

# WHAT DOES THE BODY OF CHRIST LOOK LIKE?

1CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

## INTRODUCTION:

### Body Of Christ - The Definition

The Body of Christ is a common, yet complex term used in the Christian faith. Some may initially think we are talking about the physical body of Christ, as in His human form on earth. But the term "Body of Christ" actually refers to the members of His church, throughout history. Who or what is the body of Christ? The body of Christ is the Church, made up of all those who have [accepted Jesus Christ](#) as their personal Savior. Each Christian, then, is a part of the body of Christ.

The first biblical reference to this body was made by Jesus during the [last supper](#). *Mark 14:22 says, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.'" This symbolic act is the beginning of the communion service which Christians accept as a remembrance that they are a part of the body of Jesus Christ, due to Jesus' death on the cross.*

### Body Of Christ - The Unit

The Body of Christ, like all bodies, is comprised of many parts. There are limbs, organs, and various members that, when left alone, are useless, but when assembled make up the entire body. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 describe it like this: *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many."* This means each Christian is an equal part of the body of Christ!

There is organization to the body of Christ, as described in Ephesians 1:22-23, *"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."*

1 Corinthians 12:27-28 also says, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."*

Every Christian possesses a gift and is called to use it in service within the body to build up the body of Christ, to strengthen the body and to carry out its purpose within the world. Each member of the body of Christ is also called to serve the church through his or her natural gifts and abilities. This service is offered out of devotion to Christ for the sacrifice He made on the cross, providing them with eternal life in heaven. The diversity of gifts, each supporting the other, makes the body strong!

### **Body Of Christ - Personal Application**

As a part of the church, what can you do to enhance the body of Christ? The body is a holy entity and is to be respected and treated with complete honor and care. The Bible provides several action principles for building up the body of Christ:

- **You are called to promote truth and unity** - Ephesians 4:25 says, *"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."*
- **You are called to service** - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 outlines the importance of using your God-given spiritual gift. Your gift is unique and equally important. It is essential to the body that you use your special gift in service to God.
- **You are called to share Jesus** - Romans 1:16 says, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."* As part of the body of Christ, you are to share your life-changing story with others!
- **You are called to worship** - *"It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night"* (Psalm 92:1-2).
- **You are called to love each another** - "1 John 4:11 says, *"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

## I. WE SHARE TOGETHER AS THE BODY: Vv.12-14

(12-14) The fact of unity: believers all belong to a greater unit, the **body** of Jesus Christ.

a. **All the members of that one body, being many, are one body . . . for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**: The “body-like” unity of Christians is not a goal to achieve; it is a fact to be recognized. **Paul clearly says we were all baptized into one body**.

i. Passages like this have led many to regard baptism as sort of the “initiation ceremony into the community of Christians.” While this may be *an aspect* of baptism, it is not it’s main point. The main idea behind Christian baptism is the identification of the believer – his “immersion” in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-5). The idea that baptism is primarily the initiation ceremony into the church has led to, and reinforced, unbiblical ideas such as the baptism of infants (upon the thinking, “who wants to exclude them from the church?”).

ii. But here, Paul does not have in mind *water* baptism as much as *Spirit* baptism: **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**. Paul here is writing of the common “immersion” all believers have in the Holy Spirit and in Jesus, a common “immersion” which brings them into **one body**.

b. **One body . . . many members**: Paul uses the brilliant illustration of the human body to relate the working of the community of Christians. Even as every cell in a human body is linked by a common root (a common DNA code), yet the parts of our body (**members**) look different, are treated differently, work differently, and accomplish different purposes. Even so, there is great diversity in the body of Jesus Christ,

both in appearance and function, yet each member has a common root and a common goal.

c. **Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free:**

Because of the fact of the “body” dynamic, the dividing lines created by the Corinthian Christians were strictly artificial. Jew, Greek, slave, free, did not matter anymore, because they were all in **one body**.

