

Five Sermon Outlines on “Body Life” - from Ephesians 4: 15b- 16

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Living the Body Life (1)

. . . we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15b-16)

Introduction:

The church is not a building. Well, I hope everyone knows that already. But the church is not simply people either. A room full of people may just be a crowd. If the room is full of Christian people, it may simply be a Christian crowd, it may not be a church or even The Church.

What do we mean by Body Life?

The church is the Body of Christ. As such, it is a living organism, composed of Christ and His people *and organised for His work upon this earth*. This image of a living body is one which richly reflects the dynamic of how the church ought to function and how I will find my own place within it. Living for Christ in His Church, could therefore be referred to as living the *Body Life*.

This phrase, Body Life, was made popular by Ray Stedman, in a book with this title, published 20 years ago. Body Life refers to *a way of life* made possible by comprehending what it means to live in the Body of Christ. Not everyone sees the implications of the Body of Christ. Not everyone understands the responsibilities which come with being a member of the Body.

We need to discern the Body of Christ.

We are told in 1 Corinthians 11:29 that it is possible to fail to “discern” the Lord's Body. It is found in a section concerning the Lord's Supper. There Paul is dealing with disharmony in the church as it took upon itself to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Apparently, some were “doing their own thing” in this celebration in fellowship with Christ, failing to recognize that they were part of a larger fellowship of believers under the Head. They were failing to take the time to get right with God and with one another and thus were failing to recognize the Body of Christ. They were failing to live by the principle of the Body of Christ. They were without love and respect for their fellow Christians.

Those who are in Christ, live differently from the unbelieving world.

As Christians, we have to embark upon a new way of life.

To guide us along this path, we have been given certain principles for living. These principles have been illustrated for us in the Scriptures with graphic pictures.

The Body of Christ is such a picture. The Body of Christ is not merely a reference to the church, it is a graphic illustration of how the church is to work, and therefore how we are to live. It is a principle according which we are living our lives. Consequently, it is of great importance that we understand what Body Life is all about.

Appeal:

Once we truly understand what “church” really is, it should make a world of difference, to everything we do and everything we are. Our total existence should reflect our Spiritual home - the Body of Christ.

Living the Body Life (2)- Our Source

. . . we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ. (Ephes. 4:15b)

Introduction:

Who is in charge of the Church? Does it belong to the Minister and Session - or perhaps, as in a democracy, to the members? Who is it? What if some little green men in a spaceship landed in your sanctuary and said, "Take me to your leader," where would you take them? Well, for many reasons, I hope you wouldn't bring them to your minister.

Christ is the head - and this truth has implications:

The Body into which we have been placed has a **Head**. Someone is in charge. The true head of the church is not the pastor, nor is it the people. The **head** of the church is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the one who should be in charge. The Body of Christ is Christ's!

And as the **Head** of the Body, He is the source of its life. It is because of Christ that we are in the Body. The Bible says "in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). He is the source of our life, and He is the focus of our life and should be the main priority of our life. That is why we are told that **we are to grow up in all aspects into Him**. The most important question that we have to answer as Christians, is if we truly love Jesus.

Christ is our everything:

The Bible reveals that Jesus Christ is to be everything for us. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 reads, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." The focus is Christ!

Do you need wisdom? Christ has become your wisdom, meaning the practical answer to your questions. Do you need righteousness? Christ has become your righteousness. We offer his perfect righteousness to God who accepts the righteousness of Jesus, in stead of our own broken lives. Do you need sanctification? Christ has become your sanctification. Do you need redemption? Christ has become your redemption. Whatever you need, Christ is it! He is our source. He is our life. He is our focus. And He is the head of the Body.

Appeal:

The practical implication of this headship is that Christ is our Lord. He is the one who is also in charge of my life, if I live in the Church. The head controls the body, and Christ should control his Church. In bodies where the head is not in charge, we have a physical problem. In churches where Christ is not in charge, we have a spiritual problem. It doesn't matter who or what we have replaced Christ with, whether a person, session, board, committee, or congregation; if the Head of the Church is not in charge, we are out of His will. The Body of Christ is to be led by Christ. This he does through his Holy Spirit, interpreting his Word and will for us.

And when I do not submit to Him as a "member of the Body", my life too will be outside of His will. Have you considered the consequences of that?

Living the Body Life (3)- Our Uniqueness

. . . that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part . . . (Ephesians 4:16b)

Introduction:

When we hear about living in harmony with Christ and our fellow believers in the Church, we may think that we now too must look and sound like some or other prominent Christian we admire or respect. We may think that because we cannot be like him or her, we will never fit into Christ's plan for us or his church. Nothing could be further from the truth. I remain the same person, with the same passions and interest, the same sense of humour and the same personality.

