

Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 10–12 & John 12

The One Body and the Lord's Supper: Obedience to the Head in Heaven

Scripture Readings

“There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” — Ephesians 4:4–6

“For even as the body is one and has many members... so also is the Christ.” — 1 Corinthians 12:12

“The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body.” — 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” — John 12:24

“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.” — John 12:26

The Body Is One

Ephesians 4 gathers a series of declarations into a few verses, and the word “one” runs through them all: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. None of these are conditional. They are not dependent on our performance or our consistency. They are true because God has declared them so. The body is one because the Lord has said it is one.

An infidel observing the divided state of Christendom today might reasonably say: this is not what I see. I see thousands of different bodies, different churches, different denominations, all going their separate ways. And he would be right that what he sees does not reflect the truth of God. But that does not make the truth of God wrong. It means we are not doing a very good job of reflecting it. The truth stands. The question is whether my life is a reflection of it.

Brother Darby notes that the clause can be rendered more plainly: “the body is one.” That declarative form brings it home. My father used to say that anything in nature with two heads is a freak. Equally, anything with two bodies is a freak. The Lord has one body, and every true believer is a member of it.

Members of the Body: 1 Corinthians 12

1 Corinthians 12 opens out the body metaphor. The body is one, and yet it has many members. No member can declare itself outside the body. There is someone in my extended family who, through an accident in his youth, does not have full use of some of his limbs. But those limbs are still part of his body. A defective member does not make it a different body. It is still one body — and the defect affects the whole.

Verses 25 and 26 make this personal: if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it. Someone might object that with millions of believers on earth, they cannot all be aware when a single soul is saved somewhere. And yet the Lord says this is true. Perhaps there are believers unknown to me who have been praying for the Lord’s work, and the Lord is pleased to use me in some way that answers those prayers, and they rejoice without knowing why. I am not entirely sure my hand knows exactly what my foot is doing. But if I fall, my hand knows, because it springs out immediately to break the fall.

The point is sharp: if I say that I will make allowances for sin in secret, and that no one will know, and that it will affect no one — I am making God a liar. What I do affects the state of the body. The Lord knows every thought and every inward desire. They are either bringing glory to Him, as a member responsive to the Head in heaven, or they are like body parts that will not answer the brain's direction.

The Assembly, the Body, and the Great House

The word translated “church” in the King James Bible — a rendering carried over from the earlier Bishop's Bible — is more precisely rendered “assembly.” The Lord views all believers on earth as one assembly, purchased with the blood of His own. The body and the assembly are the same people — every true child of God — but the two figures bring out different aspects. The assembly speaks of those gathered to His name; the body brings before us the thought of obedience, of members in activity under the direction of the Head.

In 2 Timothy, what is called “a great house” is larger still — it encompasses everyone who professes to be the Lord's, whether or not they truly are. The Lord said that many will come to Him in that day saying, Lord, Lord, have we not done many works in Thy name? And He will say, Depart from Me; I never knew you. Profession is not possession. The Lord knows them that are His. It is for every one of us who truly is His to walk in a way that reflects that reality.

The Lord's Supper: A Response to the Head in Heaven

In Luke's account, the disciples came to the Lord with the right question before the Passover: Where wilt Thou that we prepare? They did not arrive with a plan and ask for His blessing on it. They started by asking the Lord. And the Lord had already arranged it: a man bearing a pitcher of water would lead them to a large upper room, already furnished, already ready.

After the Passover was over — that feast of remembrance for the night when the destroying angel passed over every house marked with the blood of the lamb — the Lord instituted something new. He took a loaf, gave thanks, and broke it, saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Then the cup: This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you. The Passover remembered a past deliverance through blood; this new supper of remembrance would recall the Lord Himself in His death.

1 Corinthians 10 connects this directly to the body: “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body.” To break that bread together is to be in intimate communion with the body of Christ and with the blood of Christ. To eat at another table — whether it is a Catholic mass, a denominational service, or any of the many man-made altars that echo Jeroboam’s imitation altars at Dan and Bethel — is to be in communion with what is behind that table, not with the Lord’s table. The question the passage forces is: what is my heart in communion with? It cannot be both.

Jeroboam’s sin is explicitly named as a sin throughout the historical books: he set up two imitation places of worship and invented a feast to match Jerusalem’s, so that the ten tribes would not be drawn back in conscience to Jerusalem. God speaks of it repeatedly as a vile thing. And the scattered state of Christendom today — a thousand different denominations, none of them arising overnight — has its root in the same principle: a member of the body not responding to the direction of the Head.

The Corn of Wheat and Following Christ

In John 12, the Lord said: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” He is that corn of wheat. And the fruit of His death — every redeemed soul, the church, the body of Christ

— is encompassed in what Isaiah calls the fruit of the travail of His soul, with which He shall be satisfied. The body of Christ cannot be broken or damaged. He is building it. But what has been committed to us as a responsibility, as men, we have failed in. That which appears broken is in ruins.

Where does that leave each of us as individuals? The Lord says, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.” Where is He? In the glory. And the note from Darby puts it plainly: the cross lifts the veil and shows the sentence on all that is in the world — death. Self, and all our links of affection with this world, all of it is under that sentence. When that is seen and accepted, we are not left empty. We are left with Christ Himself. His love is there to meet the place that has been cleared out.

What sustained the Apostle Paul through all that he endured? He had his eye on Christ in the glory. That is the only thing that enables faithfulness. It is not resolving in the morning to walk in the truth of the one body of Christ. It is having Christ Himself, the Head in heaven, as the object before the heart. “We are intimately connected with Christ in heaven — that is why it says the Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. He is the head. We are the body here on earth. And as individual members of that body, we must have Him, the Head, in glory before us. There is no other way to continue on.”

We have no idea what it was for Him — the sinless One, the very Son of God, eternal life — to anticipate taking our sins upon Him, to be forsaken of God. Our minds cannot enter into it. And yet He went willingly, with one object before Him: to glorify the Father. Is that our object? To follow Him in that? We do not go to the cross — He has already taken care of that. But there is the giving up of self, and of what is of this world, in order to follow Him and to be obedient as members of His body to what He would have us do.

“His grace is sufficient. He gives sufficient grace to walk in the good of this and to respond as a member of His body to His request that we should remember Him in His death.”