## II. WE SERVE TOGETHER AS THE BODY: Vv.14-26

(15-20) Elaboration on the illustration of a body.

a. **If the foot should say:** If the **foot** felt, or declared, itself not part of the body because it was **not a hand**, the foot would be both foolish and mistaken. Diversity does not disqualify one from the body.

i. Here, Paul puts the question in the mouth of the one who feels *excluded* from the body. It is as if some of the Corinthian Christians were saying, “I don’t have this certain spiritual gift. I guess I’m not part of the body of Jesus Christ.” After all, *hands* and *eyes* seem more important and more “glamorous” than *feet* and *ears*. So Paul wants these Christians who feel excluded that they are indeed members of the body, and their sense that they are not, is just as foolish as the **foot** or the **ear** who feel excluded.

ii. Yet, the same principle can be stated towards those who desire to *exclude others* from the body. Paul could have just as well said, “The hand cannot say the foot is not of the body because it is not a hand.” Paul also wants Christians who might exclude others because they don’t appreciate their place in the body to recognize the fact of unity.

b. **If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?** Not only is this diversity in the body of Jesus Christ *acceptable*, it is *essential*. The body cannot work properly if all are hands, or if all are eyes. The body must have different parts and gifts, or it would not work together effectively as a body.

c. **Just as He pleased:** Why is the foot a foot and the hand a hand? Because it pleased the Designer to make it so. So, the hand can take no “pride” in being a hand, and the foot can take no “shame” in being a foot. Each is serving the pleasure of the Designer.

i. In the design, we see the wisdom of the Designer:  
*everybody has something; but nobody has everything.*

(21-26) Continued elaboration, showing that less “glamorous” parts of the body are just as important.

a. **And the eye cannot say to the hand:** Now, Paul writes to those tempted to pride and a sense of superiority because of their gifts or place in the body. They cannot say to such parts, **“I have no need of you.”**

b. **Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary:** Often, we consider a part of our body unnecessary or of low importance – until it is hurt. Then we realize how important it is! The hand or the eye may *seem* to be more important, and may have more “glamour” in its position – but it is not more necessary or important than other parts of the body.

c. **Less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor:** The parts of our bodies normally covered by clothes are often considered **less honorable** – but we give them **greater honor** by clothing them so carefully!

i. Clarke on the **less honorable** parts: “seem to mean the principle *viscera*, such as *heart, lungs, stomach,* and *intestinal canal*. These, when compared with the *arms* and *limbs*, are comparatively *weak*; and some of them, considered in *themselves*, *uncomely* and less honourable; yet these are more essential to life than any of the others.”

ii. Even so, **God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it**: If someone feels they are a “hidden” or “unglamorous” member of the body of Jesus Christ, God knows how to bestow honor upon them.

d. **That there should be no schism in the body**: Seen from God’s perspective, with the illustration of the body, there is never any reason for **schism in the body**. The “pride” of the “honorable” member is checked, as is the “shame” of the “less honorable” member.

e. **That the members should have the same care for one another**: Paul’s theological point about the nature of the body of Jesus Christ has now come to a very practical application. The Corinthian Christians should **care for one another** because they are all part of the same body.

i. The parts of the body work together. The eyes and ears do not only serve themselves, but the whole body. The hands do not only feed and defend themselves, but the whole body. The heart does not only supply blood to itself, but serves the whole body. Sometimes there is a part of our body which only lives to serve itself. It doesn’t contribute anything to the rest of the body, and everything it gets it uses to feed and grow itself. We call this *cancer*.

ii. “I want every member of this church to be a worker. We do not want any drones. If there are any of you who want to eat and drink, and do nothing, there are plenty of places elsewhere, where you can do it; there are empty pews about in abundance; go and fill them, for we do not want you. Every Christian who is not a bee is a wasp. The most quarrelsome persons are the most useless, and they who are the most happy are peaceable, are generally those who are doing most for Christ.” (Spurgeon)

f. Paul could have, and some today think he should have, just come out and said “**care for one another**” and ignore the spiritually true foundation for such caring. “Come on, Paul. Don’t bother us with theology. Just tell us what to do.” But Paul wants more than a *result* from the Corinthian Christians; he wants them to have *understanding* also. He also knows that ultimately, the best results are based on understanding!

g. **And if one member suffers**: The **care for one another** mentioned in the previous verse is now explained. It means to have a heart towards, and sympathy with, our fellow members, though they be different.

