo DNA tests to see if they were really relatives of the deceased. Just saying so didn’t meet the court’s legal standards. Only genetic proof of what was within qualified. Speaking of which, one claimant who never met the deceased and was ignorant of his connection until a recent notification, proved to be a direct child of the deceased. It turns out that on a business trip, the deceased had a “one night stand” with the claimant’s mother and he was the fruit of it.

Now, does it seem fair that the estranged heir gets to share the inheritance of someone he never knew or loved when he only had a one-time connection with the deceased? In one regard, it makes little sense because of “the little time” related to the deceased. But on the other hand, that “little time” gave him life and all that his father’s DNA provided. So, although he didn’t look or act like the son of a wealthy man before he was notified of his connection, he most certainly was, despite awareness or labels. The court found that he was due to share the inheritance from his biological father and ordered it so.

Here’s the point. Just because someone looks like they’re a Christian because they have the label of Methodist, of Pentecostal, or minister, is no guarantee they are. They could be ‘Grape Nuts’, like Caiaphas! And just because someone is living under a bridge, or involved in evil political stuff, they could be saved because of a “one night stand” with Jesus! Yes, that’s right. Just as people get born physically from ‘one-night stands’ (says the guy who came from an orphanage who probably began from a ‘one-night stand’), they are just as ‘born’ as anyone else. Birth is one time - for a lifetime. The same is true with the new birth. That’s why God uses the birth physical analogy. It’s “seed”, not a hypothetical concept.

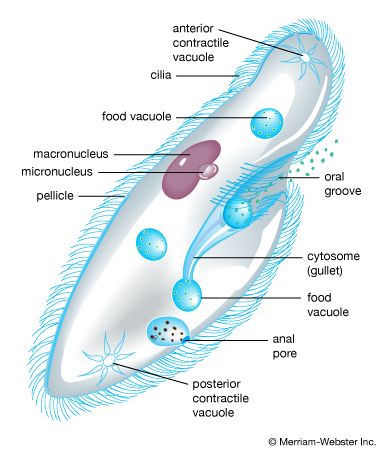
How can we tell if someone is a Christian or not? Two ways. Number one, we do a spiritual DNA test – discerning of spirits. God knows and can tell us – if He thinks we need to know. If not, we treat everyone with God’s love despite what they look or act like. The second way is if we see them manifest the spirit of God. It’s proof of the spirit within. No one speaks in tongues without God’s spirit - and the same is true with all the manifestations. When a car’s horn honks and the radio plays, it’s proof that there’s a charged battery within, no matter what the car looks like – wrecked, abandoned or in good condition.

Organization or Organism

One of the biggest misunderstandings of the word and concept of “church” I’ve seen is that too many people think that the church of Christ is an organization. They see the organizational chart of the Roman Catholic Church (or another one) such as this:



Most people consider disorganization bad and organization good. Therefore, they want to be a part of a church that has a structure and eliminates confusion. (My comment is that great structure may eliminate confusion, but it also can possibly eliminate or squelch the spirit.) To explain this, let’s look at a protozoa - a one-celled animal.



The protozoa has great structure – a cell wall, cillia to move it around, a nucleus to manage its function, and a food and water intake and exit. It is certaily organized. But what makes it special is that it has … life. It moves around on its own and accomplishes things – simple things, but accomplishments nontheless. Have you ever seen a dead protozoa? It looks exactly like a living one except one thing … you know, it lacks life. It deteriorates and no longer moves. It still retains it’s organization and structure for a short time, but accomplishes nothing. What’s more important – organization or life? Obviously, life. In fact we learn from organisms that any organization they have is there to support life. When life is over, the organization it had deteriorates because it’s purpose is passé.

Now structure is paramount in inanimate objects like buildings and vehicles, but not with organisms. Organisms supply whatever organization and structure is necessary to support and maximize life. With organisms, life is the priority, not organization. The organization in a protozoa is very different that that in a human, but both do its job to facilitate life. I’ve seen someone suffer brain damage and watch their brain rewire itself past the damage. The brain structure adjusted to support their life. Amazing! That’s how God made life!

The Body of Christ is an Organism

God could have made His primary comparison of the church to a building like He did with the Temple in chapter 3. But by far, the most consistant physical analogy God made as to what the spiritual church is, is “the body of Christ”. Check out these 10 major scripture sections where God directly compares the Church of Grace to “the body of Christ”:

Rom. 12:4ff 1 Cor. 12:12ff Eph. 1:23ff Eph. 3:6 Eph. 4:4ff Eph. 5:30 Col. 1:18, 24

Col. 2:19 Col. 3:15

By far, the most important and emphasized description God makes of the church we belong to is “the body of Christ”. What’s the big deal? The big deal is that the church is not an organization – it’s an organism. What’s important is it’s life, not it’s form, structure, or its corporate heirachal chart. That’s why we see so many different organizational church structures in the Bible. Gathered in the Temple, gathered in homes, gathered by a river…

Apostles preside, head of a houshold presides, a group of prophets and teachers preside…

Why is there no fixed pattern? Because the human leader and structure is irrelevant. Spiritual life is the priority and all else flows from that.

The Life of the Church

Now what is “the life” of the Church? Surely it’s tradition, right? The Roman Catholics boast of 2000 years history and 266 popes with “apostolic succession”. Many value that sense of gravitas. In contrast, the Baptist church started much later in 1525 AD and highlights salvation and holiness. Many like the emphasis of purity from sin and want to avoid the scandals of the Dark and Middle ages. With the Pentecostal church, there is much emotion and passion for the things of God. Many like that because it seems people are “really into it” instead of robotically following rituals. Every denomination has it’s selling points ususally highlighted in its name, but what is the life of the church of Christ, the body of Christ? Is is tradition, purity, passion, or another aspect of Christianity?

If the Church is primarily spiritual and not physical, then that’s the first clue as to what the life of the Christian church is. Additionally, when we consider the context of when the church is mentioned, the church’s collective life is obvious. What came on the Birthday of the church? It wasn’t tradition – there was none. It wasn’t purity from sin. Jesus and the prophets had been preaching on this well before. It also wasn’t passion or any other hallmarlk of any other Christian demonination. David shined passionately for God 1000 years before Christ.

What came on Pentecost was holy spirit – in a way that had never existed before - full, complete, and to whosoever believed. To Jew and Gentile, to male and female, to slave and free, to rich and poor. And the first thing that the church did on Pentecost was speak in tongues, a new and impossible manifestation of the spirit to all who were in Jerusalem at the great feast. It was an astounding display of God moving mightily and publically, leaving no doubt about what was happening. That God was involved - there was no doubt. The only question that remained was “What does this mean?” Peter answered with the gospel and about 3000 were saved. What a start! And don’t allow yourself to be mislead by big ancient buildings, or stern preaching or passionate desplays of faith. God’s gift of holy spirit was the life of the church on day one and it still is today.