The Body is composed of many unique parts:

Christ is the head of the Body, but the Body is composed of many unique parts. Here we see our uniqueness as members of the Body of Christ. The emphasis on **every joint** and **each individual part** is something we need to recognise. It is the picture painted of us by the apostle Paul in various writings by him. In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 the Body of Christ is compared to a human body composed of many unique parts. Each part is different, yet each works together with the other parts in a harmony of life. Some parts of the body are more prominent than others, but all are important. In fact, all the parts are needed.

I can be part of the whole, even though I am a unique person.

Each member of the Body is unique, but each is a part of the whole. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:14-21, "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.'"

Appeal:

There is individuality in the Body of Christ, but there should never be a sense of independence in the Body of Christ. God has made us different, not to be independent of the rest, but that we could work together, better. So God has given us all different gifts and ministries, a different anointing and experience. He has not done this so that we could put on a pedestal our gifts or experiences - above another's, but that we could minister to another's need through those gifts.

Living the Body Life (4)- Our Work

. . . from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part . . . (Ephes. 4:16a-b)

Introduction:

Did you know that you too may be called a minister? Well this word simply means being a servant. As we are called to serve Christ and other believers in His Church, we all are ministers. Traditionally we referred to this trust as the “priesthood of all the believers”. Not only are you a minister, you are a priest too!

The unity of the Body is preserved through serving one another:

Each part of the Body has a function to perform. The Body of Christ is not a bunch of loose parts placed in a pile. The Body of Christ is composed of parts that are **being fitted and held together**.

These parts are attached to one another. Just as in our human body where each bone is connected to another bone by a joint, so there are joints which connect members of the Body of Christ. In fact, the Body of Christ is **held together by that which every joint supplies**. And what is “that”? The “that” which every joint supplies, is ministry. It is “the work of service” referred to in verse 12 of this same chapter. **The proper working of each individual part** is the ministry which we provide to one another. It is at this point of ministry that we are joined. Ministry is the glue which holds us together, or perhaps more suited to the analogy of the body, the ligaments and muscles which bind us together.

The unity of the Body is preserved by submitting to the Head:

Notice, however, that it is **the proper working** of all of these unique parts which is essential. Just as in our human body where every part must work in accordance with the direction of the head, so in the Body of Christ each part must work surrendering to Christ. In our human bodies, one leg cannot decide to travel in one direction while another leg travels in the opposite direction! The results would be too painful to imagine. So, in the Body of Christ, we must work together under the leadership of our Risen Lord. And we must take seriously our responsibility to be faithful in exercising our gifts and ministries. Without them, the Body cannot be held together.

The Unity is preserved by the one Spirit of Christ in all of us.

Each of us have been gifted by the Holy Spirit with at least one gift. There are lists of gifts in Scripture. There are for example gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy mentioned in Romans 12. There is another list in 1 Corinthians 12. Additionally, there are gifted people such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers mentioned earlier in Ephesians 4.

Appeal:

What is your gift? Have you discovered it? Are you using it in the church to touch someone else's need. Remember, a gift is given to flow from God through you to someone's need. It is “that” service in love that holds us together.

Living the Body Life (5)- Our Goal

. . . causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephes. 4:16c)

Introduction:

A lot is said these days about common goals, visions and missions in order to be successful in anything we do - especially when we refer to something to be accomplished as a team.

Christ's vision for His Church is that it will build itself up, in love.

There is a common goal in the Body of Christ. The goal is the **growth of the body**. As we do our **individual part**, this **causes the growth of the body**. The Body is responsible for the **building up of itself in love** as it ministers to each member.

The faith community grows together, when Jesus is our mutual role-model, hero and teacher.

God has chosen for this growth to occur in a life in community. He has chosen to put us together in a spiritual body of believers where we can learn to be like him. He has given gifted "office bearers" as the servants of the Head, to equip us for ministry. He has called us to attain a unity of the faith. He has called us to become mature, to be like Christ. He has called us to speak the truth in love to one another, and thus **grow up in all aspects into him, who is the head, even Christ**. He has called us to work together in community to be his Body.

Appeal:

Do you see / discern the Body of Christ? Do you understand the implication of being in the Body? Are you beginning to understand what Body Life is all about?

We are a community of God's people who have been brought into a living union with God and with one another. We need one another. We do not have the luxury to act independently of one another. There are no Lone Rangers in the Body.

Watchman Nee said, "Yet just what kind of a man is he who perceives the Body? He is a person who seeks for fellowship, who fears that he himself may be wrong, and who dare not work independently. Such is the person who has discerned the Body."

The Body of Christ is a living organism submitting to Christ as the Head, composed of many individual parts, yet all working together in harmony through an exercise of the gifts given to each one, in order that we might all grow together in love to be more like Christ and bear the fruit of the Spirit for each one's benefit.

That is what Body Life is all about.

Have you started to live the Body Life yet?

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