### III. WE ARE STRENGTHENED TOGETHER AS THE BODY: Vv.27-31

(27-31) God distributes gifts and callings according to His pleasure.

a. **You are the body of Christ, and members individually**: Paul sums up his previous point. Even as a human body is a unified whole with many different parts, so also is the body of Jesus Christ. Now, Paul will write about the different parts of the body.

i. “We could call one *eye*, because of his *acute observation* of men and things, and *penetration* into cases of conscience and Divine *mysteries*.”

ii. Another *hand*, from his *laborious* exertions in the Church. Another *foot*, from his industrious *travels* to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ crucified: and so of others.” (Clarke)

b. **Apostles** are “special ambassadors” of the church. Paul and others in his day had a unique apostolic authority, which will never be repeated because the foundation of the church has already been set (Ephesians 2:20). However, God still has His “special ambassadors” in the church today, though not with the same authority as the original apostles.

c. **Prophets** are those particularly called to speak forth for God with the gift of prophecy. There was a unique, foundational authority to this gift as well (Ephesians 2:19-20). However, God raises up those to speak to the church and the world with a special blessing and power.

i. However, if one will either claim or receive the *title* of “prophet” today, let them be held to the standard of a prophet: 100% accuracy, in every word (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

d. **Workers of miracles**: Those used of God to do miracles. Yet, the Biblical pattern is for them though on the Holy Spirit’s initiative, not their own.

e. **Helps**: This has in mind those who help, or assist, others in doing the work of the Lord. The term was used in Jewish context in this way: “The *Levites* were termed by the Talmudists *helps of the priests*.” (Clarke)

i. Spurgeon on those with the gift of **helps**: “It strikes me that they were not persons who had any official standing, but that they were only moved by the natural impulse and the divine life within them to do anything

and everything which would assist either teacher, pastor, or deacon, in the work of the Lord. They are the sort of brethren who are useful anywhere, who can always stop a gap, and who are only too glad when they find that they can make themselves serviceable to the church of God in any capacity whatever.”

ii. In John Bunyan’s book *Pilgrim’s Progress*, “Help” came to Christian when he was mired in the “Slough of Despond.” That is often when the gift of helps is most useful. “Dear, very dear to us, must ever be the hand that helped us out of the depth of the mire where there was no standing; and while we ascribe all the glory to the God of grace, we cannot but love most affectionately the instrument he sent to be the means of our deliverance.” (Spurgeon)

iii. Spurgeon also describes the qualities of someone who is effective in the gift of **helps**:

1. A tender heart to really care.
2. A quick eye to see the need.
3. A quick foot to get to the needy.
4. A loving face to cheer them and bless them.
5. A firm foot so you will not fall yourself.
6. A strong hand to grip the needy with.
7. A bent back to reach the man.

iv. An old Puritan preacher once did a great sermon on this text: *And Bartholomew* (Matthew 10:3). His point was that Bartholomew is never mentioned by himself, but always with the phrase *and Bartholomew*. He is always spoken of doing something good with someone else. He was never the leader, but always a helper.

f. **Do all speak with tongues?** Paul's plain meaning is that the gift of tongues is *not* for every believer, just as the gifting of **apostles, prophets, teachers**, working of **miracles** or **healings** and so forth are not for every believer. Great damage has been done in the church by promoting tongues as necessary to really live as a Christian, or as *the* evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. This has caused many to seek the gift of tongues, or to "fake" the gift of tongues, often only to assure one's self or others that they are indeed filled with the Holy Spirit.

i. Since tongues is a communicative gift, used in speaking to God, the gift of tongues should be desired when the individual feels a lack in their ability to communicate with God. When one feels hindered in their ability to talk to God using their given language, they can and should ask God for the empowering to communicate with God in a language which He understands, but which surpasses my understanding. If someone feels satisfied with their ability to communicate with God, there is really no need for the gift of tongues, and it should not be desired until one does want a communication with God which goes beyond understanding.

g. **Earnestly desire the best gifts:** Though the Holy Spirit gives the gifts, it is good and proper for us to desire them, and to ask for them, all in submission to the plan of God.

h. Paul will explain the **more excellent way** in chapter 13, with a focus on love, not the gifts themselves. The gifts are merely ways we can express and receive love from God and love to one another. They are the "containers" and what is in the container – love – is far more important. "A shopful of barrels enrich not, unless full of commodities." (Trapp)

## CONCLUSION:

Are you a contributing member of the body of Christ? Are you actively serving God and sharing Him with others? Are you contributing to peace and unity within the body? Do you worship regularly? Take a moment to evaluate your life in light of these principles:

*"Heavenly Father, Thank you for making me part of Your body. It is my desire to be an active part of Your church by serving, promoting unity, and sharing my faith with others. Give me opportunities to accomplish these things for Your glory! Use me LORD. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."*